



# 2019 **ASPIRE** **REPORT**

[www.aspireacademy.ro](http://www.aspireacademy.ro)

# CONTENTS

THE ASPIRE MESSAGE

01

THE ASPIRE  
MODEL

05

A DAY AT  
ASPIRE

09

PROFESSORS  
AND SPEAKERS

11

THE ASPIRE COMMUNITY

15

PARTNERS

17

THE ASPIRE  
CULTURE

03

PROGRAMS

06

RECRUITMENT

10

INITIATIVES  
FOR 2019-2020

14

TEAM  
AND FOUNDERS

16

# THE ASPIRE MESSAGE

# PART /1

## Dear Supporter and Friend of the Aspire community,

Our 9th year of existence has helped us enrich our community by over 100 future leaders, which marks the achievement of reaching the threshold of 1000 members of our global community. With much enthusiasm, joy and trust, we wish to share with you our successes, but also our future plans in our mission to discover, develop and connect young leaders from all around the world, in order to have a real impact in Romania and in the communities to which they belong to.

2018-2019 represented the year in which we continued our initiatives aimed at our community through the global Hubs, we resumed organizing the mentorship program dedicated to our alumni and we offered support regarding the university admissions process to our members who were in their final high school year. At the same time, our efforts focused on the communities the Aspire graduates originate from. In 2019, we migrated the thematic weekend series - Aspire Global Weekends - to Aspire Global Hubs, by successfully piloting the Aspire Hubs model in 3 new cities (Kiev, Tbilisi and Yerevan). Therefore, Aspire now comprises 9 hubs: Bucharest, Cluj, London, New York, Amsterdam, Chisinau, Yerevan, Kiev and Tbilisi. For young people with entrepreneurial aspirations, we continued the development of our initiative dedicated to young entrepreneurs - Aspire Pre-Accelerator-, while 6 teams passed through the 3-months mentorship program and 3-days bootcamp.

The 2019 year culminated with our core summer programs - Aspire High School, Aspire Academy, Aspire Young Professionals - through which more than 100 young people joined the Aspire community. At the same time, we have continued to diversify our collaboration with professors from top universities from Europe (University College London, University of Gdansk) and the United States (Stanford, Georgetown), and to offer our participants new courses on themes such as social entrepreneurship, art or finance. With the help of the Aspire community, the high potential youth selected and trained through our programs, develop their abilities and explore different opportunities, hence becoming change agents in their communities. Throughout the 10 days of programs, our 100+ remarkable young people reunited within Aspire Academy, Aspire High School and Aspire Professionals have benefited not only from courses, workshops and trainings with successful people from diverse industries and renowned professors, but also from a complex immersion at an inter-personal level, having the opportunity to interact with our 60+ members of the organizing team, with the Aspire founders and with alumni from previous generations. We strongly believe that good ideas are born from the right synergies, so each and every formal or informal Aspire event, brings together ambitious youth, whose life stories denote perseverance and determination

# THE ASPIRE MESSAGE

# PART /2

For Aspire, 2020 marks 10 years since we bring future leaders together. With this occasion, we shift our attention on our community, but also on the future of our organization. Our focus is being redirected towards identifying the perfect formula through which the Aspire participants and alumni can take advantage of their academic knowledge and the power of the Aspire community, in order to become a change agent at a global level, through personal initiatives or projects supported by our community. In 2020 the Aspire management team's mission is to create the Aspire strategy for the next 10 years, by identifying key elements which contribute to the success and the evolution of our participants. Starting with the 10th anniversary of our flagship summer programs, we plan on introducing elective courses, therefore offering the participants the possibility to adapt their Aspire journey depending on their needs and interests, creating a more tailored experience for each of them. In addition, curriculum-wise, we plan to enrich our academic partners with a series of new professors and facilitators, experts in their domains. Our community grows every year by more than 100 members, but their quality remains our main selection criteria. We wish to bring on board youth with ambitious aspirations and visions which, together with our already-created professors, speakers and alumni network, will exploit synergies and create the context in which their ideals become reality. For this reason, this year we are working on the development of a recruitment process specific to Aspire, so that we select young people with the ability to solve real problems through innovative solutions and with a scalable impact.

