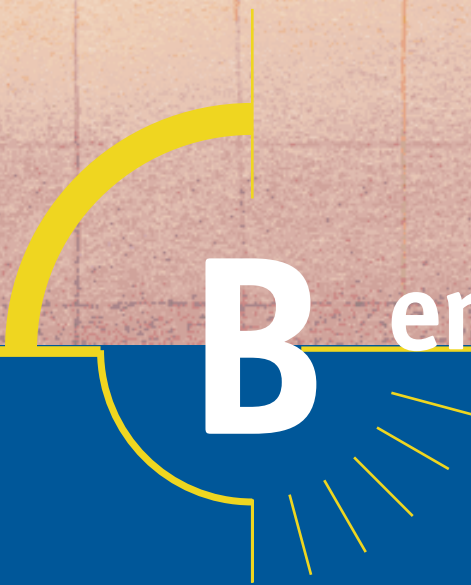




Benchmarks of excellence

FOR THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR



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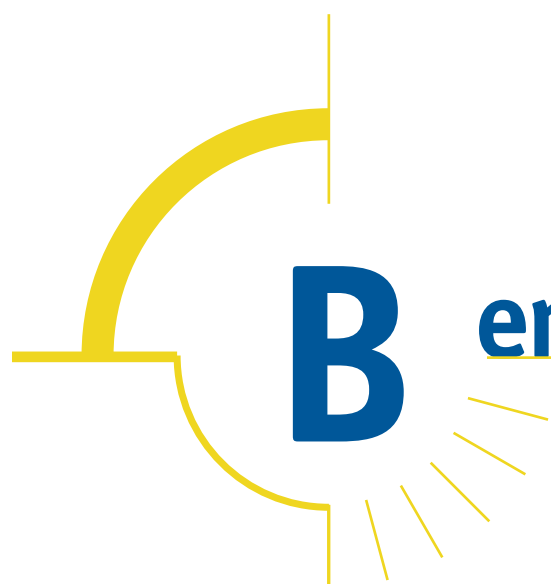


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en**ch**marks of excellence

FOR THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Developed and written by
Linda Mollenhauer

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Linda Mollenhauer was the project consultant responsible for researching and developing the Benchmarks, designing the process, and writing Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector.

Five of the many organizations that were identified as “excellent” were invited to participate in the research. They gave generously of their time, experiences and insights. Thank you to: Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada, Big Sister and Big Brother Society of Edmonton and Area, Calgary Birth Control Association, Huntington Society of Canada, Wellspring and the YWCA – Vancouver.

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foreword

Those of us who are involved in the voluntary, not-for-profit sector appreciate that we can no longer attract volunteers, donors and funders just because we are a good cause and need help. We must show that we are quality organizations, delivering quality services and products. In order to achieve that, we need to be aware of our own areas of competence – even excellence – as well as the areas that we need to improve.

The existing literature and research describes best practices in a number of areas, such as accountability or collaboration. However, what does not exist is a resource that describes excellence as it relates to the whole organization. So we set out to develop a resource that spotlights the characteristics that exist in voluntary, not-for-profit organizations that are perceived as excellent by peers, funders, and clients. We also designed tools that help organizations assess their performance against those characteristics and then develop an action plan to sustain, celebrate and communicate areas of excellence and build toward excellence in the other areas.

Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector is based on extensive research that included a comprehensive literature review, intensive interviews and many, many hours of debate and discussion. We are grateful to the five organizations that were among those identified as excellent and participated in our research. The volunteers and staff from these organizations were extraordinarily candid and insightful and provided us with real life examples that made the project come alive.

As a sector development initiative of Health Canada, the project was led by the ALS Society of Canada. A wonderful team of experts from the voluntary and private sector contributed their wisdom and experience as an Advisory Committee. McKinsey and Company, an international management consulting firm, played a pivotal role providing both human and material resources. This project began in the mind of Linda Mollenhauer several years ago. She participated on the team as a consultant serving as researcher, writer, prodder and visionary.

We are delighted to commend the Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector to you. While the project began as an initiative for national voluntary health organizations, we believe the final product has application to the entire voluntary sector.

This is not a search for excellence; it is a map leading toward excellence, a way forward for the organization ready to take a step into this adventure. May it be an exciting and productive journey!

Karl H. Benne
Senior Consultant
Health Canada

Suzanne Lawson
National Executive Director
ALS Society of Canada

introduction

Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector is an education, evaluation and planning tool that can help organizations measure themselves against the characteristics that distinguish excellent voluntary, not-for-profit organizations. It offers the chance to rise above the day-to-day demands and look at the health of the whole organization. It also provides Boards, volunteers, and staff with a process that encourages them to raise the bar and aim higher.

Specifically, the Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector can help organizations:

- Generate meaningful dialogue about the whole organization
- Celebrate areas of strength within the organization to build confidence
- Identify areas of weakness that could be a hidden barrier to higher performance
- Gather the valuable information needed to sell the organization as a good investment
- Provide a catalyst for productive change
- Kickstart a strategic planning process by reviewing the “big picture”.

For information about Benchmarks of Excellence – including a training session with a detailed checklist – or to use Benchmarks as an evaluation tool, contact:

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order from National Voluntary Organizations 613-238-1591

Also available in French.
Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

the challenges

This is a time of significant stress in the voluntary not-for-profit sector. There is increasing need and demand for many of the programs and services provided by the sector, yet there are fewer resources. This creates an intensely competitive environment in which volunteers, donors, and funders are more discriminating about their choices and seek greater returns on the investment of their time and money.

In this environment, voluntary not-for-profit organizations are being asked to become more efficient and more effective. They are required to be more accountable and produce more tangible outcomes. As well, they must demonstrate clear benefits to stakeholders, particularly funders and donors.

Despite the demands placed on the voluntary not-for-profit sector, it remains somewhat of a mystery to the public. The public knows the sector does good work and when it touches their lives, they appreciate the support or benefits they receive. However, there are many misconceptions and little knowledge about the high quality of management and performance that is achieved in most organizations. There are also many comparisons to the way business is run that can provide limited recognition of some unique techniques that voluntary not-for-profits organizations utilize.

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

There are two key challenges for the sector. The first challenge is to meet the demands for higher performance, greater returns and increased accountability by rethinking the way organizations operate. While all voluntary not-for-profit organizations struggle with fiscal realities, the sector must rise above the survival mindset of simply trying to do more with less and embrace a focus on excellence.

