

# Improving Board/Council Communications Strategy Session Recap

October 9, 2009 – 10:00-11:00 a.m.  
Large Conference Room

Regional Council Members Present:

Dr. Bob Donofrio, Dr. Michael Reed, Barbara Mezzio, Josh Allen, Janelle Radoccia, and DeAnn Davies

Board Members Present:

Dr. Pamela Powell

Staff Present:

Elliott Hibbs, Michelle Katona, Kim Syra, Herlinda De la Cruz, Tiffany Erickson, Mary Jo West, Sandy Carpenter, Jennifer Johnson, AdiShakti Khalsa, Brenda Tomlin, Hazel Chandler, and Sherri Elkins

The intent of the meeting was to address concerns mentioned in the Council Member survey for improved and increased communication between the Board and Councils. Dr. Powell had suggested a group convene to explore ways to improve communications so that a greater and stronger relationship between the Board and Councils can be achieved.

The following was discussed, and will be submitted to the Board to discuss and consider:

Strategy 1 Board meeting recaps to Councils within 5 working days.

Consensus:

Staff will prepare a recap of each Board meeting highlighting results and presenting those in the context under which the Board acted rather than just content – including notes of activities and themes of discussions. The group agreed it is an excellent idea, has high value, 1 ½ pages is appropriate and 5 business days for delivery is reasonable.

A suggestion was made to put the recap of the meetings on the web site with a disclaimer that the recaps are not intended as official minutes.

Strategy 2 Providing a means for easy email access for exchange of ideas and comments between Board members and Council members.

Consensus:

Staff is in the planning stages of creating a Board Chair email address available to Council members to email questions and/or concerns to be addressed either by the Board Chair, other Board members or directed to staff for a reply. To remain in compliance with open meeting law, one staff member will have access in order to promptly forward an email to the Board Chair or other appropriate Board

member. (Two additional staff members will be available for back up) Council members will also have the ability to request a certain Board member respond to their question.

Concerns:

- May still not be as open a communication effort as many would like. Suggestion that a message board where questions, comments and concerns can be posted for Councils to view and make comments. No discussion between parties only comments. Issues can be addressed individually by staff or Board members.
- Lack of response or tardiness of responses to questions to the Board by Councils. The Councils are often up against a timeline and quick responses are often needed so Councils can act.

Strategy 3 Assigning Board members certain Regional Councils with a responsibility to attend a minimum of 2 meetings per year and report back to the board. Available also to attend would be a staff member to assist the Board member if requested.

Consensus:

The Board members would be assigned certain regions in their areas with the responsibility to attend and participate in the process a minimum of two meetings per year and report back to the Board. This should be a two way communication with the Board member participating as appropriate on issues that are addressed and raised during course of the Council meeting. The consensus was that this would be very valuable to the Councils.

Concerns:

- Communication flow would be only one way, if only requirement is for a Board member to report back to the Board, rather than to engage with a Council during the meeting. Reassurance was made from staff that this would be open communication and, at the discretion of the Council, the Board members would be willing and available to participate and have open dialogue.
- With a Board member in attendance, some Council Members feel their hands are tied with open meeting law requirements that restrict open dialogue with the Board member. They were reassured this is not the case.

Strategy 4 Board members assigned to multi-region areas would be required to hold at least one discussion/study session each year with representatives of all of the RPCs in that area invited to participate.

Consensus:

Everyone was in agreement that this would be very valuable.

Strategy 5 Council members could be appointed to serve as members on standing Board committees for Finance and Programs.

Consensus:

While there was a general agreement that this could be very valuable, concerns as noted below caused the group to agree that notification and offers to participate to council members would suffice.

Concern:

- Appointment of additional people to standing committees of the Board would mean that there would be a higher risk of quorum issues. It was suggested that posting the meetings on the web site and notifying council members through email so they could attend or dial into the meeting might be a better alternative. A notice with phone in numbers for council members to participate in committee meetings will be available for all Program and Finance Committee meetings.

Other comments and suggestions for future discussion included:

- The need to clarify the roles of the Board and the Councils and then provide specific training so all parties understand the roles and missions of each.
- Streamlining the grant process is critical. It was stated by staff that an RFP has been put in place for an examination of the grant process, to streamline and make the process more effective and operational.
- Opportunities need to be provided to allow Councils to provide input on approaching Board decisions. It is important for the Board to obtain the perspectives of people from across the state and rural council members in particular cannot travel to the meetings to make their views known. Good decisions require sharing of information and perspectives from all areas and that should be available prior to the Board discussing and taking action. Perhaps there should be a letter from the executive director or the Board requesting input or feedback from the Councils so that when a policy is set the Councils input is considered.
- A suggestion was made to expand the Finance Committee purpose to include sustainability regarding the tobacco tax revenue that is decreasing quite rapidly, add public /private partnership and discuss how we work with philanthropy and business, including the business and philanthropic leaders on our Councils. Include ways of expanding the finance committee in other areas and then bring in the varied key Council members that have that role.
- A suggestion to meet like this quarterly to discuss how these ideas are working or bring in new topics. Coming together with staff, administration, Board and Council members participating is a nice mix for relationship building.

- It was suggested to have study sessions, panels, or presenters with staff, Board and Councils present to work on problems across the regions or just problems in particular areas. (Also see strategy 4 above.)