

29 July 2014 Workshop Summary Notes

Present were: Alan, Jen, Pete, Mal, Walt, Helen and Chris

The intent of the workshop was to open a dialog between staff and board, and among board members, to begin a conversation about organizational and behavioral change needed to accommodate a shift in organizational functioning over the coming two years, as described following.

Alan opened with a brief history of association work on big projects focused on opening the watershed to migratory fish, Chris's efforts in those projects as a Project Manager with less emphasis on "member-centric" duties typical of a non-profit executive director, and the coming/upon-us-now transition (for Chris) from project manager to member-centric executive director focus. A solid 2014 Plan of Work was a good start, but the inertia for start up, particularly around fund development, was severely underestimated. So acquisition of two "Sandy Relief" grants, while burdening Chris with more Project Manager work, does allow for a more thoughtful, more strategic transition plan that will plot out the successful transition to member-centric functioning over the coming two years.

Chris laid out his thoughts on the goals and outcomes for the coming two years as the transitional phase is worked through.

1. While the overall intent is to work back to being a member-centric organization, the funding stream must be consistent as he has no intent on going back to fiscal management by layoffs, which was the norm prior to his arrival. Everyone agreed that style of management was unacceptable and was hurtful to the associations reputation.
2. Because of this, the most important element over the coming two year transitional phase must be and will be fund development. A Fund Development Committee is under creation—Alan has agreed to act as chair, and the ED and FD chair are currently working on laying out a strategy and will present that to the board at the August meeting.¹ A cloud-based database system—Bloomerang—is being reviewed and will likely be selected as WPWA's new member/donor/volunteer database; this is a first necessity for forward motion by the FDCommittee.
3. The transitional period is likely to be stressful (for Chris) because roughly 25 hours per week of ED time will be delegated to the two new "Sandy" projects² and wrapping up existing river rehabilitation projects. Once administrative duties are layered in, little time remains to focus, in any concerted way, on transitioning to member-centric behavior. Fund Development will be the focus of the ED as this is THE critical element to success over the course of the transition.
4. The board can help ensure success in several ways;
 - a. Continue to build the board with people passionate about the association's mission and that are willing to engage and participate at both board and volunteer levels. It is unclear at the moment if Helen, as President, will remain in the capacity of Chair of the Board Development Committee, or if

¹ I don't think a Fund Development Committee has been formally created or tasked by the board; I suggest that at the August meeting we create a Board Policy that establishes a permanent/standing FDCommittee and tasks it accordingly. And no, we should not change the bylaws to reflect this.

² The WPWA Sandy Project engages with towns and is under the control of WPWA; The Nature Conservancy Sandy Project is paying the ED as a technical consultant on fish passage based on his previous experience and expertise in this area.

- she will delegate this to another board member; this should be resolved soon so that building the board can continue seamlessly.
- b. Develop an orientation process for new board members and implement it. This is a board responsibility and will help engage new members in a more effective fashion.
 - c. Assist the ED, staff, and the association by volunteering, particularly in fund development activities. It is critical to remember that as a volunteer, you work under the purview of the ED who is responsible for day-to-day management. Anticipated specific needs will be:
 - i. Assist with development of the 2015 Plan of Work
 - ii. Help develop a year end, tiered set of annual appeal letters to the membership, built upon the 2014 design.
 - d. Strategically think through, with the help of staff and association members, how to create an effective Membership Committee whose primary charge will be to review existing member programs, reach out to the membership to determine what kinds of programs are desired, and to work with staff to revamp program offerings to better fit member desires.

Open Discussion

- There was discussion about becoming better at identifying the difference between board focus on governance and executive director responsibilities for day-to-day management of operations.
 - It was suggested that the president and ED meet often to review management. Board levels discussions of management should be avoided unless there is specific need, as identified by president and ED, and in such case, the ED should seek advice from the board as a meeting agenda item.
- There was discussion about the ED keeping a list of obstacles and barrier and challenges as they arise over the transitional phase, and to review this with the president during their regular meetings and consider the engagement of appropriate board members in seeking solutions.
 - An example would be working with Walt, in his role on the Rivers Council, to advocate on WPWA's behalf about new boating regulations that require permits for organized on-river activities, such as canoe and kayak paddles offered to members.
- There was discussion of increasing volunteerism within the association.
 - This emphasizes the need for a Membership Committee because at present is no one to follow through regarding interested in volunteering members. Example is survey that was sent out late spring; several respondents but no follow up.
 - Helen volunteered to call survey respondents³
 - Query respondents on their specific interests as volunteers
 - Let them know current needs ONLY exist (at present) for board service and fund development (which will be referred to as "growing the association" or something similar.