However, some volunteers and staff have difficulty focusing on excellence because they face barriers to change. A barrier might be attitudes held by some volunteers or staff that block change, such as “why would we change, it seems to work this way”. To break down the barriers, organizations may need a stimulus that shakes them out of their complacency or outdated assumptions.

Other organizations are preoccupied with short-term solutions rather than a long-term and broader perspective. They need a tool that helps them to diagnose the whole problem from a “big picture” point of view rather than starting by fixing parts or focusing on specific functions. In other cases, volunteers and staff simply need a broad vision of what the organization could be and a tool to help them get there.

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

The second challenge is to educate the public and the organization’s stakeholders about the excellence that does exist in the sector. To do this, the sector needs to provide a model that draws from real organizations and is practical and digestible, not theoretical. The model also needs to illuminate the characteristics that are unique to the voluntary sector, not simply adapt those of the standard business model to the sector.

the purpose

Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector is an education, evaluation, and planning tool that addresses these two challenges facing voluntary not-for-profit organizations. It ultimately aims to help organizations improve their ability to meet the needs of stakeholders while becoming an even better investment for the community. Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector is designed to do this by providing a greater understanding of what makes an organization excellent.

The Benchmarks of Excellence were developed from research based on a sampling of excellent organizations from across Canada. The list of organizations was developed through consultation with funders and community leaders. Therefore, the Benchmarks of Excellence provide a model that is practical and unique to the sector and is not simply adapted from the business sector.

Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector can be used to focus a spotlight on the excellence that is being achieved by the voluntary not-for-profit sector. It can also be used to educate the public, funders, donors, business and government about the unique qualities that drive the sector.

how the benchmarks were developed

The development of the Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector was a thorough and consultative process.

PHASE I

It began with a comprehensive review of literature and discussions with key opinion leaders about the challenges facing the sector; how organizations are addressing the challenges; and the best practices of governance, operations, structure, processes and culture. Out of these discussions emerged a draft series of characteristics which represented excellence in the sector.

PHASE II

These draft characteristics were then sent to funders, including corporations, foundations and governments, with a request to identify those health organizations which they felt were excellent and reflected some or all of the characteristics.

A sampling of five of the identified organizations from across Canada were then selected for in-depth interviews with senior staff, Board members and key volunteers. The purpose of the interviews was to uncover, explore and validate the characteristics that make an organization excellent.

PHASE III

The draft characteristics were then adjusted and debated in a roundtable discussion with some of the organizations that participated in the research as well as a sampling of other strong organizations.

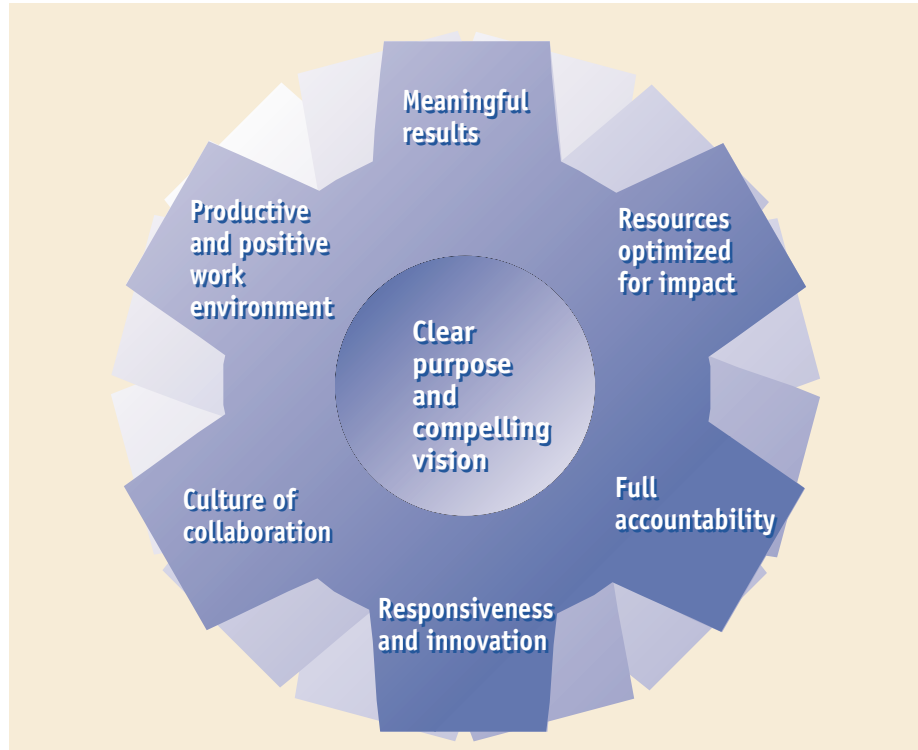
Based on the roundtable discussion the characteristics were further refined and renamed Benchmarks of Excellence.

PHASE IV

The evaluation process for assessing organizational performance was pilot tested with many charitable organizations. As well, the questionnaire was tested for clarity and language.



the *Benchmarks of Excellence* – an overview



THE BENCHMARKS OF EXCELLENCE ARE AN IDEAL STANDARD

Most voluntary not-for-profit organizations want to strive for excellence. They want to be more effective and better meet the needs of their users.* The Benchmarks of Excellence will help them achieve these ambitions by outlining an ideal standard to which organizations can aspire.

Most voluntary not-for-profit organizations already do many things well. But the characteristics described in the Benchmarks of Excellence are rarely found in equal strength in any one organization. They provide a point of reference – something to reach for – which stretches the organization towards even higher levels of performance.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

