To: San Mateo County Commission on the Status of Women

From: Tanya Beat, Director

Date: November 19, 2019

Subject: Status of recent events/projects

Update:

- Peninsula Family Service Thought Leader Series:
  Civic participation: Barriers & Opportunities, Friday, Nov 15, 8:30am -1:30pm
- ACCW Conference: Saturday, Nov 2; Dana Linda attended

Announcements:

- **Choices Program**
- **Transgender Day of Remembrance:**
  - Wednesday, November 20\(^{th}\); Redwood City Public Library
  - Procession: 5-6pm; Program: 6:30-8:00pm

Action:

- Calendar for 2020
  - Discuss any dates
  - Approve calendar

Announcements from Commissioners:

- n/a
2020 Meeting Schedule

*CSW meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month with the exception of November due to the Thanksgiving holiday.*

*Meetings to be held at 455 County Center, Redwood City in room 101, 6:30-8:30pm*

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How Important is Culture to Your Nonprofit Board?

By: Diana Kern, NEW’s Vice President of Programs

Nonprofit boards are groups. All groups have cultures. The best and most productive groups have cultures that foster inclusiveness, accountability to each other, trust, open and honest discussion and where members of the group feel valued and appreciated. The most effective groups have leaders that truly believe mission, vision and values are critical to group accountability. In all my years working with nonprofit boards and CEO’s, I have found that most boards do not pay enough attention to or even question the role “culture” plays. Bottom line... culture is about leadership. Leadership cannot be put in a policy. All board members have a duty to lead.

We all understand governance now, and almost all boards have board member job descriptions as well as a code of ethics. About 70% or more of all nonprofit boards have passed policies that call for the annual review and signing of a conflict of interest policy. No written policy can take the place of culture. And, how do you create a sustainable culture when the Board Chair role changes frequently or the person filling the role was strong-armed into the role because no one else would step up? What if the person has never lead a group or lacks leadership skills?

The biggest issue with nonprofit boards is the “nice-guy” syndrome. This lethal syndrome seems to be in the DNA of volunteers who traditionally avoid any form of conflict which will infringe upon their personal time or cause conflict with other directors. We just want to show up, meet for the hour and half necessary to provide oversight and leave. However, never underestimate the power of culture when major changes need to be considered.

Top Five Considerations about Nonprofit Board Culture

1. The Board Chair Does Make A Difference. It is not the role of the CEO to set the culture for the board. The board is made up of peers – volunteers at the table there for any number of reasons. We hope those at the table with us are there for the right reasons – to advance the mission of the nonprofit and to protect stakeholders through proper oversight and actions. The Board Chair is the leader of the board, just as the CEO is the leader of the staff.
Boards that strategically place servant leaders into their Chair roles perform at significantly higher levels. The Board Chair seat is just as important as who the board chooses to lead the business.

2. Officers Together Own Culture. Culture comes from the way we talk and treat each other and from the expectations we set for each other. No expectations. No outcomes. If we as volunteer peers do not seek accountability from each other, only the 20% of overachievers will actually produce. Three people will do all the work. And, while they are doing all this work they will complain to each other about how ineffective everyone else is. Nonprofit board work needs to be spread out evenly in order to avoid burnout and to help build sustainability and succession of officers. If a fellow board member fails to perform, whose job is it to find out why and to seek ways to correct the issue? All the officers own this job. The officers need to know they have to have each other’s backs and must be seen as a united team focused on the same goals. The more they communicate with each other, the better.

When someone agrees to an officer roll they need to take it seriously and believe they are just as important to a good culture as the board chair is. Do they help screen the next set of board recruits and share our values and cultures so we ensure a good fit? Do we lead by example and show up on time, having read all the materials sent to us and take an active role? In many cases those that have ended up next to me at the board table seem to have received less screening than a potential date might.

3. Put Culture Into Action. Have you ever heard someone ask a kid, “Where’d you learn to do that?” In most cases, they will say a parent or another close adult taught them. Culture can and should be passed on. Today, the average length of time anyone serves on a single nonprofit board is six years. And in many cases, this is much less. Therefore, we have to intentionally help culture along. Some ways to do this include:

- Agendas that ask for affirmations or provide time to acknowledge good deeds or outcomes, celebrations and appreciations
- A culture that encourages a move to consensus building regardless of the bylaws – getting to “yes” in order to build a team and accountability
- Board Officers that call board members outside of meetings or email them to check in or inquire if they need anything or have questions about their service
- Establishment of informal mentoring of newer board members
• Instituting professional development support for board members to learn important skills like leading meetings, asking for money, or acquiring the tools of a great Treasurer
• A board chair that thanks everyone for coming and starts and ends meetings on time
• Officers that, together with the CEO, review the upcoming agenda for input into critical discussions

This list can go on and on. None of these things will ever be found in policy. When I am a board chair, I also set a culture of respecting each other and the staff’s time by requesting all smart phones be put away for the hour and half needed to conduct the meeting. I have also called board members that did not show up and neglected to email or call me to say they could not attend the meeting. It is board meeting right? Not a staff meeting? Stop the culture of having board members email the CEO the day of meeting to say they can’t make it. It is not their problem. The accountability is to the Board Chair and your fellow board members.

If food is your culture, embrace it! Feeding board members, as long as the expense is reasonable, is okay, especially if your board meetings are in the early evening.

4. The Board Needs to Communicate The Culture. At the beginning of year, and once you have elected your officers and filled those open board seats, include in the first meeting the agreed upon norms and culture. You will be shocked how happy and engaged this makes volunteer board members! We are taking time to talk about how we will treat each other and how we will respect each person’s time. Here are some great examples I have seen for your group’s consideration:

• If an email is sent out by the CEO or Board Chair seeking an “action” or “response” if you do not respond in 48 hours, our culture is that you have agreed to waive input
• For all board meetings, smart phones will be but on vibrate or put away and we will respect each others time by only attending to smart phones, emails, etc. if we have an emergency
• Our staff spends up to 8 hours putting together the material for our board packet. We ask that each board member read the material before coming and we do not require our staff to print copies – bring your own in hard copy or electronically
• Since we meet every third Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. food and drink will be provided ½ hour before the meeting – contributions of “sweets” by the board members is encouraged
• We ask all board members to give a one-year notice of their intention to no longer serve (we understand when emergencies prevent this). In your final 12 months, we will ask you to identify your replacement and recommend this person to the Governance Committee for consideration. This is our way of creating succession for board member and to honor those we leave in service.

• In our meetings we encourage respectful debate on strategic matters – open and honest discussion is expected of our board members

• We agree not to monopolize meetings and to encourage those that have not spoken to add their opinions and thoughts

These seven steps can help you build a culture that begins to cultivate accountability to each other. Serving on a nonprofit board is hard work. We should feel accountability to our fellow board members and apologize if we have let them down and if necessary, feel compelled to resign if can’t add value and pull our own weight. When we refuse to get of the way our peers have to hold us accountable. We may only see each other a dozen times a year, but we have to work hard to create a peer culture that inspires us and sustains us.