Aspire celebrates 10 years of existence, 10 years since we try to bring high quality education into the lives of youngsters with potential from Romania and not only. We have grown from a program with 39 participants to a community with 1000 members and 3 annual programs which help us extend our community with over 100 members annually. 2020 is placed under the sign of the number 10 - 10 years, the 10th edition, 1000 members. We thank you for being with us during these 10 years and for contributing to the education of future leaders. We strongly believe that this year's accomplishments, as well as our next year's ambitions, give you joy, and they would not be possible without the trust and support you provide us with. With gratitude, we thank you for all your support, for helping us follow our mission, and confidently look towards the future. Thanks to you, Aspire will continue to identify and grow not only young people with leadership potential, but their ideas as well, and to bring a positive change to the society.

**Elena Zaharia**

Executive Director

# THE ASPIRE CULTURE

# PART /3

## VISION

---

Our vision is to develop a community of ethical, successful and influential leaders across a wide variety of disciplines, with diverse backgrounds, in Eastern Europe and beyond.

## DISCOVER:

We adhere to the highest standards of recruitment and focus on four key areas: leadership track, intellectual and emotional maturity, driven personality and community engagement.

## CONNECT:

We create year-long opportunities for our members by connecting them with their peers and companies.

## MISSION

---

Our mission is to discover, develop and connect young leaders; we strive to inspire them, to help them find their true life meaning and contribute to the development of the society.

More than an academy, Aspire is an experience that changes the lives of the great leaders and entrepreneurs of tomorrow, this non-profit organization identifying itself with a clear mission, vision and values.

## DEVELOP:

Aspire has three core summer programs that kick-off the Aspire experience, followed by community development initiatives. All activities are designed to inspire and motivate the students, help them grow in all areas of life and achieve their true potential.



# THE ASPIRE CULTURE

PART  
/4

## VALUES

KEEP GROWING

STRIVE TO GIVE BACK

THINK LONG-TERM

EXCELLENCE IS A MUST

ASPIRE IS A LIFE-LONG JOURNEY

### KEEP GROWING

Be introspective and challenge the status quo. Be committed to developing yourself personally and professionally.

### THINK LONG-TERM BUT START ACTING NOW

Set clear goals for yourself and start working on them now. Think of what would make you proud years from now, when looking back at your life.

### ASPIRE IS A LIFE-LONG JOURNEY

We provide opportunities that go far beyond our summer programs and are committed to supporting you in all stages of your life.

### STRIVE TO GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Bring about positive change in your community by engaging in social projects or starting a sustainable business.

### EXCELLENCE IS A MUST

We select highly motivated and diverse participants who stand out within their communities. As an Aspire Alumnus or Alumna you become an ambassador for Aspire so you are expected to adhere to the highest standards of achievement.



# THE ASPIRE MODEL



## HOW DO WE DIFFER FROM OTHER PROGRAMS?

One of the defining elements of Aspire is the program the participants attend each day during their stay at Poiana Brasov. Every year we integrate the feedback received from our participants, professors and organizers, to improve the next editions, and 2019 was no exception.

The exclusive connection with professors from Stanford or Georgetown is what confers the Aspire Academy, Aspire High School and Aspire Professionals programs the status of being the most prestigious leadership and entrepreneurship programs in Romania!

The 2019 Aspire programs were based on leadership sessions, communication workshops, but also on personal development exercises, inspired from a successful course at Harvard, called Authentic Leadership Development. More than this, participants attended negotiation sessions, with a high degree of applicability in any area, and they were introduced to the technique of “storytelling”, which is becoming more and more prevailing in business, but also in daily life.

Complementary, the participants benefited from team building sessions, business mentorship, but also discussion panels on the topic of studying abroad and the application process they must go through, if they decide to follow this path.



An important subject for all programs has been design thinking, which is becoming increasingly popular and useful in all domains of work. The participants were asked to observe their environment, to pay attention to details, to innovate and to find disruptive solutions.

