

DR. SARALYN GRASS



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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Executive leader, consultant, and expert witness with more than two decades of experience leading complex organizations across government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors. President and Co-Founder of Verdant Synergies, a consulting firm providing legal case analysis, leadership consulting, executive coaching, strategic planning, nonprofit development and research and analysis. Proven record managing multi-million-dollar budgets, building high performing teams, and strengthening systems of accountability and operational performance. Recognized for expertise in institutional responsibility, K-12 and early childhood systems, and expert witness testimony related to negligence, mandated reporting, and standard of care.

EDUCATION

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2014 Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Policy & Program Evaluation
 Graduate Certificates:
 Global Pathways with a specialization in Global Issues
 Center for Global Engagement
 Emergency Management and Homeland Security
 Emergency Management and Homeland Security Program

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2006 Master of Science (M.S.) in Human Development
 Concentration:
 Special Needs Across Child and Adolescent Development and Community Agencies

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2004 Bachelor of Science (B.S) in Psychology
 Focus: Early Childhood Development and Learning Systems

TRAINING



CONSULTING & ENTREPRENEURSHIP EXPERIENCE

- 2025 - Present President & Co-Founder**

 - Lead a cross-sector consulting firm providing executive advisory, organizational strategy, legal case analysis, and systems design for public agencies, nonprofits, and private organizations
 - Advise boards and senior leaders on governance, accountability structures, compliance frameworks, and performance improvement
 - Design and implement strategic plans, funding models, and operational systems to strengthen organizational effectiveness and impact
 - Provide expert witness services and case consultation related to institutional responsibility, negligence, mandated reporting, and standard of care
 - Support business development, partnerships, and growth strategy for emerging and established mission-driven enterprises

- 2014-2019 Vice President & Co-Founder**

 - Co-founded and scaled a for-profit hospitality and manufacturing business from start-up to established community brand
 - Led company operations including finance, human resources, marketing, event programming, and community engagement
 - Positioned the company as a recognized regional gathering and cultural venue through strategic partnerships and brand development
 - Oversaw multi-million-dollar operating budgets, investor relations, and fiscal performance

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

2023–2025



Chief Executive Officer, Kids Hope Alliance

- Directed a \$50+ million public agency supporting youth development, afterschool, and prevention programs
- Developed and maintained long-range strategic plan reflecting departmental mission and vision.
- Responsible for raising the public visibility of the organization within the community, overseeing marketing of organizational activities, programs, and goals.
- Oversaw fiscal operations, strategic direction, and data-driven program evaluation.
- Served as public spokesperson and liaison to City Council, advocating for policies benefiting children and families.

2021–2023

Chief Administrative Officer, Kids Hope Alliance

- Facilitated operations in accordance with City Ordinances, City Charter, and all state & federal laws – including the planning, development, implementation, and delivery of an annual \$40 million RFP program for area nonprofits.
- Supervised department heads and administrative staff; directly overseeing employee hiring, training, and performance evaluations.
- Responsible for financial and managerial analyses as required by the City pertaining to organizational operations and programs; evaluating data and making recommendations based on findings; and supervising the preparation of financial reports and projections for presentations to City departments including the Office of the Mayor and City Council.

2023

Chief of Grants Contract Compliance

- Served as the high-level liaison to City Procurement and the Office of General Counsel ensuring department's engagement in cost-effective purchasing procedures and compliance with City laws governing public procurement.
- Oversaw the development of bids, requests for proposals and requests for quotations including the review of specifications, draft contract terms, and supplemental conditions.
- Liaised with Mayor's Office, City Council, other City executives and officials, and public and private partners in the planning and management of grant-funded community development programs.

2019–2021

Chief Programs Officer, Kids Hope Alliance

- Coordination with Chief Executive Officer and executive team in overall development, strategic planning, service delivery, and management of the organization across multiple sites and departments.
- Direct oversight of RFP program for awarding over \$40 million in grant funds to area nonprofits every year.
- Direct supervision of program directors, working with each department to improve cross-agency collaboration and coordination

2019–2021



Executive Director

- Represented all 30 Early Learning Coalitions in state policy and legislative advocacy.
- Led organizational strategy and communications on behalf of early childhood stakeholders statewide.
- Coordinated organizational priorities and strategic plans with industry-specific contractors.
- Communicated with state and local partners and stakeholders, including extensive work with lobbyists, legislators and policymakers.