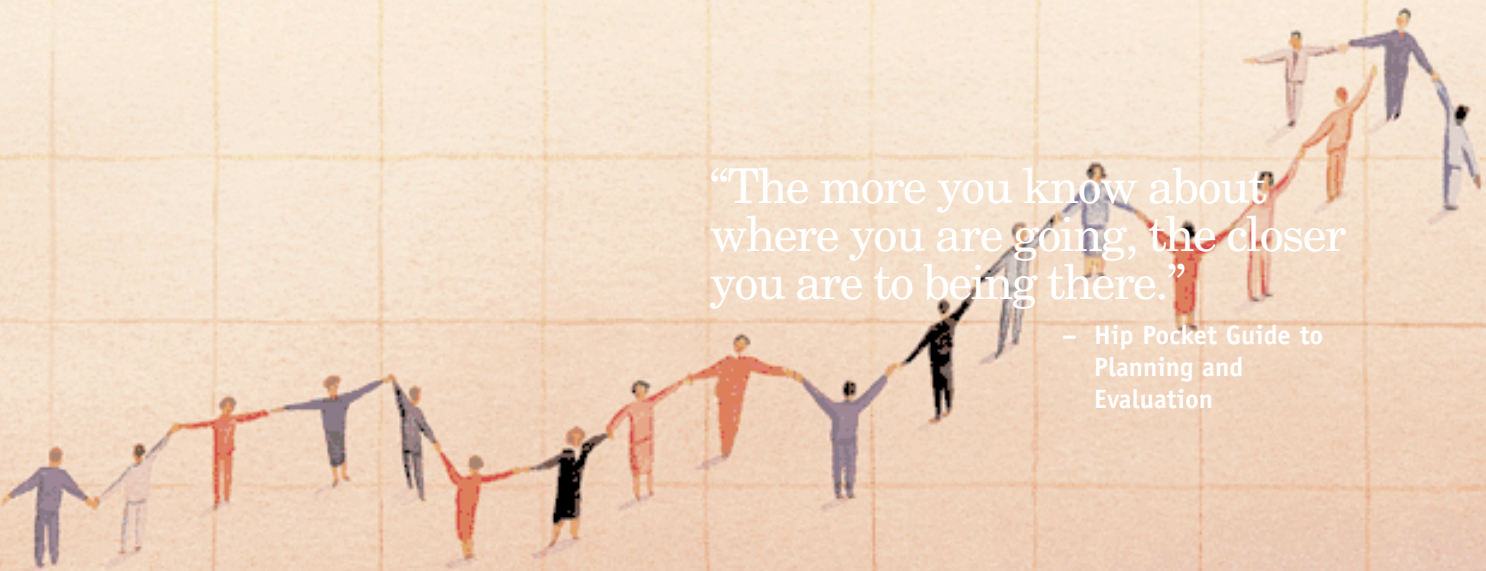
Each of the Benchmarks of Excellence is broken into a number of contributing factors. For example, one characteristic of an excellent organization is that it has a clear purpose and a compelling vision. There are a number of factors that contribute to an organization's ability to achieve this. The organization must be focused on what it wants to achieve and have set a clear course on how to achieve it. It must demonstrate that it serves a real need and is relevant to the users. It must also be driven by values that guide the organization's actions.

THE BENCHMARKS ARE INTERDEPENDENT

“A clear purpose and a compelling vision” is at the centre of the wheel because it is the most critical component. Without knowing where they are going and how they will get there, a voluntary not-for-profit organization cannot be strong in any other area.

The Benchmarks of Excellence are interdependent – like cogs in a wheel. If one is weak, it has an impact on the performance of all the others. For example, organizations can't be fully accountable unless they are able to describe the results for which they will be held accountable. The Benchmarks also strengthen one another. For example, a positive work environment allows for greater innovation and is enhanced by a collaborative management style.

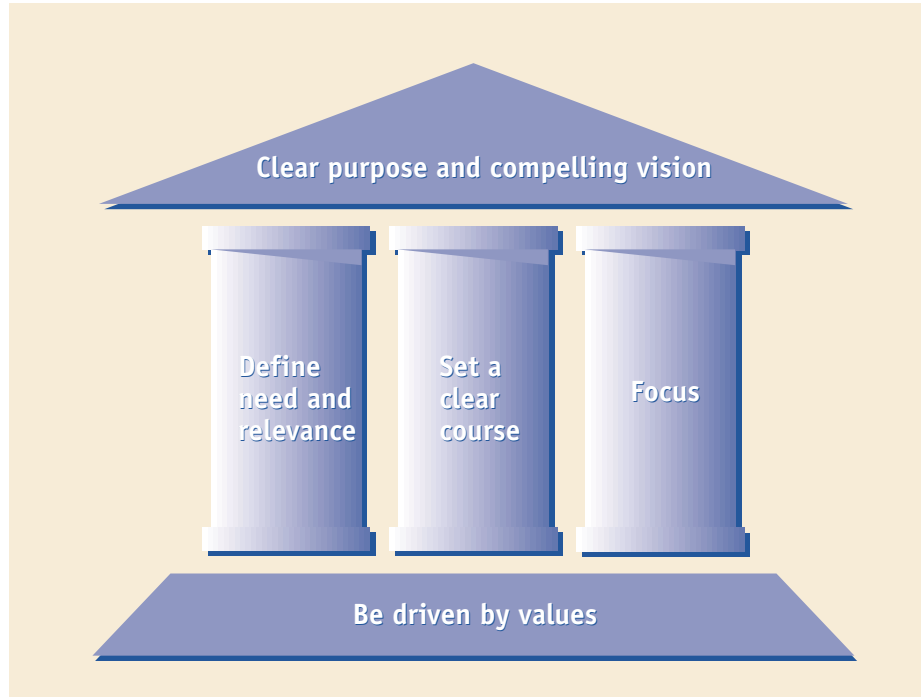
* The term user throughout the workbook describes those people who use, participate or benefit from an organization's programs and services. The term user in this workbook is interchangeable with the terms clients, members, customers or consumers.



“The more you know about where you are going, the closer you are to being there.”

– Hip Pocket Guide to Planning and Evaluation

a clear sense of purpose and compelling vision



DEFINE A REAL NEED

Excellent organizations are explicit about the needs or problems which are addressed by their programs and services. They have convincing evidence, which includes facts and statistics from authoritative sources, that the problem or need exists. Those who benefit from the programs and services are not only clearly identified, they have contributed to and endorsed the description of the need or problem. The need or problem described is also of a reasonable dimension; something can realistically be done about it.

SET A CLEAR COURSE

Excellent organizations know where they want to go and have a roadmap of how they will get there. They have a mission statement and a vision for the future that is inspiring, challenging and compelling. It propels the organization forward so that everyone is pulling in the same direction. The roadmap in excellent organizations has clearly defined goals and strategies and manageable expectations of what can be accomplished. In fact, Board members and staff take time in planning sessions to decide what cannot as well as what can be done.

FOCUS

Excellent organizations are not easily side-tracked. They know exactly what business they are in. In fact, if asked about the purpose of the organization, stakeholders would give a consistent message. The description of the mission or purpose is specific; it is free of jargon and vague prose. These organizations avoid being all things to all people. Furthermore, funders and others in the community view the purpose of an excellent organization as unique; it doesn't duplicate or significantly overlap with any other organization's mandate.

