

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits Leadership Conference - 6/14/23

Session: Evolving the Nonprofit Board

Facilitated by Leah Porter and Amanda Ziebell of Propel Nonprofits

Participant Notes from Flip Charts:

Believe the community knows best – How can we cultivate space for community creativity? Dreaming?

- Ask how much change people really want and when.
- Embrace idea that a nonprofit's objective is to work their way "out of business."
- Invite community leaders to BOD meetings.
- More leadership and board retreat time
- Honor "frontline" staff input. Many are of the community you're serving.
- Get board members out of board room. They should attend org events with community members.
- Annual (bi-annual? Quarterly?) event (food, conversation, voting) with stakeholders for big picture conversations about decisions for next year. Could be policy, budget, outreach, etc.
- Recognize you can't thrive if all you do is survive.
- Community/school survey.
- Invite/include staff members to join/present at board meetings.
- Prioritize emotional intelligence training.
- Buy in for committee chairs by listening to their thoughts and ideas.
- Believe the community knows best – work with the board on strategy to provide listening session and round tables.
- Paid opportunities for community to provide input.
- Turn over strategic planning to community and support process.
- Take intentional walks in community, noticing, listening, asking questions.
- Ask all stakeholders (ask in accessible ways, ask more than one)
- Ask transformative questions.
- Evaluate board composition to ensure community voice -OR- establish intentional working groups to hear from the community.
- Get clear about who you are surveying.
- Make space for community audience/clients to be heard at board meetings.
- Recognize lived experience as a valuable board expertise.
- Give CEO grace to say, "I don't know."
- Provide art and glimpses of a transformed future to spark belief.
- Survey the members of the organization.

Ground your org in curiosity and humility – What are the relationships that will help create change?

- Finding relationships/collaborations that accomplish multiple goals that lead to positive changes.
- Build in exercises to challenge board members to be curious and humble.
- Grounding org – engaging community leaders, emerging leaders, listening and learning from lived experiences.
- Move the power – board are to listen and integrate community input.

- Partner with other organizations that have similar mission/goals.
- Increase board diversity.
- Promote structured “circle share” discussion in the board to flatten sharing and listening.
- Reimagining the structure/relationship between nonprofits and foundations.
- Pause during discussion at board meetings to intentionally ask if the initiative or action will do harm.
- Partner with those outside of comfort zone.
- Build power in participants and alumni.
- Practices of mindfulness.
- Opportunities to be present/engaged with unfamiliar (to them) communities.
- Laughter and joy.

Center power in community – What can we accomplish together that we cannot accomplish alone?

- Building/having conversations with our local community. Create a strong bond with locals for positive impacts.
- Listen to what they need, provide the resources to operationalize.
- The community members we serve sit on our board of directors (lived experience).
- Significant operating cost resources include “head count”/staff costs.
- Introduce the word “power” to the board and talk about what the board’s power is and encourage discussion about how to wield it.
- Determine who can help achieve your mission.
- Center power in community strength in listening, shared resources, and perspectives.
- Partner with other organizations that have similar mission/goals.
- We can’t solve pain points if we haven’t asked what they are.
- Before the budget is set, tell community what the big dreams/goal/needs are. Fill budget after.
- New ideas and hope.
- Everything.

Support the community to lead – What might our role be in supporting the change (rather than leading the change)?

- Supporting change through collaboration to provide our strengths in technology access and skills training.
- Recognize you can’t (and shouldn’t) do it alone. Identify trusted community partners.
- Evaluate how board decisions are made – how to include community?
- Open listening sessions with people served.
- Pose the question about intentional partnerships with like-minded orgs.
- Couple paradigm-shifting with composting/dreaming in terms of structural concepts of org and roles.
- Look for ways to say yes, instead of reasons to say no.
- Invest in getting community input often and in diverse ways.
- Including regular board training and learning to build capacity of community as board members.
- Boards talk openly and plan for developing and transitioning board officers and leaders.
- Recognize that patriarchy and white supremacy impact your organization.