The participants were also trained on the crucial skill of public speaking by having to pitch their ideas, participate in debates and in mock interviews.

All these were completed by informal moments in which the participants were able to socialize among themselves and with the professors, speakers or Alumni from previous generations. This type of networking led to the birth of many ideas, initiatives and friendly, durable bonds, which sometimes turned into lucrative professional collaborations.

# PROGRAMS

# PART /01

## ASPIRE ACADEMY

Our flagship program and the one with the most history, as Academy is the first summer school that Aspire ever ran. The program has continuously grown over the years through the development of a qualitative curricula, focused on providing a transformational experience to our participants. In 2019, 26 exceptional students (out of almost 100 applicants), coming from 10 countries, were selected to join the program. This year, we have focused on the development of the curriculum, in order to make sure that, academically, we offer our participants the best possible experience so that they continue to learn and grow. A consequence has been that we have directed our efforts less towards the marketing, therefore the intake has been slightly lower than in the previous years.

## ASPIRE HIGH SCHOOL

A program meant to select the most proactive high school students in terms of volunteering and entrepreneurship. Besides the curricula itself, they benefit from interactive courses assisting them in the process of applying to top universities. This year, we have received almost 100 applications and we have selected an elite of 30 individuals. Out of this number, 26 participants were Romanians, along with 2 participants coming from Switzerland, 1 from Mongolia and 1 from Ukraine.

## ASPIRE PROFESSIONAL

A unique educational and professional development experience, during which young professionals interact with professors from top universities, such as Harvard, Stanford or Georgetown and are inspired by successful leaders, local managers and entrepreneurs. The 4-day program is designed to offer a captivating experience, in which the participants create bonds and interact with speakers, organizers, the Aspire board and ultimately with the whole community. This year, we have received almost 100 applications and have consequently welcomed 27 participants originating from 10 different countries, such as Mongolia, Ukraine, Switzerland, Georgia and India.

## ASPIRE WEEKEND

A 3-day program created for all members of the Aspire community. It focusses on a more in-depth analysis of the knowledge gained from the previously graduated program, as well as on the development of particular transferable competencies, which are key ones in today's constantly moving and evolving world. Over 30 Aspire Alumni chose to relive the Aspire experience and to reconnect with fellow Alumni, networking being one of the key purposes of the program.

# PROGRAMS

# PART /02

## ASPIRE HUBS

This year, we transformed the Aspire Global Weekend concept into Aspire Hubs. Starting with the year, Aspire has 9 hubs: London, Chisinau, New York, Kiev, Amsterdam, Bucharest, Cluj, Tbilisi and Yerevan. Conferences with speakers from the entrepreneurial, IT or even publishing world took place in 5 countries: the UK, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. We plan on continuing organizing the hubs in order to scale the concept and to have an impact in these communities. A total of over 150 participants have joined us, having a taste of what the Aspire experience has to offer. This year, Aspire has committed to investing in the education sector of Eastern Europe, motivated by our belief that young people from all around the world should have the opportunity to develop themselves with the help of the Aspire experience.

## ASPIRE PRE-ACCELERATOR

Throughout our 9-year run, the Aspire programs and activities have diversified to address the development requirements of our community members, as well as future ones. In 2019, along with our established programs, we have continued to develop the Aspire Pre-Accelerator.

We organized the Aspire Pre-Accelerator program to help teams in the early stages of their business understand

the problem that they're working on in much depth. The experience was designed for participants to dig deeper into each of the areas of the LEAN Canvas and at the end come out with a better understanding of the customer, the problem and the solution fit. There were 3 parts to the pre-accelerator:

### COACHING PHASE

(6 weeks, starting in the first week of April)

### BOOTCAMP EVENT

(May 24th - May 26th)

### MENTORING PHASE

(from June onwards)

## COACHING PHASE

The coaching phase enabled teams to actively engage with experienced coaches from the Aspire community. Together they went through structured exercises from Disciplined Entrepreneurship (Bill Aulet) and discussed the practical and tactical decisions to be made. Teams would have weekly chats with their coaches and review the tasks assigned on topics such as the LEAN Canvas, Problem Definition, Market Segmentation and User Persona. We also organized online webinars fortnightly.