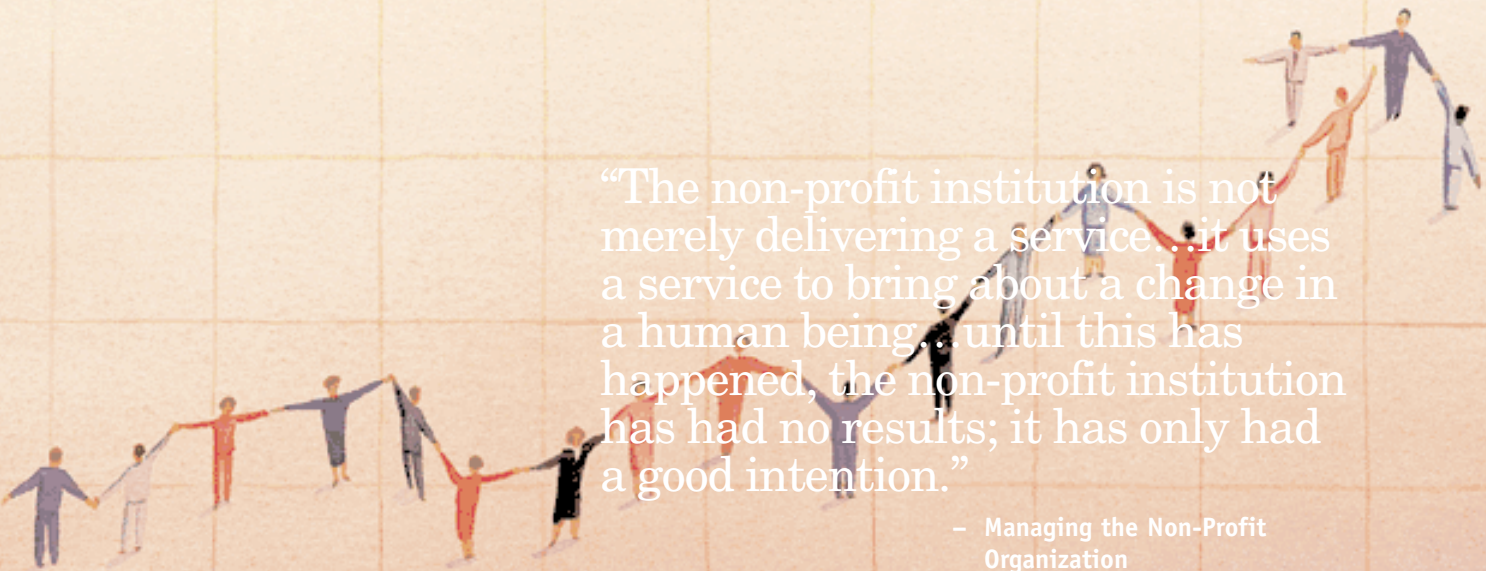
BE DRIVEN BY VALUES

The value statement, which describes what the organization stands for (e.g., the beliefs and principles about how the organization does business such as how do we treat users or make decisions), is concise, visible and provides a cornerstone to all decision making. In excellent organizations, even the drive for effectiveness and efficiency is not achieved at the expense of its values. Excellent organizations regularly refer to the values – to guide recruitment and human resource management, to measure the success of programs and services and to influence policies and procedures.

CASE STUDY

We never soft-peddled what we do, even though our purpose, which is to help people consider their sexual and reproductive choices, is fairly controversial. We haven't lost sight of our purpose and have hung onto the passion and the courage of our convictions. As well, our values are ingrained in all our programs. They aren't empty words tucked away in a manual. For example, one of our values is to never judge our clients. So we actually train our staff and volunteers on how to check their prejudices at the door.

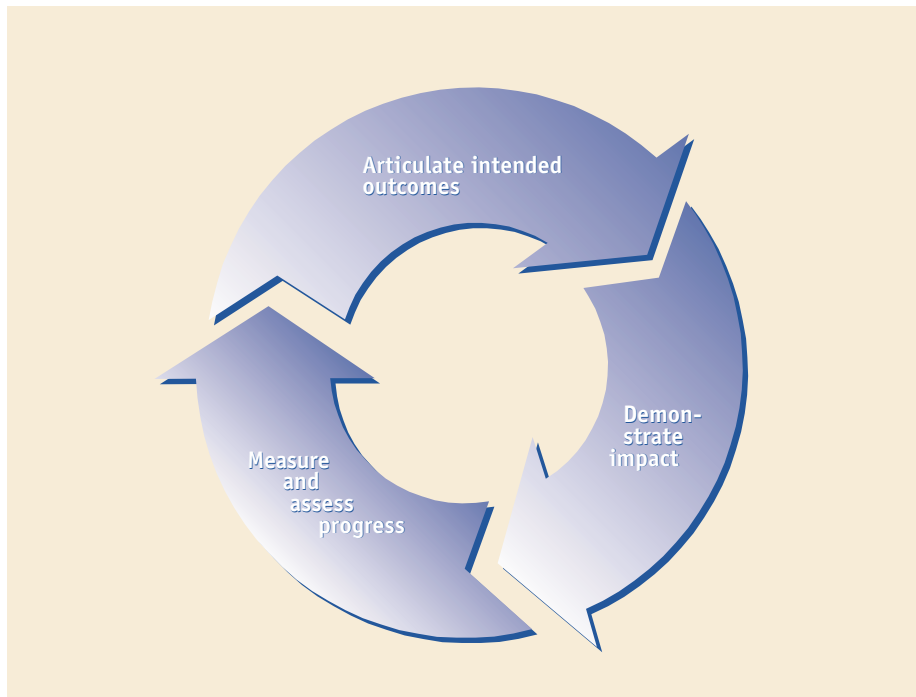
– Calgary Birth Control Association



“The non-profit institution is not merely delivering a service...it uses a service to bring about a change in a human being...until this has happened, the non-profit institution has had no results; it has only had a good intention.”

- Managing the Non-Profit Organization

meaningful results



ARTICULATE INTENDED OUTCOMES

Excellent organizations are able to describe the difference they make to the lives of those they serve and can effectively communicate the value of the difference to stakeholders. These organizations define results as the outcome of their efforts, not simply as their activities. For example, the activity is described as the number of support programs run to help people cope with a disease. The result is described as the change that took place that allows them to better cope. Are they emotionally stronger; are they better equipped to physically handle the disease? Excellent organizations also actively communicate those results to stakeholders so that they understand them and buy into them as meaningful.

