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Measurable Results. Immeasurable Value.

The Power of Organizational Assessment

Many organizations don't realize that they may be spinning their wheels, have ineffective programs, or even that they have wonderful untapped capabilities that can improve their performance. Even though nonprofits vary in their objectives and roles based on the communities they serve and their missions, every organization can rally around one goal or one initiative that can positively impact performance. The problem is how to identify that best "one" goal or objective.

Organizational assessment and strategic planning can tap into a wide range of opportunities that increase efficiency, reinvigorate boards, and redirect staff and resources toward achievable goals. Although the process may seem overwhelming and potentially expensive, the actual method is simple and delivers powerful cost-effective results.

- Phase 1: Preliminary internal interviews are conducted with select organization representatives, either in person or via telephone
- Phase 2: A series of small group brainstorming sessions are conducted for:
 - Issue and opportunity identification
 - Prioritization
 - Status quo determination and analysis
- Phase 3: External Research
- Phase 4: Action Planning and Execution

Nonprofits should conduct an assessment of at least two aspects such as organizational effectiveness and program performance and from two vantage points; one from outside to measure credibility, such as fair process of decision-making or financial sustainability, and the other from inside to assess the organization's human capital, such as teamwork, communication effectiveness and resource development.

Organizations often wonder what tangible benefits they can expect from engaging in this assessment process, and if they're worth the time and expense. This is difficult to answer in general terms because the benefits are often specific to the organization and too numerous to list. However, the potential benefits an organization can expect include:

- Minimal board and staff preparation/participation requirements
- Condensed timeline

- Executive control over staff participation and messaging
- Unbiased third-party consultant perspective
- Actionable recommendations
- Benchmark for future assessment and measurement

Many organizations struggle with the question of performing an assessment with internal resources or whether they should engage outside consultants for help. Engaging consultants that possess organizational analysis expertise, along with process and analytic skills, is an important first step. But what really makes the difference is their ability to be sensitive, impartial, and skilled with people. These soft skills along with a broad range of expertise increases credibility and helps to:

- Improve the relationship with organizational stakeholders
- Increase the depth of probing and analysis
- Ensure a more engaged board
- Lessen the often perceived threat to executive directors and staff
- Build greater ownership of the assessment results

Organizational assessment can help build the capacity and effectiveness of nonprofits, while enhancing their programs and service offerings. It also helps them identify opportunities to strengthen their relationship with members and positively impact the industry they serve. Simply put, engaging in this activity provides organizations a significant and measurable return for the time and resources invested.

Contributed by Rob Patterson, CEO, The Center for Association Resources, Schaumburg, IL. The Center is an accredited association management /professional services firm that offers project-based services in membership research, organizational assessment and board training/planning. We assist our clients in achieving excellence! Rob can be reached at 888.705.1434 or at rob@association-resources.com. Additional information is also available at www.association-resources.com.

