

Engaging the Nonprofit Board: Let Them Lead

Montana Nonprofit Association
7th Annual Conference
September 24, 2008
Helena, Montana

Peggy M. Owens, CFRE

Outcomes for this session

- Three forms of governance
- Engage the board with generative discussion
- Techniques to encourage board conversation

Three modes of governance

- Fiduciary
- Strategic
- Generative Thinking

Fiduciary Governance

- Approval of Budget
- Give meaningful financial contribution, open doors for funding opportunities
- Policy approval
- Assure legal and ethical standards

Strategic Governance

- Mission, vision, values and planning
- Address issues strategically
- What drivers and associated performance will allow the organization to achieve its goals?
- Board actively participates with staff

Generative Governance

- Collaborative approach with executive staff and board not evaluative
- Gives problems and challenges a framework and definition
- Looking back helps shape the future. Asking why were we successful, unsuccessful?

CEO or Executive Director Hiring Process

- Fiduciary Mode—What is a competitive salary range? Approval of Position Description.
- Strategic Mode—hiring the right executive director. What strategies will assure a successful hire?
- Generative—what qualities are needed in our new staff leader to move the organization forward?

Why 3 modes of governance

- Makes a more meaningful role for the board
- Helps utilize the talents and skills of the board members, political and social connections as well as professional expertise
- Moves the organization forward

Techniques for generative conversation

- Facilitated board meetings
- Staff serves as internal consultants, not the one to run the meetings
- Suspend the meeting rules; take a playful approach to discussion
- Promote robust discussion

How to encourage board discussion

- Use small groups to discuss substantive issues
- Write down before discussion the most important question
- Counterpoint—several board members develop arguments against a recommendation
- Surveys

Improved board structure, Improved board meetings

- Fewer committees, work groups adapt to specific issues and relevant questions
- Agenda features ambiguous or problematic situations
- Time allotted for discussion
- Leaders as facilitators
- Written reports in advance of the meeting
- Generative work can occur outside of board meetings

Exercise—what are the top three strategic issues

- Put on your board hat
- Identify what the top two or three strategic issues are for your organization
- Pick one
- Determine what mode(s) of governance would be most useful to handle the topic

Opportunities for generative work outside the board room

- Board and CEO have brown bag lunches with open-ended discussion
- Board engages stakeholders about new direction or challenges
- Boards meet with other boards to learn about similar issues
- Board participates by serving as a direct service volunteer, attend tours, agency orientations

Closing thoughts

- Boards and executive staff should be adept at all three forms of governance
- Board members are eager to find more meaningful and satisfying roles
- Leadership matters--build a board that is thoughtful and willing to think, not just share their expertise
- Your next steps

Bibliography and Resources

- Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan and Barbara E. Taylor (2005), **Governance as Leadership**, John Wiley&Sons, BoardSource
- Peter C. Brinckerhoff (2007), **Generations-The Challenge of a Lifetime for your Nonprofit**, Fieldstone Alliance
- Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff (2007), **Don't Just Do Something, Stand There!**, SF: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Leslie R. Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant (2008), **Forces for Good-The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits**, Jossey-Bass