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Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

In planning, boards must listen to staff

By Barry VanderKelen

Nonprofit boards of directors have responsibility for setting strategic direction for their organizations, hiring chief executive officers to implement the plans and ensuring adequate resources are available to accomplish the goals.

When an organization has staff, does the board or the staff have more responsibility for developing a strategic plan?

Individual board members have skills and experiences that augment the capability of the staff.

Most board members do not work at the nonprofit every day. A key advantage of this distance is that they have a perspective staff needs.

Conversely, staff members live the mission of the organization every day. They understand the nuances of programs and services.

Being focused on the operations, however, may prevent them from recognizing local, regional and national trends.

It would be a mistake to allow a board to write a strategic plan without staff input, and vice versa. The different perspectives of board and staff must be blended together in the planning process.

Yet while boards are responsible for setting strategic direction, they are most effective when responding to proposals from staff.

Many nonprofits do not have staff. In these organizations, there are board members and

volunteers who are so active they actually are surrogates for staff.

When it's time to develop a strategic plan, it is crucial that these people present their thoughts about the programs and services they provide.

To prepare for the planning process, and to be ready to adapt the plan when circumstances change, board members must educate themselves about the organization and its industry.

The board as a whole must continually learn about governance, finance, programs and fundraising. Because members complete their terms or leave for other reasons, new members join boards regularly. The strategic plan is only as strong as the least informed board member.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

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