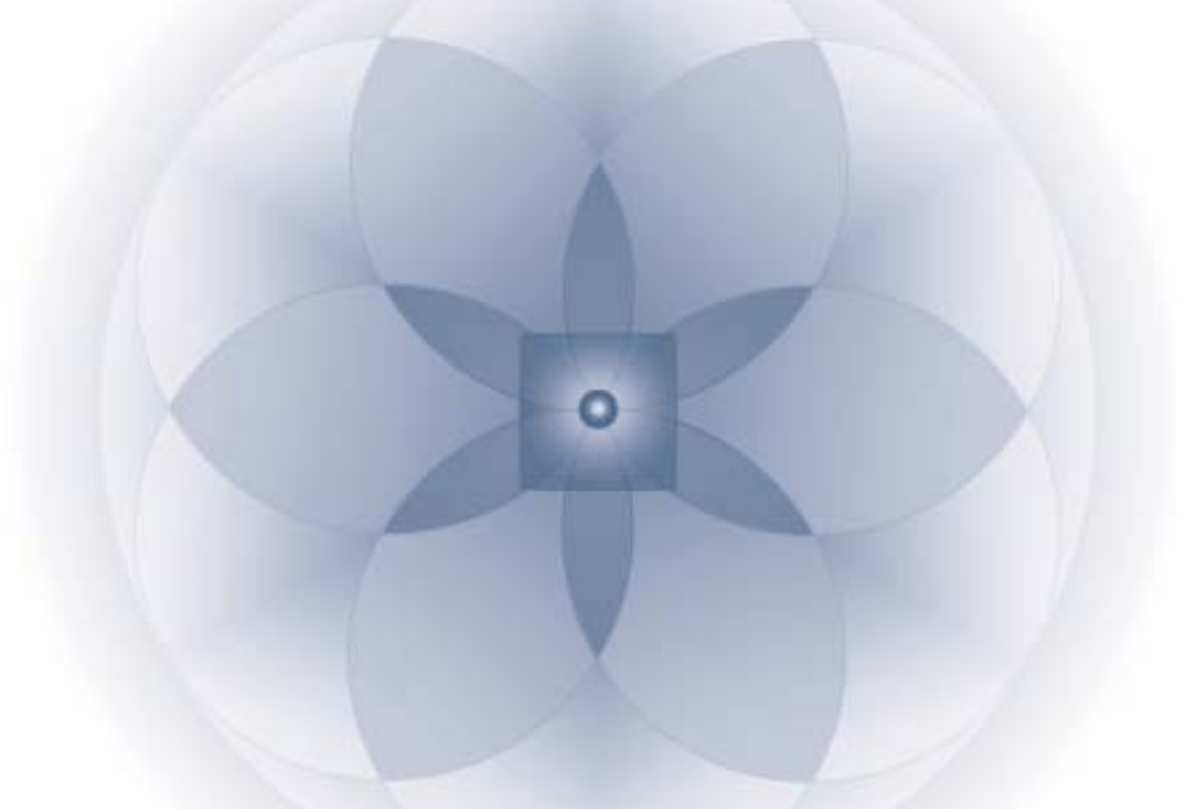


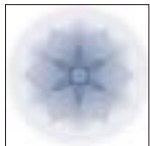
Radiant Strategies: A Framework for Sustainable Nonprofit Organizations



CORE NEEDS. Develop Mission Anchors and Critical Capacity



MISSION CONTROL. Infuse the Mission into Programs and Activities



SOCIAL CHANGE. Propel Mission Success Beyond the Organization

Mission Anchors

- Environmental scan
- Mission articulated clearly
- Vision articulated clearly
- Values statement
- Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Active list of critical issues to address, with timetable

Incomplete List of Critical Capacity

Board of Directors:

- Understand/articulate mission
- Clear job descriptions
- Responsibilities contract
- Yearly performance evaluation of executive director
- Committee structure
- Regular access to revenue/expense and projected cashflow reports
- Regular review of yearly budget
- Participate in raising funds

Executive Director:

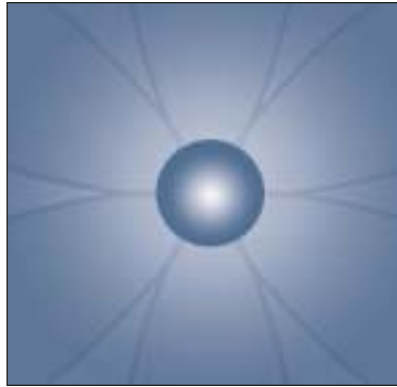
- Clear, measurable goals
- Systematic planning
- Direct people on what to do, how to do it, and why
- Routine monitoring, evaluation

Staff:

- Understand/articulate mission
- Clear job descriptions
- Yearly performance evaluation by staff leadership
- Information flow to/from staff leadership and board

Financial Management:

- Database accounting software with proper categories
- Tracking of restricted and unrestricted funds
- Prompt filing of U.S. and state 941s, 990, etc.
- Yearly budget
- Periodic revenue/expense and projected cashflow reports
- Policies on cash reserve, borrowing against grants
- Database contacts software tracking donations



CORE NEEDS. Develop Mission Anchors and Critical Capacity

There is a lot of buzz in the nonprofit world these days about sustainability. With foundation boards reassessing the percentage of their giving, and directing that support not be applied to basic operating costs, foundations are seeking additional indicators to help them evaluate current grantees and assess where to invest future funding. Nonprofits, faced with these same realities, and with contributions down and operating deficits up, are struggling to demonstrate their financial savvy by generating “sustainability” plans.