DEMONSTRATE IMPACT

The results achieved by excellent organizations are tangible and contribute to the fulfillment of the mission. These organizations have credible proof of the changes that take place in the lives of their users as a result of their programs and services. The proof may be based on formal, statistical analysis or simply on testimonials from users. As well, users see the results as helping them solve their problem, address their issues or meet their needs.

USE MEASUREMENTS TO ASSESS PROGRESS

Excellent organizations are committed to the ongoing measuring and testing of the impact of their work. They set realistic performance measurements to track the progress towards achieving results and use a formal data collection and reporting system. The findings are then used to improve results and in the planning and priority setting process.

CASE STUDY

If we can't demonstrate a measurable outcome, we can't ensure that we are using community resources efficiently and effectively. For example, we have worked to define what we mean by women's equality. The key question we have to answer is how does equality translate into a tangible objective? We have also done intensive strategic planning and evaluation to ensure we are producing results. Once we have evidence of our achievements, through testimonials or more formal research, we communicate it widely. It adds to our credibility.

—YWCA of Vancouver



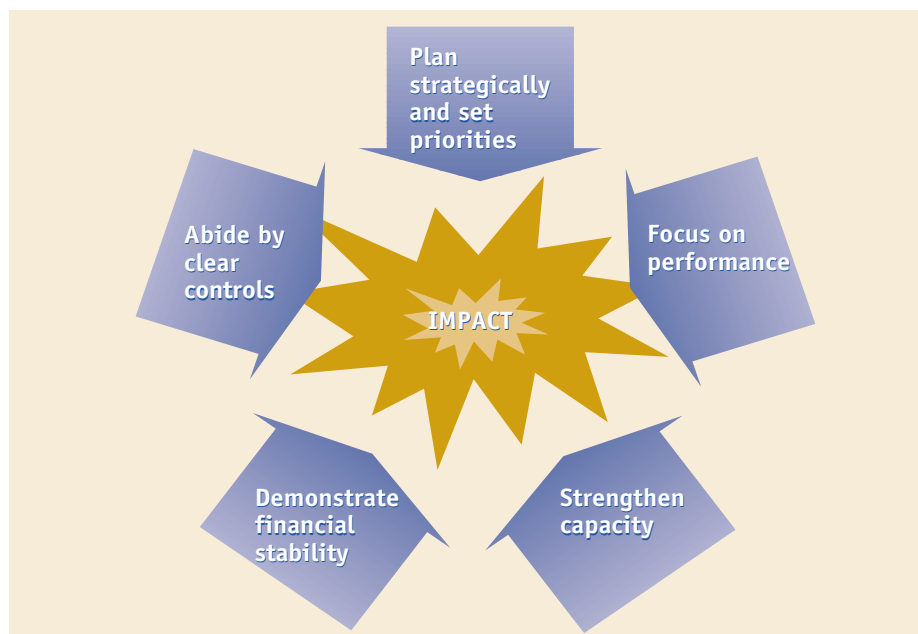
“Most mission for the money.”

Mission-based
Management

resources optimized for impact

PLAN STRATEGICALLY AND SET PRIORITIES

Excellent organizations go through a rigorous planning process that analyzes the internal and external environment to form a picture of where the organization needs to be in 3 to 5 years, and also formulates specific, annual tactical steps to be undertaken to meet the goals and objectives. These organizations appreciate the power of planning as an important navigational tool. The planning process is valued because it keeps them focussed on what's important, coordinates effort and ensures resources are not wasted. It is used to set and gain consensus on priorities and timelines. Excellent organizations then use the plans as the basis for revenue generation, resource allocation and the evaluation process.



FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE

Excellent organizations have a clear picture of how the organization is performing in terms of operations, finances and programs. Information systems provide comprehensive, current information in a format that assists in evaluation and decision-making. For example, the financial information includes comparisons, such as “budget to actual”, and useful management ratios such as “cost of fundraising per dollar donated”. Excellent organizations also measure effectiveness in both the long and short term. As well, the performance numbers that describe the number of people served are presented objectively so that decision-makers can make observations and form conclusions. If excellent organizations are not performing at the expected or at an acceptable level, they make the necessary changes to revise expectations or to improve performance.

STRENGTHEN CAPACITY

Excellent organizations are committed to strengthening their capacity to perform effectively and efficiently. The structure of an excellent organization enhances its ability to achieve its mission. For example, if the mission is to find a cure, the structure includes a scientific advisory group composed of credible experts with a clear mandate. Excellent organizations also have the right volunteers and staff in the right positions to deliver results. Furthermore, these organizations build support systems that help volunteers and staff to carry out their roles day-to-day. The support systems might include technology, administration, training, supervision, or procedures.

DEMONSTRATE FINANCIAL STABILITY

Excellent organizations never lurch from crisis to crisis; they have a stable source of funds. There are a number of factors that contribute to their financial stability. These organizations have a credible plan for long-term sustainability and have enough funds in reserve to sustain a sudden shortfall of funds. They have a diversified income stream that is not dependent on political whim, one-time gifts or a few traditional sources. In most cases, they have or are building a major gift and planned giving program. Excellent organizations not only have a Board that is actively involved in fundraising, they also have allocated enough resources (human, financial and support systems) to raise the projected revenues.

