

May 2017 Association Tip-of-the-Month

Top Tips for Successful Association Management

Associations are complex organizations with many moving parts, and the prospect of managing them can be overwhelming. Member recruitment, member maintenance and outreach, event coordination, finances, liaising with the Board, and managing the day-to-day functioning is a lot to handle. Thankfully, you are not alone. If managed correctly, every participant in the association can be an asset who contributes to the success and efficient functioning of the whole. Here, we provide some top tips for successful association management.

Assign Clear Roles:

- *To be effective, successful managers need to utilize the strengths of the people around them. However, this isn't possible if the people they manage do not have a clear idea of what role they are playing. Multiple people who all think they are in charge of a project or subject matter is a recipe for a tangled mess that slows things down, breeds resentment, and sabotages your association's success. Within your staff and volunteers, be very clear about who is assigned to which project, who they report to, and what is expected of them.*

Communicate Effectively:

- *Effective communication is the key to every human interaction, and association management is no exception. The ability to clearly and effectively communicate goals, ideas, and expectations is necessary if you are going to manage a diverse staff and volunteer population for an association. Effective communication is not only in words, it is in tone, body language, and facial expression. Effective communication is communicating for results, not to relieve frustration or to vent anger. Make sure that every communication with your team is done with an eye towards achieving a goal, whether that is to complete a specific project or to create and maintain an effective team.*

See Your Board As An Ally, Not An Adversary:

- *Boards of directors can be tricky to work with. It can be easy to fall into an adversarial relationship with your board, with both sides demanding answers and actions and little work being done. This is an appalling waste of what can be an excellent resource. Boards have the potential to be phenomenal ambassadors for your mission and projects, great fundraisers, and a valuable tool for member recruitment. To get these benefits out of your board of directors, you must first approach them with the idea that you are partners. Walking into board meetings seeing them as a threat or hindrance closes the door to the possibility of working together. Before you walk into any meeting, make sure you that you believe you're walking in to see partners with a common goal.*

Have Defined Processes & Procedures

- *When things break down (and you know they will) it saves immense amounts of time, effort, and headache to be able to refer to a defined process for getting back on track. Written procedures and processes for everything from member enrollment to tracking expenditure will help the organization run smoothly. Not only that, having processes and procedures in places sets up the association for long-term success, as newcomers will not have to reinvent the wheel every time staff and management experiences turnover.*

Association management is complex, and requires you to juggle competing projects and goals. However, organizing your resources by defining processes and setting clear and distinct goals for your staff and volunteers can eliminate overlap of effort and make your association run smoothly. Making your Board an ally and developing and maintaining and positive rapport with your board and other participants also prevents headaches and can give you resources you wouldn't otherwise have. All of the participants in your association have something to contribute, and as a manager it is your job to find ways to maximize those contributions for the good of the organization.