Organizational Leadership

A new leader has to be able to change an organization that is dreamless, soulless and visionless ... someone's got to make a wake up call.

Warren Bennis

Both Sue Vinyard and Mary Merrill state that the volunteer administrator of the future must do more than manage – they must provide leadership not only to volunteers, but to the agency as well. While previous modules have addressed some of the leadership competencies needed, this module will describe several others.

According to Fisher and Cole (1993), volunteer administrators wear many hats besides that of managing volunteers. They are frequently the most public person in the organization, interacting with clients, donors, and the media. Competencies falling under the organizational leadership construct included skills in planning and needs assessment, strategic planning, and a commitment to and communication of the organization’s mission and vision to volunteers, clientele, and the general public. The ability to access the needs of clients, the community, volunteers, and the organization was covered in Module 2, Lesson 1—Needs Assessments and will not be addressed in this module.

Steps to Successful Strategic Planning

Organizational Strategic Planning involves answering the questions:

Where are we now?
Where do we want to be in the future?
How will we get there?

Step 1 – Commitment to the Process

All phases of the organization must be committed to the strategic planning process. If the agency is going through reorganization, or if key personnel positions are vacant, it is not a good time to start developing a strategic plan. The organization’s leadership must be willing to devote the time necessary to complete the process or the new strategic plan may end up like so many other planning documents, collecting dust on the shelf. Commitment means involving all stakeholders in the process including paid staff, volunteers and clientele. It means setting aside time for these stakeholders to meet and have conversations with each other about the values and future direction of
the organization. And it may mean devoting resources towards a retreat away from the organization’s site so that participants can focus on this important task.

Step 2 – Articulating Values, Mission, and Vision

Most organizations have a mission and vision statement. If your agency does not have these statements, then a facilitator should be hired to guide the organization through the process of identifying its core values and developing a mission and vision. If these statements exist, they should be reviewed to see if they are still viable descriptors of the agency and where it is headed.

A mission statement is like an introductory paragraph: it lets the reader know where the writer is going, and it also shows that the writer knows where he/she is going. A mission statement must communicate the essence of the organization to the reader. It communicates focus and purposefulness. A mission statement describes why the organization exists, the activities through which the organization works towards its purpose, and the values or beliefs that guide the organization.

While a mission statement describes an organization in the here and now, the vision statement creates an image of the organization at some future time. A vision statement describes what the organization hopes to become. Both the mission and the vision statements reflect the organizations core values.

Step 3 – Assessing where you are now and where you want to be.

Having a good idea of where your organization stands now in terms of delivering its mission is an essential step in strategic planning. Questions you might ask in this step are:

- Who are our clientele?
- How are they served?
- What are our sources of funding?
- Are they sustainable?
- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do our staff/volunteers have?

A SWOT analysis is frequently used to begin this process. As described in Module 2, Lesson 1, a SWOT analysis describes the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats facing your organization. Examples of information revealed by a SWOT analysis are listed below:

- Strengths - knowledgeable, caring staff, effective volunteers
- Weaknesses - too few volunteers, inadequate resources

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• Opportunities – new funding sources, new audiences  
• Threats – potential reduction in funding/resources, increased competition for resources

The next phase is to decide where your organization needs to be in 10-20 years. What does it need to look like or be doing to be viable?

Step 4 – Develop Strategies, Goals, and Objectives

Strategies are the broad approaches that your organization plans to take to continue to be viable to your clientele and to take the organization into the future. Goals are the broad results that you expect while objectives are more specific. You may have multiple objectives that will help you reach a goal and multiple goals as part of the overall strategy. The result of this step will be an outline of your organization’s strategic direction and the goals and objectives that will move the organization in that direction. Before being finalized, this written document should be distributed to staff and other stakeholders for their review and additional input. The final document will be written using this feedback.

Step Five – Putting the plan into action.

Too often the strategic plan is an exercise in planning that never really gets beyond the point of the writing the plan down. Many strategic plans collect dust on someone’s shelf or languish in a filing cabinet. It is the leadership team’s responsibility to see that the strategic plan is implemented.

The leadership team should first select the goals from the strategic plan that are the most critical. These goals should be addressed first. It should be decided who (individual or group) will be responsible for implementing each objective outlined under that goal and a timeframe for accomplishing the goal. The team must also address accountability. How will that person or group be held accountable for addressing the goal? How will progress be monitored?

Summary

An organizational mission and vision, based on deeply held values, will motivate and give direction to your organization. A set of well-designed strategies must be developed to bridge where you are now (mission) to where you hope to be in the future (vision). The next step in the process, is sharing the vision.

References