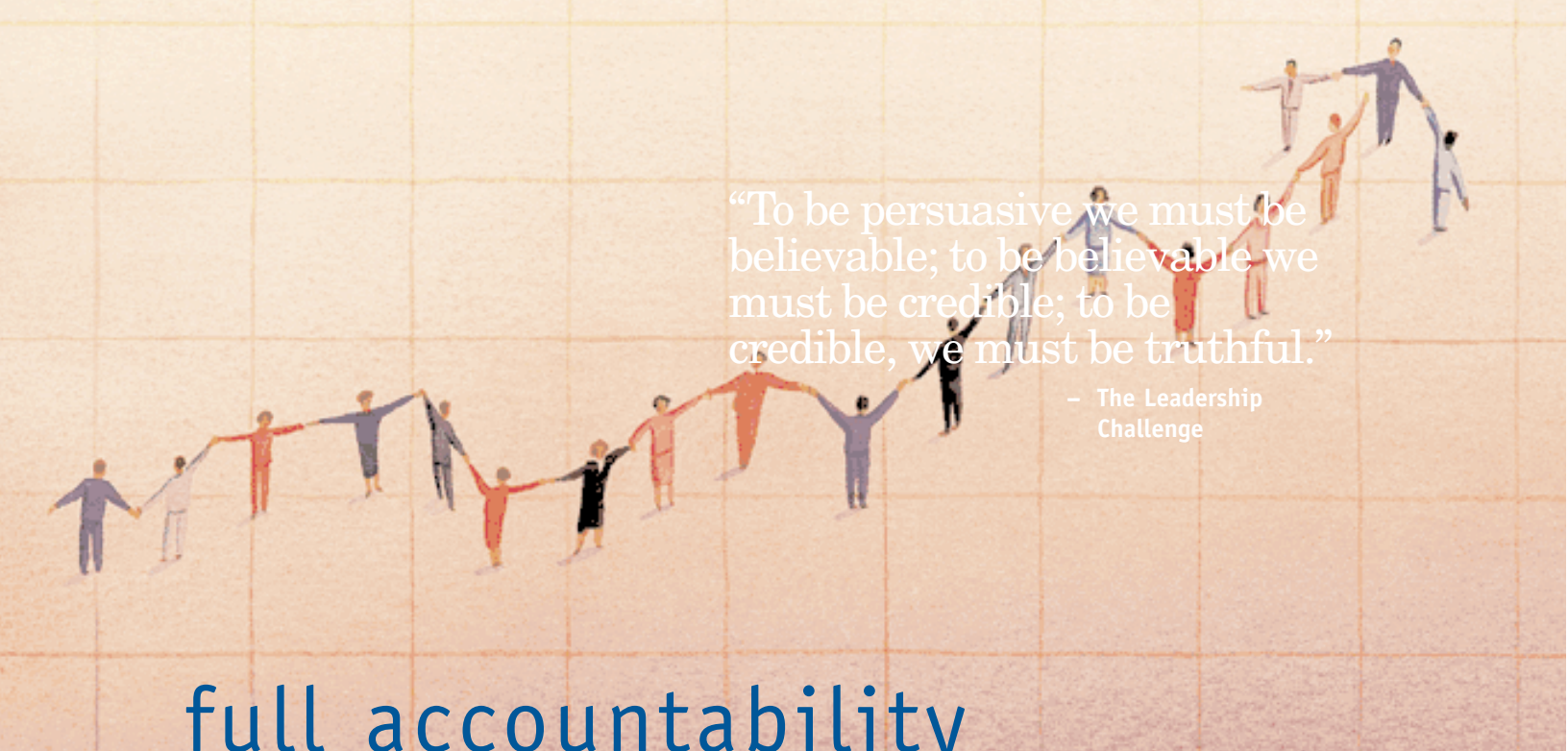
ABIDE BY CLEAR CONTROLS

Excellent organizations use clear and thoughtful controls to enhance their ability to be effective and efficient. The controls, whether procedures or policies addressing personnel or finances, help standardize actions, assist in decision making and lay out responsibilities. These organizations have also established controls that protect the organization from waste and abuse in the handling of financial resources. Excellent organizations not only create controls; they regularly review them and always enforce them. Furthermore, these organizations also educate volunteers and staff about the controls through orientation and training sessions.

CASE STUDY

We have to be efficient because we are responsible for making the most of our limited resources and allocating funds to priority areas. For example, to date we have had comparatively modest funding available for research. But we have leveraged the dollars we had by co-ordinating our effort with others. We are also good at managing expectations. We focus on specific issues and build consensus about what we can and can't do. Once we have agreement, we develop plans with explicit priorities and goals, clearly stated timeframes and achievable performance benchmarks.

– Huntington Society of Canada



“To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible, we must be truthful.”

– The Leadership Challenge

full accountability

Take responsibility for performance

Demonstrate clear lines of responsibility and authority

Commit to transparency

Be bound by ethics

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERFORMANCE

There is recognition within excellent organizations that accountability is more than an obligation to keep accurate records. These organizations define accountability as a responsibility to comply with legal and regulatory requirements, deliver on their mission, stay true to values and produce programs and services that meet the needs of their users. There is also recognition that accountability relates to performance in different areas: organizational governance and stewardship, financial and fundraising management and program results.

DEMONSTRATE CLEAR LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY

There is a recognition that the organization is responsible to many diverse audiences (e.g., donors, funders, users, volunteers) at many different levels (e.g., national, provincial, local). Lines of responsibility and authority are clearly delineated, understood and reinforced at all levels in these organizations. Volunteers and staff know the boundaries of their authority and are held accountable for their area of responsibility. These organizations also clearly outline the functions, duties and authority of each committee and every level of the organization in bylaws, procedures and resolutions.

BE BOUND BY ETHICS

A code of ethics consists of a set of formal rules about appropriate behaviour. Together with informal norms, they influence all decisions within excellent organizations. In fact, these organizations believe that the drive for results must be achieved within the boundaries of the code of ethics. Excellent organizations help staff, Board members and volunteers to comply with the codes by ensuring that codes are visible and understood.


COMMIT TO TRANSPARENCY

Excellent organizations are deeply committed to the importance of being transparent about their fundraising and financial management, program results and organizational governance and stewardship. They conduct their affairs in a way that is easily observed and understood. In fact, the sentiment that nothing is hidden permeates the whole organization from the Board to the grassroots level. These organizations also proactively communicate and quickly respond to requests for information from stakeholders and non-stakeholders about their structure, operations and performance.

CASE STUDY

One of our key mandates is to serve as a model for the delivery of community-based cancer support services. This keeps us focused on accountability because we are held up for close scrutiny. We have had to be introspective, precise and demanding about our performance and processes. How does that translate into day-to-day activity? We have undertaken rigorous evaluation of our programs to ensure they work. We've taken informal processes and made them formal by writing them down. As well, we regularly check in with our members to ensure we are providing them with what they really need.