But we do ourselves a tremendous disservice if we think of sustainability solely in terms of fiscal solvency.

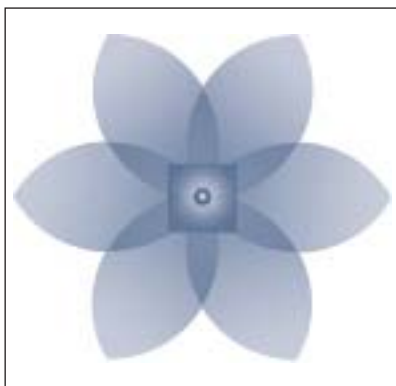
Sustainability means more than having a good financial plan – it means that an organization has all the essential elements to survive. While a solid financial footing is important, it is equally important for an organization to have a clear mission, strong leadership, mission-oriented programs and activities, and effective communications and management systems. When these elements are in place, an organization is much more likely to survive during economic downturns.

We suggest that the best foundation for sustaining a nonprofit organization is to lay down mission anchors and achieve at least a minimal level of capacity in key areas. The audiences for these efforts are primarily internal. Ideally these elements would be in place and functioning well before the organization begins to reach out to external audiences with programs and activities. And it is never too late to return to these core needs and make needed adjustments.

Example

A national foundation supplies this tagline with its sponsorship of the NPR program All Things Considered: "Supporting improvements in the hospital working environment for nurses and their patients."

What if ... Rather than simply presenting its institutional face, the foundation chose to advance a funded mission: "Reminding healthcare providers that accurate, reliable translation services improve the diagnosis and care of nonEnglish-speaking patients."



MISSION CONTROL. Infuse the Mission into Programs and Activities

Example

In the 1990s a popular fundraising event for nonprofit organizations was hosting a "murder mystery" party, where donor guests tried to solve the crime and identify the murderer. When a midwestern shelter for battered and abused women (no stranger to violence) hosted such a party, some supporters cried, "Foul!"

What if ... The women's shelter took the basic idea of solving a crime and reshaped the agenda, so that participants are given "clues" to underlying problems and then work to prevent the violence from occurring.

Example

The Children's Defense Fund has challenged its employees to end their voicemail messages with the line, "And let's remember to *leave no child behind*" (the trademarked mission statement of the Fund). This same message is featured on the organization's fax cover page, letterhead, and other printed material, continually reinforcing the Fund's mission and primary message. This is an excellent example of how creative, strategic thinking can help to infuse the mission into activities where it is now lacking.

A mission-directed organization uses its vision and mission statements as guideposts by which success is determined. It communicates its mission throughout its programs and activities and bases decisions on the values of the organization. Such an approach is critical in preventing "programs chasing dollars" and other short-term fixes when funding cycles are down.

Clarity of mission and vision attracts like-minded givers and demonstrates a sense of confidence and purpose that draws favorable attention. The nonprofit organization that will prevail is one that can demonstrate its mission in action and responding to community needs.

Development professionals often remind us that every activity is a fundraising opportunity. Similarly, we believe that every activity presents an opportunity to advance the organization's mission.

We recommend that nonprofit organizations (a) conduct a comprehensive audit of all programs and activities, assessing to what extent each helps to extend the organization's mission and tracks with its vision, (b) develop a strategic communications plan that targets defined audiences with compelling messages and specific action steps, and (c) create a message platform that includes a concise organizational description, one-page fact sheet, and key message points drawn from the mission.

The benefits of this kind of "mission control" cannot be fully realized without first attending to the core needs.

Example

Reclaiming Futures is a grant-funded initiative to improve success rates with young people caught up in a cycle of substance abuse and crime. Rather than dealing with the problem piecemeal, each local program brings together the entire spectrum of institutions that are part of the solution. To achieve their joint mission, each part of the puzzle makes changes so that all the pieces fit together. These changes then become embedded within the respective institutions, and Reclaiming Futures has successfully propelled its mission – and program expenses – beyond its own organization.



SOCIAL CHANGE. Propel Mission Success Beyond the Organization

Example

A human-caused forest fire in 1950 resulted in the rescue of an injured bear cub, who became the living mascot Smokey Bear. The National Forest Service linked the bear's huge popularity to its educational message, "Only *you* can prevent forest fires." Over time, millions of schoolchildren in the United States and abroad adopted this message and propelled it forward, effectively transforming social practices with fire safety.

Example

FACE is a national nonprofit with the broad mission of promoting sensible alcohol use and policies. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) aims "to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime and prevent underage drinking." Recognizing that these missions partly overlap, the two organizations arranged for FACE to provide its educational products to all MADD chapters at a reduced rate. MADD has extended its resources with discounted materials; and FACE has gained a revenue stream and propelled its mission into a new distribution network.

Entrepreneurial leaders think "outside the organization" and envision new ways to advance the mission. Such leaders serve in a variety of community or professional groups and help to connect the dots. They are willing to cross boundaries between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, to find nontraditional partners and solutions.

In seeking social change, nonprofit leaders can reach out to external audiences with the intent of embedding their missions in outside people and institutions. This approach is possible because nonprofits have the unique ability to measure success in terms of mission rather than profit.

Collaboration among organizations, based on intersecting missions, is a proven way to leverage the strength of each partner by sharing resources and complementing the work of other groups rather than competing with them. In forging these partnerships, and perhaps forgoing some of the credit for successes, organizations demonstrate an overriding commitment to mission. Funders and donors respond very positively to this kind of commitment.

Another method is to motivate key audiences to adopt your messages as their own, and allow them to propel your mission forward. This can extend an organization's reach far beyond what it could accomplish alone.

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