# PROGRAMS

# PART /03

## BOOTCAMP EVENT

The bootcamp event was organized to provide an in-person opportunity for teams to meet each other and potential mentors for the last phase of the pre-accelerator. Apart from talks on relevant topics, teams went through clinic session in which they questioned assumptions about their plans together with facilitators. Additionally, the teams attended a “speed-dating” innovation session where experts in various fields gave valuable input on how teams can solve their problems, innovate, and achieve growth. Finally, the teams had the opportunity to pitch their business idea in front of a jury formed out of start-up experts and receive critical feedback.

## MENTORING PHASE

For the mentoring phase teams could work with more experienced persons in a more hands-off manner and with less frequency than during the coaching stage. We trusted teams to reach out whenever they needed help, advice or an introduction to people who might be able to help them. By supporting these projects, Aspire wishes to encourage the entrepreneurial environment of Central Europe and of the emerging EMEA countries, pledging to offer mentorship to innovative ideas, which want to impact local communities. Through the 3-month program and with the support of the mentors and project managers, several teams have succeeded in gaining their very first customers for their platforms and in testing their business idea.



# A DAY AT ASPIRE

*Breakfast*

## ADVERSARIAL COMMUNICATION

with Sam Potolicchio

## AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

with Alex Radu

*Lunch*

## DESIGN THINKING

with Phil, Lucy and Celia Malone

## THE ART OF PITCHING AND STORYTELLING

with Alain Heureux

## WORKING ON GROUP PROJECTS

*Social time*

*Dinner*

## ASPIRE ACADEMY

Based on three core modules: leadership, entrepreneurship and personal development with a deep dive into authentic leadership development, which allow students to apply the knowledge acquired academically in real-life situations, through case studies and debates. This alternative learning methods help the participants critically analyze leadership, management and entrepreneurship problems in different contexts.

## ASPIRE HIGH SCHOOL

A summer school addressed to the best high schoolers from all around the world, gives them the opportunity to learn and develop themselves in an informal learning environment, while being taught by professors from top universities.



The participants benefitted from numerous interactive educational consultancy sessions meant to help them choose and apply to prestigious universities. We facilitated the exchange of opinions and experiences between people who studied in Romania and those who attended university outside the country. The students acquired different transferable skills, such as negotiation techniques, presentation abilities and efficient communication.

## ASPIRE PROFESSIONAL

The participants gained knowledge in areas such as negotiation, strategic interaction, leadership and constructing and delivering a powerful and efficient message.

# RECRUITMENT

As in past years, the Aspire 2019 selection process was rather complex, yet with a well-defined aim: recruiting young individuals with diverse backgrounds, having the potential to be agents of change within their communities. We focused on finding those young individuals who have clearly showcased leadership potential, a willingness to surpass themselves, an interest in their home communities, and, last but not least, intercultural sensitivity.

Each candidate was evaluated through a careful consideration of their CV, an essay detailing an instance of their leadership potential and ultimately, an interview. The recruiters worked exclusively in pairs and were assigned on a rotational basis. Consequently, each application was reviewed by at least 4 recruiters.

The Aspire concept and its community have constantly developed. If in 2011, Aspire Academy merely brought together 39 individuals, the total number of Aspire Alumni has continued to grow, reaching the milestone of 1000 members in 2019, with the constant addition of new programs and new generations.

This year, we received almost 300 applications for our flagship programs (Aspire Academy, Aspire Professional and Aspire High School). The slight lowering of the number of applications is due to the fact that in 2019, we focused on the developing of our main products (by adapting the curriculum, for example), in order to maintain the long-term growth of our organization.

Starting with the 10th edition of our core programs, we wish to implement a recruitment process specific to Aspire to be able to select young people with the ability to solve real problems through innovative solutions, hence we are working on the development of a new recruitment process. We wish to have by our side young people with ambitious visions and hopes which, together with our already-created professors, speakers and alumni network, will exploit synergies and create the context in which their ideas become reality.