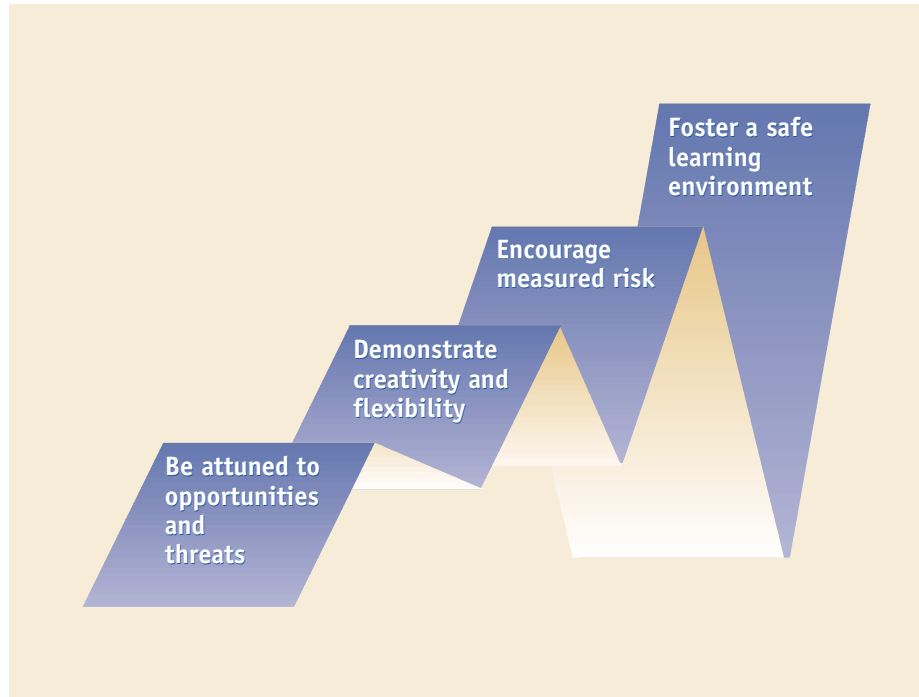
– Wellspring



“The greatest threat to any organization is not the lack of ability or resources, but the failure of the imagination.”

– The Creative Trainer

responsiveness and innovation



BE ATTUNED TO OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Excellent organizations anticipate and respond quickly to internal and external opportunities and threats. They have formal mechanisms to scan and analyze the environment so new trends or challenges rarely surprise them. Every strategic planning session begins with a review of the environment and then a discussion about the impact this knowledge has on the mission, goals and activities.

DEMONSTRATE CREATIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Volunteers and staff have a sense of urgency about the need to improve the way they operate. This urgency drives them to be creative about inventing new and better ways of delivering service and imaginative about how to generate resources. Brainstorming sessions are a regular activity in which volunteers and staff are encouraged to think about old problems and issues in new ways. Excellent organizations are also comfortable with change and are flexible about the way things are done. In fact, nothing is considered sacred or above scrutiny and assumptions are always open to challenge.

ENCOURAGE MEASURED RISK

Excellent organizations are willing to try something new, even if there is risk involved. They are not intimidated by the fact that it has never been done before or because there are no guarantees of success. Volunteers and staff are prepared to take risks because there are few barriers, such as rigid attitudes or procedures, to adopting new ways of doing things. There are also safeguards against failure – when considering new ideas or opportunities, excellent organizations carefully weigh the risk involved against the benefits received.


FOSTER A “SAFE” LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Excellent organizations understand that in order to be creative and take risks, volunteers and staff must feel comfortable expressing their ideas, trying new things and making mistakes. In this environment, criticism is always given constructively and leads to positive changes. These organizations not only cultivate this “safe” environment for exploring and experimenting, they also promote continuous learning. Excellent organizations provide many opportunities to examine what worked and didn’t work and to learn from the process.

CASE STUDY

In order to be a more cohesive movement across Canada the national office has to be responsive and innovative. On a strategic level, we have done an intensive review of current realities and future opportunities. The process resulted in a document that challenges basic assumptions that have been around for decades. On a direct service level, we are much more responsive to local Big Brother and Sister agencies. For example, we have instigated a customer-service policy. One of its requirements is that we must return their calls within 24 hours.

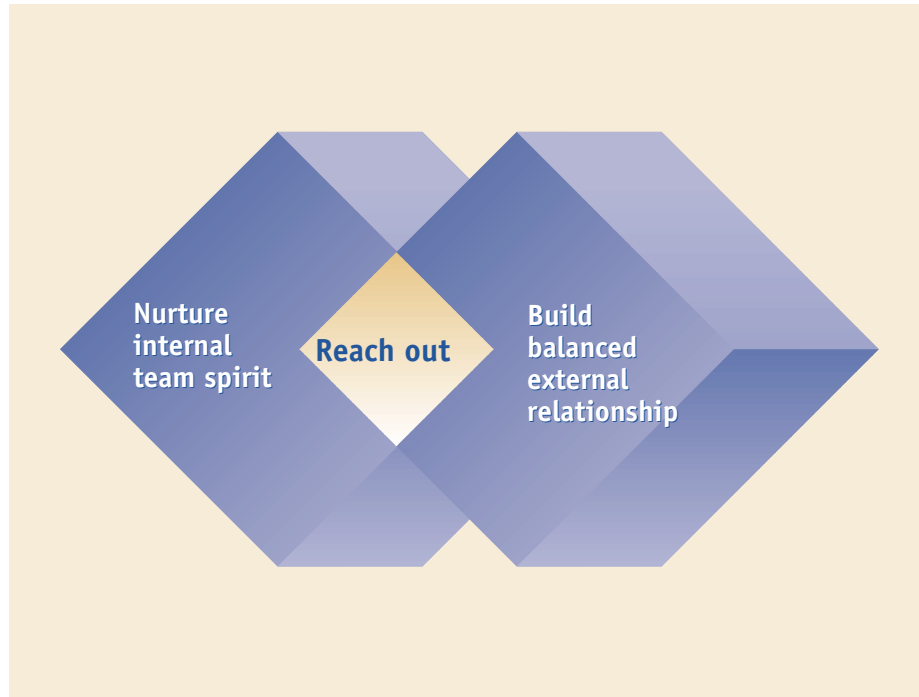
– Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada



“True collaboration is built on a parity of power. Each party may bring something different to the relationship, but one is not inherently superior to the other.”

– Philanthropic Quest

culture of collaboration



NURTURE INTERNAL TEAM SPIRIT

Within excellent organizations, the culture of collaboration effects the way users, volunteers, Board members and staff work together. In other words, collaboration is not only a way of doing, it is a way of being. This culture promotes a team spirit so that there is a high degree of mutual respect and interdependence between staff and volunteers. Furthermore, all levels of the organization feel they are players on the same team. For example, excellent organizations often use teams which cross over functions or services to review or design programs.