2015–2017



Vice President / Help Me Grow Florida Statewide Director

- Managed \$3 million Help Me Grow grant budget, including allocation, hiring and management of staff, and reporting to a governing board on the status of the program.
- Collaborated with state/community stakeholders to increase Help Me Grow visibility and development of relationships / partnerships.
- Ensured trainign and technical assistance is provided to local 2-1-1 Help Me Grow affiliates

2011–2015

Vice President / Chief Programs Officer

- Managed staff of over 40 both locally and offsite on childcare policy and grant initiatives including those below as well as 21st Century Community Learning Centers administration & Refugee Micro-development Family Child Care Home project; and more.
- Acted as Operations Director of the agency assisting in improving Human Resources, company-wide professional development, and other strategic initiatives.
- Research and Crafted applications for various funding opportunities for the agency

RESEARCH & PROFESSORSHIP EXPERIENCE

2020–2023; **Adjunct Professor**

2026–Present



- Graduate Level instruction in
 - Early Childhood Policy and Law
 - School Finance, Social and Emotional Learning
 - Community Resources
 - Curriculum & Instruction in Early Childhood
 - Program Planning in Early Childhood

2020–2022

2010–2011



Adjunct Professor

- GraduateLevel instruction in
Evaluation of New Educational Programs and Practices

Graduate Teaching Assistant

- Assistance in large, multi-year research and reform project funded by the Institution of Education Sciences (National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools)

2007–2014

Graduate Teaching Assistant

- Instruction of Introduction to Education course for undergraduate students

2008–2010



Director of Programs and Research

- Management of 10+ staff members both locally and offsite regarding childcare policy initiatives including:
 - Professional development within a Quality Rating System
 - Professional Development Registry
 - Other strategic initiatives
- Development and oversight of grant proposals and awards including Head Start technical assistance, disaster relief and other global initiatives

2010–2011

Director of Research

- Acting coordinator of research for the Partners in Education and Research for Kindergarten Success (PERKS) project, funded by US Department of Education
- Liaison for requests for research analyses and technical assistance from Florida Early Learning Coalitions and state stakeholders
- Development & dissemination of valid & reliable Research and Data on early childhood issues including professional development, academic assessment and workforce initiatives

2008–2010



Research Project Coordinator

- Development and management of grant writing and fundraising strategies
- Design, building and implementation of substantial qualitative and quantitative research projects
- Oversight of agency and sponsored research programs, including synthesis of research findings and reporting to stakeholder groups regarding early childhood initiatives
- Management of grant budgets, acknowledgement and reporting processes

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- Selected as a Community Hero to receive the Leadership Excellence Award by Step-by-Step 4 Help Foundation, Inc., May 2024
- Selected as member of Leadership Jacksonville Class of '24, May 2023
- Recognized as a Girl Scouts of Gateway Council Women of Distinction Honoree, April 2022 Selected to receive a Trailblazer Award from the College of Education at Florida State University for Fall 2019
- Was one of the final four candidates for an open Tallahassee City Commission vacant seat
- Selected as member of Leadership Florida Education Class 4, August 2018
- Recipient of Jockey International Scholarship through the North American Council on Adoptive Children, February 2018
- Selected as member of Leadership Florida Connect Class 8, August 2017
- Recognized as one of the "25 Women to Know in Tallahassee" by Tallahassee Democrat, February 2017
- Winner of a Pinnacle Award from 850 Business Magazine, an honor for women who are a moving force in the business world and their communities, August 2016
- Selected as member of Leadership Tallahassee Class 34, May 2016
- Named "Golden A.C.E." (Authentic Community Engagement) in the Category of Entrepreneurship by the Tallahassee Network of Young Professionals for their "Top 20 under 40," May 2016
- Grasslands Brewing Company won Entrepreneurial Startup Business of the Year by Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, May 2014

- Co-Chair, Project One Health Regional Advisory Council (2025)
- Committee Member, Florida Bar Citizens Advisory Committee (2025-Present)
- Co-Chair, Grants Decision Team, Women's Giving Alliance (2024-Present)
- Board Member, The River Club (2022-Present)
- Volunteer, Guardian ad Litem (2015-Present)
- Board Member and Officer, Florida Afterschool Network (2020-Present)
- Board Member, Early Learning Coalition of Duval County (2019-2020, 2023-2025)
- Member, Rotary Club of Jacksonville (2023-2024)
- Planning Committee Member, Girl Scouts of Gateway Council (2022-2024)
- Advocacy Committee Chair and Steering Committee Member, Women's Giving Alliance (2020-2024)
- Board Member and Officer, Florida Alliance of Children's Councils and Trusts (2019-2025, Vice Chair '22-'24, Chair '24-'25)
- Fundraising Chair, Northeast Regional Council for Leadership Florida (2022-2024)
- Fundraising Chair, Northwest Regional Council for Leadership Florida (2018-2019)
- Regional Vice President, Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (2017-2021)
- Board Member, The Children's Campaign (2015-2020)
- Board Member and Chair, Keep Tallahassee Beautiful (2015-2019)
- Board Member, Guardian ad Litem Foundation (2016-2018)
- Council Member, appointed to the District Advisory Council by Leon County School Board Member (2016-2018)
- Commissioner, appointed to the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women & Girls by Mayor (2017-2019)
- Commissioner, appointed to the Tallahassee Minority Women and Small Business Commission by Mayor (2016-2018)
- Board Member, Kids Incorporated, Inc., (2014-2018)

***Publications, Speaking Engagements & References available upon request**