

We are delighted to share our progress thus far in developing the principles-based, systems-oriented body of knowledge as it evolves. This document is a working draft; updates will be made throughout 2010.

Principles for Membership-based Organizations

A Working Draft

Membership-based organizations are established to represent specific professions, trade or personal interests. Some have individuals while others have organized groups as members. In either case, they are founded to promote and protect the interests of their members.

These organizations are designed to address common challenges and to achieve common goals. Beyond the formal structure of these organizations, a culture emerges that influences their general operating procedures and their daily routines. This culture might not be readily observed or easily documented, nonetheless, association management professionals must be sensitive to this culture in order to effectively pilot the organization to achieve its mission and goals as well as enhance the organization's current programs, products and services.

Culture

An organization's culture evolves over time and includes the shared attitudes, actions, beliefs, and behaviors that permeate every corner, but realistically without the same impact on every member. These cultures are not static and changes in the larger society can modify and alter them.

The organization's culture can manifest itself in a variety of contexts:

- Manner by which association meetings are conducted.
- Environment created at membership events to foster community.
- Frequency, manner, and reason by which members are recognized for making contributions.
- Messages delivered by key volunteer and staff leaders in person and in print.
- Tone incorporated into written and electronic correspondence.

These are not insignificant examples; they convey to the members constantly the core values and goals of the organization. Members will more likely become involved in the organizations when their values and goals and those of the organization are shared. Volunteer and staff leaders can reinforce an

organization's culture. They can also be agents to move the organization's culture in a more positive direction

Volunteer and staff leaders eager to develop an organization responsive to member needs must support and embrace a culture that emphasizes those values and goals. Culture is often subtle, but not invisible. There are some standards that can be set to guide behavior, thinking, and actions in every situation, even the most mundane and routine. It is reasonable to review these standards from time to time to see if their integrity is still viable in a changing society.

Organizations that fail to establish a core set of values often find themselves shifting in tone, focus and direction from one leadership term to the next. At the same time that mission, vision and values guide the organization's focus and direction, **principles** are beliefs or ideologies that guide the means by which the organization is governed and managed. The secret to effective volunteer and staff leadership is understanding the role that principles play in associations and incorporating them into daily operations and program development.

Types of Principles

Three types of principles guide the operation and program development of membership-based organizations: general principles, specific principles, and targeted principles.

General principles

are a broad set of beliefs about a core functional areas. Broken into the various program areas used by all membership-based organizations, these principles are summarized in this booklet. For example, membership development is a core functional area guided by general principles.



Specific principles are a defined set of beliefs about a specific topic or component within a functional area. For example, the delineation of the stages of membership development is guided by specific principles.

Targeted principles are beliefs that guide the development of action under a specific topic. For example, a member-get-a-member campaign is guided by targeted principles.

General Principles

Overall

- Membership-based organizations exist for its members to achieve their personal and professional goals.
- The organization's greatest strength and potential lies within its membership and staff.
- Everyone involved in the organization possesses unique skills, talents, abilities, and expertise that can contribute to the organization.

Specific Principles

Membership Development

- Membership development is a process that cuts across all programs and administrative areas within the organization.
- The membership development process. impacts and affects every function in the organization
- Everyone in the organization has the opportunity and responsibility to contribute in some way to membership development.
- An organization's primary goal is to identify, tap and cultivate member and staff potential.
- The organization's culture and environment play a significant role in determining the level of member involvement.

Leadership Development

- Volunteer leaders of a membership-based organization are cultivated from its membership.
- The ability of the volunteer and staff leadership to remain responsive to member needs is the strength and value of a membership-based organization.
- Effective leadership is the direct result of an ongoing systematic approach to identifying, recruiting, training, and recognizing the organization's members.

- Members may exhibit leadership capabilities but do not actively seek formal leadership positions; these talents should be recognized and tapped.
- A high degree of volunteerism results when the organization creates a culture and environment that is inviting and responsive to members' readiness and willingness to participate.
- A "leadership partnership" relationship enables volunteer and staff leadership to maximize the organization's greatest potential and talent.

Governance and Management

- An organization has formal and informal customs, traditions, and attitudes that shape its culture.
- Managing the membership-based organization as a system with program areas operating in an independent and integrated fashion enables resources to be maximized fully.
- Staff provides continuity and expertise to help ensure the organization's stability.
- Formally written policies, processes, procedures and practices help guide the association's day-to-day operations.
- Decisions for the organization are rooted in its values, vision, and mission.
- Goals are established based on member needs rather than the personal perspective of a few strong-willed leaders.
- Those involved in governance and management possess a clear understanding of their roles, duties, obligations, and responsibilities.
- Effective governance and management focus on the future by recognizing the dynamics of the present and lessons learned from the past.
- Associations ensure sufficient resources are generated to achieve its goals.

Member Services

(Programs, Products and Services)

- Membership-based organizations are responsible for designing and delivering a range of programs, products, and services that contribute to the personal and professional success of its members.
- Satisfied and active members learn through an orientation that identifies how those programs, products, and services that will address their specific needs.

- Programs, products, and services are the most effective vehicles for disseminating critical information to members and other targeted audiences.
- Information generated from the members' perspective has a greater opportunity to capture attention and cultivate awareness.
- Associations interested in serving a diverse membership need to provide members with the option of selecting additional services for an additional fee.
- Programs, products and services generate important non-dues revenue for the organization.
- Programs, products and services are continuously reviewed to ensure they meet the changing needs of current and future members.

Legislative and Regulatory Influence

- Selected volunteer and staff leaders are identified to serve solely as the organization's official spokesperson(s).
- A comprehensive approach of integrated and independent strategies can achieve legislative and regulatory changes.
- Constant and consistent communication with members and other targeted audiences are required for the organization seeking to address a legislative or regulatory initiative.

Communication and Public Relations

- An effective communications effort disseminates information to internal and external audiences about programs, products and services available to help members recognize their needs and achieve their goals.
- The organization and its members are actively involved in and responsible for communicating information to one another.
- Information developed from the members' perspective has a greater chance of being understood and acted upon.
- The values the organization holds about its members are reflected in the tone, manner, style, and format of its personal, printed, and electronic communication.
- An organization's overall communication plan considers a wide variety of frequent and consistent channels to routinely deliver key messages to the membership and other targeted audiences.

Please contact us with your opinions and perspectives about these principles. We welcome your suggestions and ideas.

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