SESSION TITLE : The Role of an Effective Board

CONVENER(S): Liz Bergeron, PCTA

PARTICIPANTS: N/A

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS and/or RECOMMENDATIONS:

- How some of the other boards are structured?
- How to be more effective
- Understand governance
- How Boards get selected, are structured and what their role is?
- How do you recruit? How are Boards structured?
- Learning about Boards from a partner perspective
- How to meet opportunities – new ED, restructuring, Partners. know they need a new type of a Board (Board with skills, business orientation)
- Board staffing and how do Boards operate; How can Partners work with Boards?
- Paid staff or solely volunteer organization: makes a difference in the role of the Board

- Liz has been involved with NGO's for 20 years, 4 different NGOs, started at PCTA 9 years ago
- PCTA 9 yrs ago: There was a long list of board members, only half of which were active. Liz worked with the Board Chairman and streamlined the number down to 7, with requirements:
    - they must all be active in the organization.
    - attendance at board meetings kept track of – 90% attendance last year!
    - Board members pay their own way to come to meetings
    - are not *required*, but expected to make a significant financial contribution and to participate in every volunteer donation effort
    - peer pressure works well to accomplish all of the above
- Original PCTA Board structure: lots of Board committees, only 3 full-time staff. Board President was involved in meetings with the federal agency partners.
    - PCTA soon realized it should be the staff's job to interact with fed agencies, since the staff better understands how the NGO functions on a day-to-day basis
    - General consensus in the room that as NGOs evolve, this original structure ends up shifting into much more staff, less Board member responsibilities
    - Currently, PCTA's federal partner (PCT Program Manager) generally attends 1 board member meeting a year
    - Now, Board helps PCTA set goals and attends Washington DC events
    - PCTA didn't have a lot of pushback from minimizing the Board size to 7, FTA did, however
    - PCTA Regional Representative program has been very effective in the federal partnership, they interact at the Forest and district levels
    - At first, volunteer groups didn't like the Reg. Rep. Concept because volunteers thought their role now didn't mean as much

- PCTA Management Committees can be comprised of staff *and* Board members, but on a Management Committee a Board member is the same as any other committee member
- New England Trail at the stage of trying to establish a Stewardship Council, they currently don't have high membership so the Board will have to start off doing most of the work, which is typical
- ATC has a committee whose focus is stewardship, and this reports to the Board.
- ATC and FTA have a long history of volunteers
- PCTA currently doesn't have a Trails Operations Committee, or Stewardship. Also doesn't have people with trail maintenance backgrounds on their Board, just hikers
- ATC gets complaints that their board isn't representing the people working on the ground. If a board becomes too much like a business, they must find a way to reach out to those people on the ground.
- FTA beginning to lose cohesiveness of a thru-trail, they are factioning into separate chapters that do their own thing
- PCTA officers are nominated by the Board and have 1 year terms. Consideration for getting rid of Board term limits
- PCTA has had a very effect direct mail campaigned, hired an outside contractor to organize that.

IDEAS

- Recruitment tool: local training programs that train potential non profit Board members
- Building a board takes focus and commitment
    - first step is change the tone and be clear about intention; you may lose a few people
    - a good job description (PCTA provided example)
    - financial contribution "significant" and "participate in every fundraising campaign at some level" (PCTA)
    - PCTA Structure: BOARD COMMITTEES (4 – staff person for each one; meet 1x per month) AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES (Board or non Board members staffed; advise the ED; EX Hike the Hill Committee; these are ad hoc committees formed as needed)
    - Identify skill sets needed
- Create a Governance Council to engage folks who care but are not as interested in the management and fundraising
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CHRONIC ISSUES/CHALLENGES

- What is each Board member bringing to the table in addition to contributing?
- Bd members should not be a financial drag or dead weight on the organization
- Too many committees…
- Too many conversations with agency partners; need to be coordinated through the staff but depends on the organization and Board; confusion as to who speaks for the organization and need for continuity in the relationship
- Splintering into hiking clubs with little understanding of the relationship to the Board and to the broader mission
- Constituencies feel like they want representation on the Board – trail workers, hikers, funders, partners, chapter, regional reps