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GULF COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Sculpting a High-Performing Board

A THREE-STEP PLAN

Boards are better equipped to move the organization forward when they:

- Regularly assess their performance
- Question their habits
- View the board as a team that deserves regular professional development
- Honor organizational history but understand that they must ensure the organization keeps pace with changes in the economy and shifts in the environment in which the organization functions.

Such boards are considered high-performing boards. Here are some steps to move your board towards a culture of high-performance.

Step One: Identifying Practices of High-Performing Boards

To begin your board's evolution into a high-performing governance body use the following 5 practices of high performance to facilitate discussions in your boardroom. Explore the strategies that support quality performance and determine an 18-month plan to implement strategies.

Practices of High-Performing Boards

1. Members intentionally build a team with clear goals, disciplined attention to governance and a commitment to a culture of trust and camaraderie.

2. Board leaders, in partnership with the CEO, design and focus board meetings and board activities so that members engage in meaningful, consequential discussions that lead to smart decision-making and strategy.

3. The board creates an atmosphere where members are encouraged to engage in respectful debate as a learning team, where diverse ideas and viewpoints are welcome and a culture of philanthropy flourishes.

4. Board members are provided with a thoughtful orientation and ongoing opportunities to learn about the nuances and realities of the organization and come to deeply understand the mission.

5. Decisions are based solely on what is in the organization's best interest. Once a decision is made the full board stands behind it.

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Step Two: Strategies for Implementing High-Performance Practices

To go beyond "considering" these practices to putting them into action requires some changes to the way you approach the board's processes. To ensure the board embraces these practices, the Governance Committee, Executive Committee, or an Ad-Hoc Group should take ownership of facilitating action on these steps through the design of a 12–18-month board development plan. Following are strategies that support a higher level of performance.

Strategies for Building a Board Team

- Start every year out with several clear goals for the organization and for the board's focus. Use these goals to define the work of committees and shape agendas for the year. Have these goals clearly visible at every meeting.

- Include an opportunity at each board meeting for board members to get to know each other and form collegial connections.

- Include a mission moment at board meetings as often as possible, such as inviting a recipient of services to speak, showing a brief video relating to your mission or having a staff member share their vision.

- Recognize board progress and create opportunities for celebrating success of both the board and the organization.

- Design a plan for board development for the year which might include tactics such as a re-crafting of the committee structure, redesign of orientation process, adoption of a commitment to put more substantive issues on the agenda for board discussion and an in-the-boardroom training on fundraising.

- Participate in a board assessment every 12-18 months and use the survey results to improve board work.

Strategies for Fostering Board Meetings that Result in Meaningful Work

- Schedule the Board Chair and CEO to meet 2-3 weeks prior to board meetings to determine the issues that should be included in the upcoming agenda. It is important to keep in mind how to best use board members' time and talent and how they align with pressing short-term and long-term issues.

- Ensure that items that go on the agenda for discussion, vote or education are of substance.

- Send board packets out 1.5 weeks prior to the meeting. Identify information board members will need and organize it with descriptors about why the material is important.

- Committee chairs regularly fulfill their responsibility of identifying committee work that is critical for full board discussion and submits those items for the agenda, putting the day-to-day routine committee business reports on a consent agenda.

- Include instructions for agenda items to the board (i.e., this item needs board input before a decision is made or a vote needs to be taken on this issue).

- Be clear that it is the responsibility of the board chair and all board members to ensure that

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everyone is heard and that conflicting viewpoints are honored.

- The board understands that after debate and decision-making they will move forward with one voice.

Strategies for Creating a Culture of Trust, Engagement and Philanthropy

- Assign a seasoned board liaison to all new members that helps them become better acquainted with the history and function of the board.

- Design a Board orientation to be educational, experiential, and inspiring.

- Provided Board Members with education on the three pillars of fundraising: cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.

- Ensure that the vital role board members play as an ambassador is understood.

- Create a culture of philanthropy. Engage all staff, board and volunteers in inviting the community to know the organization and thanking donors. Display visible signs of appreciation throughout the organization.

Strategies to Ensure that Board Members Deeply Understand the Organization

- Give the CEO/Executive Director opportunities to share stories of "what keeps her/him up at night" in a setting in which provides support and trust.

- Keep Board Members abreast of the outcomes the organization is achieving in a variety of ways. (i.e. data, feedback, stories, anecdotal information and surveys of stakeholders.)

- Share with Board Members which programs are having high mission impact or are generating profit compared to programs that have low impact or do not generate profits.

- Ensure that Board Members can articulate what sets their organization apart from others.

- Educate Board Members about the lifecycle of the organization and take time to analyze and set strategies based on that knowledge.

- Ensure that the Board understands the promises the organization has made, the contracts it is committed to and the stances it supports.

- Confirm that the Board understands the capacity needs of the organization and is dedicated to efforts to securing and committing funds for a strong infrastructure.

Strategies to Ensure that Decisions are in the Best Interest of the Organization

Strive to ensure that the following statements are accurate:

- The board understands the critical importance of recognizing conflicts of interest and each board member takes responsibility for articulating and documenting any and all conflicts and sharing this information with the full board no more than annually.

- Board members with the slightest concern over a conflict of interest, recuse themselves from board work that involves that issue.

- Board members with conflicts that impede their capacity to act in the best interest of the organization resign from the board.

- Board members understand that while they may hold deep respect for the CEO, board chair

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or other member of the organization – all decisions should be made in the best interest of the organization.

- The board strategizes for both the near-future and the long-range outlook for the organization – taking into account and planning for change and transitions.

- Board and staff engage in continual learning about their role, field, trends that impact their mission and changes in the needs of their constituents so that the organization is ready for the future.

Step Three: Formalizing the Commitment

The final step to evolving your board into an extraordinary board is making a formal commitment and empowering a task force of the board to oversee follow-through. This commitment is called a Board Pledge and should be customized to support the uniqueness of your nonprofit. On a yearly basis and during orientation, the board should review the pledge and identify areas in which they want to focus in the year ahead.

Board of Directors' Pledge

The Board of Directors for [Organization Name] is dedicated to practicing the highest level of effective governance to ensure the sustainability and mission success of [Organization Name] .

We recognize the laws governing New Hampshire nonprofit organizations and our duties to uphold these regulations.

We are committed to the following ongoing practices:

- Implementing a yearly plan for ongoing governance education

- Affording new board members with a robust and engaging orientation

- Articulating the role of the board and the board's goals for the year at the beginning of each calendar year.

- Carefully engaging in pre-planning for meetings, identifying substantive issues and crafting an agenda focused on meaningful decision-making and sense making.

- Making strategic decisions regarding how committee and ad hoc committees are needed to execute the work of the board and provide those groups with directions and goals.

- Fostering a culture of trust, inclusiveness, and openness to diverse dialogue in the boardroom.

- Making all decisions in the best interest of [Organization Name] and, once a decision is made, moving forward with one voice.

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