³ This should be an example of behavioral change from board member to volunteer being managed by the ED, and it would be interesting to report back to the board what worked or didn't, etc.

Chris Fox Presentation to the Board at the start of the Workshop follows:

My goal tonight is to inform you of where the ED is currently, the 2 year road ahead, and where I anticipate a lack of capacity that will require the board's assistance.

Every Non-profits organizational structure and the roles of board, ED and staff is different. Within each these components are not static and will fluctuate throughout the years. Traditionally long term and short term fundraising and fund management has been the primary responsibility of WPWA's ED with ad hoc assistance from the board. In 2013 we learned through our participation in RIF's INE program that this is a prohibitive practice to achieving long term financial stability. We made a decision in 2013 to begin to balance this responsibility between the board and the ED. Grant driven projects are not only an important revenue stream, but assist in elevating the visibility of the organization, builds capacity and achieves our mission. Conversely, member donor cultivation, retention and communication is a separate but equally important revenue stream.

In late 2013 we anticipated that I would be at the beginning stage of transitioning from an ED that serves as a project manager and an executive director to more of a true ED. We agreed that projects would take a back seat to Member/Donor relations and Fund Development with the expectation that only one 10 hour a week project would rest on my desk. Allowing me 25 hours a week to dedicate to regular admin and fund focus.

In early 2014, RI TNC presented us with a funded opportunity to assist in their dam removal projects on the Lower Pawcatuck. This project in our watershed required our input funded or not. Because this fit within our approved workplan and provided needed funding to ensure a balanced budget in 2014, we agreed to contract with RI TNC to provide them with Technical support. Our pursuit of 1 ten hour per week project was fulfilled.

Not knowing this funded opportunity would be afforded to us, WPWA previously applied for our own Sandy Relief grant. Although the likelihood of being awarded funds to implement the Watershed Flood Resiliency and Management Plan was quite low. We recently learned that our proposal was accepted and would be funded nearly in full. This project too will require 10 hours per week of my time for the next two years.

For better or worse the ED is now committed to 2 projects in 2014 and 15 that combined will cover more than half of the ED's salary and some other operating expenses. However, these two projects will also consume more than half of my time over the next two years.

I am currently involved in the start up phase of both of these projects, which is one of the most onerous and stressful phases as a PM. I am also in the process of closing out the fish passage projects. Also, a demanding and stressful project phase that will consume about 5 hours per week for the remainder of 2014. Add that to the other 20 project hours and we are left with an ED who can only focus an average of 10 hours per week on admin, staff and program management, fund management and development in 2014.

To overcome this I will make focusing on core ED responsibilities my top priority. My second priority will be ensuring the PM work is done efficiently and successfully to preserve the integrity of the Org in the public eye. Thirdly, I will get the fledgling Fund Development

committee up and running by October of 2014. The first step is to complete my research on a new membership Database called Bloomerang. It is a cloud based program that far exceeds the capabilities of our existing Access database. If I deem it the right fit for us over the coming week, I will craft a plan to implement it in August with help from Alan and our new staffer. This will be a core resource of the Fund Development Committee. Concurrently Alan and I will develop broad yet basic goals and tasks for the committee which will guide our efforts to populate the committee. Here is where I need the board members to support me the most. I am hopeful that those among you who are hesitant, will rise to the occasion and participate even if it outside your comfort zone. Without you full buy in, we cannot fully succeed.

Helen will remain focused on governance, business, and meeting organization and oversight. There is a strong need to develop job descriptions for our board members and to develop an orientation program with the appropriate resources. I am asking that she delegate this work out, perhaps to an ad hoc committee. She will continue as our point person for new board member cultivation unless she chooses to delegate that work in part or entirety to board members.

Pete will keep up his AWESOME job as treasurer in 2014 and Jen will begin to shadow him in training for transitioning from secretary in 2014 to Treasurer in 2015. The staff will remain committed to the day to day operations and completing the Welcome Center start up work which includes developing operational procedures, a volunteer training program, and outreach resources.

In early 2015, with a fund committee up and functioning, I intend to replicate this development process to implement the Membership Committee. I will populate that committee with a mix of board members and the general membership. Re-engaging our members in a planned and thoughtful way is critical to long term organizational stability. In late 2015, I expect that committee will be working to revamp our programs to better provide a suite of services that our members want, not what we think they want. With a particular eye toward increasing program revenue and volunteer engagement.

These are our core areas of focus and improvement over the next two years, with your help we have the capacity to accomplish it. I expect there will be other ad hoc opportunities for board members to participate along the way. But these initiatives must remain our primary focus. And we must not let other activities unnecessarily distract us from this path.