



Board Governance Case Study

Incorporating community engagement principles into organization management – one organization's story

Background

An urban community planning organization has served their community for over 20 years. Since their inception they've worked with and through the city planning department in addressing both resident and business issues. In the past few years, they've had significant leadership transitions in the staff and board. They've also been impacted by a number of problems a similar community organization was experiencing. Both of these factors led the board to struggle with stabilizing the leadership of the organization and a high degree of conflict within the board and between the board and Executive Director. When we began work with the organization, they wanted to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the key leadership and engage the community to inform them of the organization's strengths and mission.

Process

The process began with board and staff committing to working through the difficulties and building policies and protocols that everyone could support. Next, interviews were done with all board members, and as part of the interview process, board members were educated on roles and responsibilities of the board. In addition, Board members completed a Board Assessment to measure overall board effectiveness. Once all board members, including the Executive Director, were interviewed, they were informed of the overall findings. The board then prioritized the critical issues to address and developed a workplan. The two items that received the highest priority were development of board policies and completing a strategic plan.

Products

Three key products came out of the process:

1. A comprehensive board manual including: Revised bylaws, Board Policies, Meeting calendar, Committee structure, Participatory decision making protocols, Executive Director performance review
2. A finalized strategic plan (started a year earlier)
3. An annual meeting format for educating the community on progress and electing new board members. As part of the education process, community facilitation training sessions were held to solicit and train community volunteers to facilitate community planning events

Short Term Results

The organization was able to re-energize its relationship with the community based on the board and staff's leadership and initiative in re-vamping the board governance role and the organization's strategic plan, The annual community meeting was very well attended and for the first time in years, there were multiple people running for open board seats. The board was able to put less time into managing the organization and focus its efforts on the critical issues facing the community. They were also able to support the Executive Director in receiving a multi-year grant to stabilize operations of the organization.