# PROFESSORS AND SPEAKERS

## PART/11



### PROF. LUCIANA HERMAN

---

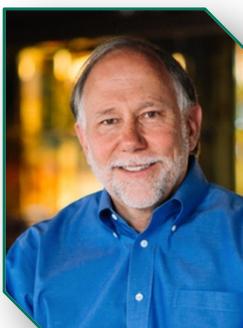
Luciana Herman is a university lecturer in Public Policies at Stanford University. In the past, she taught writing and rhetoric courses at Harvard University and at University of California, Berkeley. Her academic interests include American political rhetoric, racial formation and immigration policies. Dr. Herman holds a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley.



### SAM POTOLICCHIO

---

Sam is Director of Global and Custom Education at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University. Potolicchio was named as one of “America’s Best Professors” by the Princeton Review, the only one in his field and the Future Leader of American Higher Education by the Association of Colleges and Universities. He has served as the department Chairman and Distinguished Professor in Political and Social Communications at the School of Public Policy at RANEP, the biggest university in Europe and as the President of the Preparing Global Leaders Foundation, a leadership training program for rising leaders from over 100 countries.



### PROF. PHIL MALONE

---

Phil Malone is a Professor of Law and Director of the Juelsgaard Intellectual Property and Innovation Clinic at Stanford University. His work is focused on understanding and promoting innovation and exploring how intellectual property and competition policy in high-tech industries affect it. Phil came to Stanford from Harvard Law School. He was one of the faculty directors of the Berkman Center and was the initial HLS liaison to the Harvard Innovation Lab, a new, university wide center aimed at facilitating innovation and entrepreneurship among Harvard students and faculty.

# PROFESSORS AND SPEAKERS

## PART/12



### ALAIN HEUREUX

---

Alain is university professor at Gdansk University of Technology and is a serial entrepreneur who founded his first company in 1984. In 2010, he opened one of the first incubators in Brussels, enrolling over 60 beginners in the creative industry, but also hosting events for several corporations and institutions (The Egg Brussels & Pepibru). As of now, Alain is the co-founder of Creative Bruxelles and Creative Ring, as well as trainer in Virtuology Academy.



### ALEX RADU

---

Alex Radu studied at Harvard University and graduated the MBA program of Harvard Business School in 2012. He worked in the past for Morgan Stanley and is now part of the Goldman Sachs team, conducting his activities from both London and New York offices. He is passionate about transforming the educational process and also enjoys piloting, sailing and travelling.



### DANI OROS

---

Dani is member of the Aspire Steering Committee. He was the co-president of Aspire between 2014 and 2016 and managed to take Aspire to the next level, dedicating himself completely to the programs implemented. From his first days as a participant in the 1st edition of Aspire Academy in 2011, and years later, while serving in different positions in this organization, Dani brought added-value to the Aspire programs. As of now, he is Head of Marketing Romania at Google, in the past having worked for Ana IMEP as Head of Special Projects and in consultancy at A.T. Kearney and IBM.

# PROFESSORS AND SPEAKERS

## PART /2



### GIORGIANA NEAGU

---

Giorgiana Neagu is Training Coordinator at Premium AEROTEC. She is part of the Aspire community since 2011, she was co-president in 2014, now part of the Executive Board. During the last past years, Giorgiana worked in areas such as marketing, training and human resources, being involved in educational, leadership and community development projects.



### DAN PASCARIU

---

Dan Pascariu is the President of the Board of UniCredit Tiriac Bank. He has previously been the President of the Board of Bank Austria Creditanstalt Romania for 9 years. He is also cofounder and Associate Professor in the Romanian Banking Institute. He held lectures as an invited Professor at Bucharest University of Economic Studies, University of Chicago, Stanford University in California and Georgetown University in Washington. Dan is a friend and supporter of Aspire, having attended every edition since 2011.

# INITIATIVES FOR 2019-2020

## PART /1

### ASPIRE PRODUCT REDESIGN

2020 marks the 10-year anniversary of the moment we started bringing together future leaders. With this occasion, we direct our attention towards the future of our organization.