BUILD BALANCED EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Excellent organizations seek out opportunities to collaborate in the community and develop balanced relationships that benefit all parties. They are driven to collaborate, not only to generate efficiencies but because it benefits the users. Excellent organizations believe that they bring a unique and equal contribution to collaborative relationships, especially with funders and donors. Not only are these external relationships built on mutual benefit, they are also built on mutual trust and respect.

REACH OUT

Excellent organizations look outward. They regularly reach out to all stakeholders, including users, funders, donors and other community groups to get feedback and to openly discuss direction. These organizations are inclusive – in decision making or in Board composition – because they appreciate the value of diverse points of view. They are also keenly sensitive to users' needs and behaviours. For example, Board members and managers who are not involved in direct service take the time to meet with users and talk about their needs.

CASE STUDY

Collaboration is not an add-on. Nor should it be done just to be more efficient. It's about delivering better service to our clients. We've found that collaboration works when you listen to all your stakeholders. For example, we invited staff, volunteers and clients as well as competitors and collaborators, to help develop our vision. Our external partnerships work best when we both add equal value. We always demonstrate the return we can offer. I think we are also valued as a partner because we are secure enough to be confident, but not so secure as to be arrogant.

– Big Sisters and Brothers of Edmonton

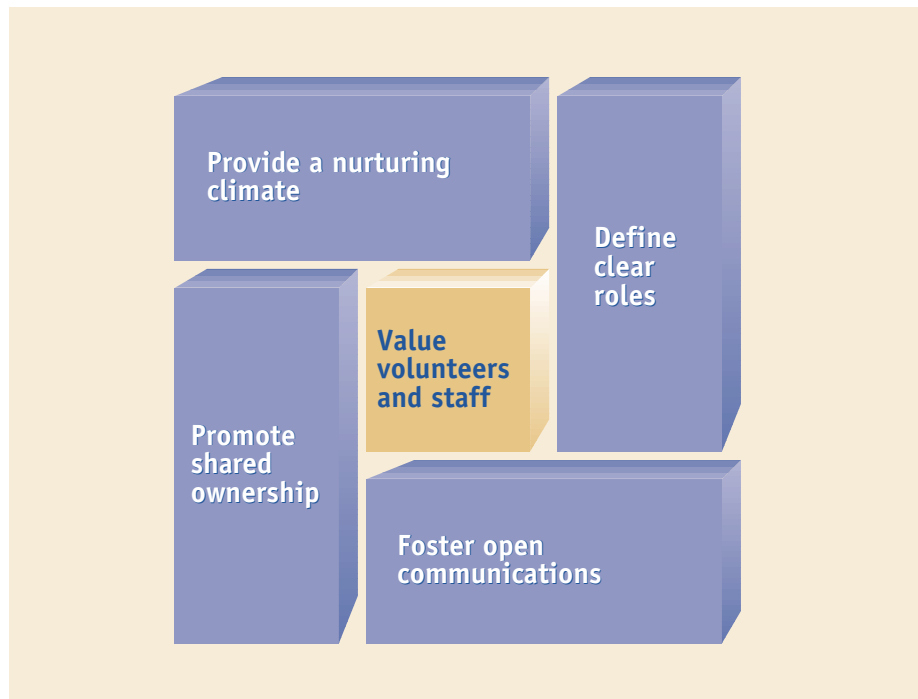
– Huntington Society of Canada



“What is rewarding gets done.”

– The Leadership Challenge

a productive and positive
work environment



VALUE VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

Excellent organizations view people as their most valuable asset. They are prepared to invest in them – in training and continuous learning – and reward competence. If there are paid staff, the Board understands that one of its most critical tasks is to select the strongest, most capable CEO/Executive Director who in turn has a responsibility to hire a strong capable work team. The Board and staff in excellent organizations also commit the time and resources necessary to identify, attract and retain the best available volunteers.

PROVIDE A NURTURING CLIMATE

There is a nurturing climate in excellent organizations in which volunteers and staff feel support for their efforts. A number of factors contribute to this climate. First, there is a high degree of respect and trust between the Board, other volunteers, users and staff. Second, the leaders are good coaches and mentors and they effectively manage expectations. Third, human resource policies and procedures such as performance evaluations are seen as helpful and fair. Finally, successes are celebrated and, while the atmosphere is intense, there is always time for laughter.

DEFINE CLEAR ROLES

Excellent organizations set clear expectations about specific roles so that volunteers and staff feel that their job is relevant and meaningful. Each volunteer and staff member has a job description which outlines agreed-upon responsibilities and expectations. There is also little overlap or duplication of roles between the various levels of the organization; the relationships are clearly defined in bylaws, policies and procedures.

PROMOTE SHARED OWNERSHIP

Volunteers and staff in excellent organizations have bought into and contributed to the direction and strategies so that there is a harmony between the organization's goals and individual goals. Because volunteers and staff feel a sense of ownership, they feel empowered to make decisions and to take initiative. Furthermore, leadership is not seen as hierarchical in excellent organizations, but is nurtured at all levels of the organization.

FOSTER OPEN COMMUNICATIONS

Excellent organizations insist on open and honest communication between volunteers and staff and between all levels of the organization. They regularly provide opportunities for the exchange of information and for constructive debate.

CASE STUDY

It is even more important that we cultivate a nurturing and vibrant atmosphere because of our mandate, which is to offer psychological, emotional and social support to individuals living with cancer and their families. We cultivate the atmosphere in a number of ways. Along with caring and compassion, there is a great deal of laughter and fun. As well, volunteers and staff both feel they have an important role to play. There are clear job descriptions and well-established processes for decision making. Finally, we use our time efficiently in meetings – we pay attention to the details but don't dither over the little stuff.

Wellspring

summary

Each organization will need to decide which of the Benchmarks are most important and select its own strategic path toward excellence. The process can be adapted to serve the specific needs and interests of each organization. It is intended to guide, not prescribe action.

The Benchmarks of Excellence represent a snapshot in time. They should be seen as guideposts, not absolutes, because they will inevitably change as the environment places new challenges and demands on the sector.

The ultimate goal of the Benchmarks of Excellence for the Voluntary Sector is to help your organization to better serve its stakeholders. We hope it is a productive and worthwhile process.

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For further resource material:

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