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Knowledge-Based Governance: A Good Decision

Professional associations around the world are abandoning the traditional governing model of decision-making and adopting the business-based model of using information and insight to provide strategic decision-making for their associations. These “knowledge-based organizations” focus less on who is making the decision and more on making a well-informed decision based on strategic data.

Using knowledge-based governance can change the dynamic of a Board meeting, allowing for up to 80% of meeting time to be spent on pertinent dialogue, deliberation and decision-making instead of spending time collecting and analyzing data. By providing concrete evidence to support any decision, the Board can then focus on the true issue at hand and bypass the minutia that can prolong important decisions.

Providing data before a major decision will answer questions before they are asked. When gathering data, information should be based on four key questions:

1. What do we know about our members/prospective members/customers – needs, wants, and preferences that is relevant to this decision?
2. What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our members’ marketplace/industry/profession/ that is relevant to this decision?

3. What do we know about the “capacity” and “strategic position” of our organization that is relevant to this decision?
4. What are the ethical implications of our choices?

These questions envelop every facet of making a decision, covering staffing, market trends and most importantly, membership needs.

Monitoring the needs of membership is the most important practice for any organization. Gathering data through needs assessment surveys can build a database of crucial information that will provide direct insight into the minds of your membership.

Members of the AR staff have been trained in marketing research best practices and have generated surveys that unearth the details an association’s leadership needs to improve everything from publications to annual conferences.

Crafting an effective survey goes far beyond simply asking questions. Asking the right questions the right way can only bring the right answers.

The actual deployment of surveys has come a long way. Gone are the days of expensive mailing or faxing a six-page survey to 3,000 members around the world.

AR has implemented an online survey tool to increase the efficiency in which the survey is deployed while also improving

response rates and the quality of reporting.

An association conducted a member survey two years ago with a 1% response rate. Two months ago, AR staff members expanded the survey, improving the response rate to 33% by allowing members to take the survey online.

The end product resulted in a goldmine of information that will be used in their upcoming strategic planning.

Association Resources is a strong advocate of knowledge-based decision-making. The AR staff encourages the development of knowledge-based organizations by helping clients develop effective needs assessment surveys, strategic plans and training in strategic decision-making.

Many AR staff have attended the American Society of Association Executives’ (ASAE) Symposium for chief staff and chief elected officers. This program teaches attendees the use of knowledge-based decision-making to formulate the most effective resolutions for your organization.

Achieving optimal results from the Board of Directors is key in reaching the goals of an organization. With strategic thinking and informed decision-making, Boards can make confident decisions that impact their membership and continue to look toward the future success of their organization.

Perfecting the News Release: Writing Tips to Get It Read

When the communications staff at AR sits down to write a news release, they know that a good news release is as important as the news itself. Here are some tips from our communications staff.

While a news release in itself is not a sales tool, the information within the release must be enough to sell the information to the editor. You do not get a second chance to remedy a negative impression left by a poor news release.

Before writing the release, the first question to ask is if the news is “newsworthy.” Many organizations believe that sending out a news release guarantees coverage, but news to one organization can mean nothing to the media.

The release’s unique selling point must catch the editor’s eye. What sets this release apart from the other 200 that came in today?

Inverted Triangle

To write *for* a journalist, you must write *like* a journalist. In most

writing styles, the writer develops the plot and leads the reader to a conclusion. The journalistic-style of writing is the antithesis of this writing style, giving the ending first and working backward.

The inverted triangle starts with the most important information first. As paragraphs are added, the information becomes less important. If a release has been written properly, you can tear off the bottom half and still all the information you need.

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Headline

Writing a powerful headline is a key component in getting attention for your news release. For those who have hired staff members and received dozens, if not hundreds of résumés, 99% of them were sent to the circular file after reading two lines.

Intrigue the editor with a powerful teaser, which will encourage them to read more. A good headline will pique their interest and a well-written

lead will get your release read.

Lead

An effective first paragraph will be what captures your audience for audience for good. The lead must tell the entire story within five seconds. Creating a succinct sentence with all five elements is easier than it sounds. Focus on the five W’s: Who, What, Where, When and Why. Being cute or writing a cryptic lead will surely get your release filed.