Our focus is being redirected towards identifying the perfect formula through which the Aspire participants and alumni can take advantage of their academic knowledge and the power of the Aspire community, in order to become a change agent at a global level, through personal initiatives or projects supported by our community. In 2020 the Aspire management team's mission is to create the Aspire strategy for the next 10 years, by identifying key elements which contribute to the success and the evolution of our participants.

Starting with the 10th anniversary of the summer programs, we plan on introducing the elective courses, therefore offering the participants the possibility to adapt their Aspire journey depending on their needs and interests. This way, we wish to offer each participant a tailored experience with the help of which they can identify the necessary tools for growth in the appropriate environment.

### ASPIRE RECRUITMENT REDESIGN

Our community grows every year by more than 100 members, but their quality remains our main selection criteria. We wish to bring on board youth with ambitious aspirations and visions which, together with our already-created professors, speakers and alumni network, will exploit synergies and create the context in

which their ideals become reality. For this reason, this year we are working on the development of a recruitment process specific to Aspire, so that we select young people with the ability to solve real problems through innovative solutions and with a scalable impact

### ASPIRE BLOG

We are proud of our community of 1000 leaders, 1000 young and active people who are involved in their communities and who represent leaders in their areas of work. Through the Aspire Blog, we wish to present the stories and the achievements of the members of our community members. Our community is defined by the incredible achievements of our alumni and we intend to empower them and promote their initiatives through our articles.

### ASPIRE CONNECTED

Aspire started from a 39-members program and grew into 3 annual programs which enrich our community with more than 100 people every year. We wish to bring our community closer than ever, to be able to transmit more easily opportunities, but also to facilitate the members' access to our new initiatives, which is why this year we aim to work on a platform which would connect all of our recent activities, all of our employment or charity opportunities. The platform would also facilitate our members' meet ups in the hub areas and their grouping around common interests such as entrepreneurship or environmental protection.

# INITIATIVES FOR 2019-2020

PART  
/14

## ASPIRE AMBASSADORS

We believe that our biggest asset is our extraordinary community of young leaders. They are always sharing their thoughts, impressions, experiences with their friends and recommend the Aspire programs. Through Aspire Ambassadors, we wish to create the context an equip our alumni with the tools needed to promote Aspire in their schools and universities, connecting this way young people with potential to our Aspire opportunities. We are convinced that our alumni network has the power to connect us to people who share our values.



# ASPIRE COMMUNITY

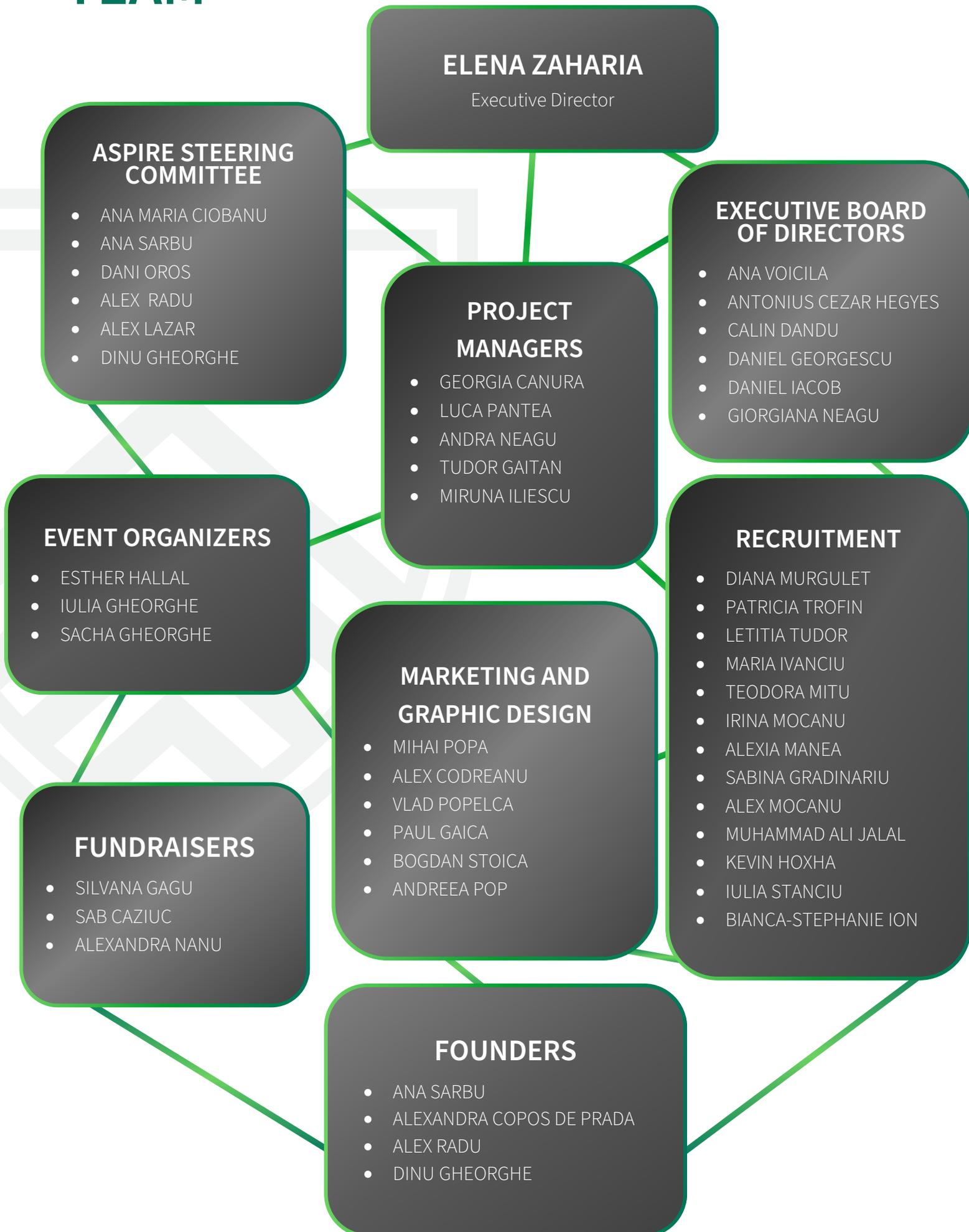
One of the most considerable takeaways of being an Aspire Alumnus is the Aspire Community. Now reaching the impressive number of 1000, it consists of an incredible group of smart, like-minded individuals. It is a constant source of **opportunities**. Our Alumni Club is a platform for job or internship offers, event invitations, recommendations, but at the same time, a place where people can always seek professional and personal support. One of this year's most successful opportunities offered to our community has been the **Mentorship Program**. Depending on every person's needs, abilities and traits, we have matched different alumni with mentors from our network and provided them with support and suggestions in order to create a useful and successful mentorship experience. We have received incredibly positive feedback from both mentees and mentors who have had a meaningful and helpful experience within our program. An example would be this moving feedback of a mentee: 'for me the mentorship program brought me someone that I could share my vision with and really understand me. It gave me confidence in my powers and guidance for the process to find my way in my professional career'. Another important aspect of the Aspire community is the **networking**, the socialization. **Aspire Mini Reunions** are informal meet ups held in cities where the number of alumni is rather large, such as London, Bucharest or Amsterdam. They play a great part in uniting us, adding value to our network and to our

sense of community that we so greatly focus on. This year, we are planning to formalize the reunions through implementing a new monthly dinner concept and inviting a person with significant achievements for a fireside chat hoping that this would provide our alumni with new opportunities.

**Aspire Hubs** are not only great learning opportunities, but also incredible occasions for networking with other inspiring people from our region. In true Aspire nature, we like to end our year in style by attending the **Aspire Christmas Ball**, which has become a true tradition. It is an occasion to rekindle with the Aspire family, but also to get to know other members of our incredible community.



# TEAM



# PARTNERS



MARIA INVEST



[www.aspireacademy.ro](http://www.aspireacademy.ro)



[www.aspireacademy.ro](http://www.aspireacademy.ro)

20

19