Body

Using the inverted triangle method, add additional paragraphs that provide further details to back up your lead. A sure fire way to capture your reader is to tie your information to current events.

Boiler plate

Always end your release with a short paragraph about your organization, including products, services and a brief history.

A properly written news release will surely impress readers and can build instant credibility with a media outlet, opening the doors to the acceptance of future releases.

Making the Media Feel at Home on Your Home Page

The Internet has become the most effective means of sharing your organization’s news. Many organizations are taking a proactive approach to media inquiries with an online news room.

The online news room houses everything from news releases and media briefings, to fact sheets, biographies and even stock photos.

Two of AR’s client associations maintain an online media

resource to complement the news rooms at their respective annual meetings. These online news rooms provide pre-meeting resources, including information on key events and notable presentations.

One organization’s online news room has opened the door for members of the media to access information or to schedule interviews with key experts who provide information for articles. The increased access to their communications has provided a

substantial influx in interview requests and media attendance at their annual conference. The online news room has taken away the need to cold call and made the organization’s staff and volunteers available to serve as a resource.

The Internet is the world’s most powerful information resource. An online media presence is a magnet for the news and can build an organization’s credibility with the media and establish themselves as a resource.

Making the Visa Process Easier for Meeting Attendees

The past few years have brought sweeping changes to the way business travel is done. Upgrades in security and screening have increased safety around the nation, but at the expense of often long delays and tedious searches. While few would actually trade the upgraded security process to move through the line faster, travelers have accepted these delays as part of their travel itineraries.

The United States has continued to implement security measures on domestic flights, but a concerted effort has been put into managing travelers coming into the country. Stringent regulations on visas have added significant delays to the application process.

Professional associations around the nation are coming to the aid of international meeting attendees by monitoring and updating the latest information for international travelers. AR clients have begun to put specific travel information in their brochures and Web sites to make the process smoother.

Association Resources recommends clients post and monitor information (see right) on acquiring visas. Registering your international meeting with the State Department will provide an added benefit to travelers. Once a meeting is registered, the information is disseminated to U.S. Consulates around the world, eliminating the need for meeting invitation requests.

With the increased security measures, many visa applicants must appear for a personal interview at the U.S. consulate. With waiting times ranging from several weeks to several months, applicants should begin the application process as soon as possible.



As of January 5, 2004, all non-immigrant visa holders are fingerprinted and photographed upon arrival in the U.S. The use of the inkless, digital "finger scanner" and digital photographs have only added mere seconds to the security process. As of September 2004, all international travelers were to be photographed and fingerprinted, but that initiative has been put on hold temporarily.

With intense security measures aimed at maintaining the safety of

air travel, the need to proactively communicate this helpful information to your international constituents is essential. Ensuring a smooth and timely visa process for attendees will further encourage international visitors to attend your activities.

For the latest information on visas and international travel, visit:

- <http://travel.state.gov/vwp>
- <http://www.dhs.gov/us-visit>

Tips for Visa Applicants

- **Apply for your visa at least three months in advance.**
- **Provide a trip itinerary, including travel to any countries other than the United States.**
- **If travel plans depend on early approval of the visa application, specify this at the time of the application.**
- **Provide proof of professional, scientific and/or educational status (students should provide a university transcript).**
- **Provide evidence that you are intending to return to your country of residence. This includes such things as:**
 - family ties in current country of residence
 - property ownership
 - bank account
 - an employment contract or statement from employer showing that position will continue after the dates of the meeting.

Client Support Services Protecting Data From Growing Old

A vital component to the success of any business or association is its data warehouse. A recent report issued by the Data Warehousing Institute found that inaccurate and low-cost data costs U.S. businesses over \$611 billion per year in bad mailings and staff overhead.

The use of data has evolved from simply names and addresses used in mailings to tracking meeting attendance, certifications and financial transactions. As the use of online databases expands at an exponential rate, companies and associations are investing considerable resources in ensuring data integrity.

The world's on-demand society calls for membership, attendance or financial records at a moments notice. Not being able to supply records or sharing information that is inconsistent or outdated is an embarrassment that every organization wants to avoid.

Association Resources recognized the need for vigilance in maintaining client records and established the Client Support Services department (CSS). CSS is charged with managing client data and maintaining the

consistency and integrity of every record in the system.

Managed by Cathy Sluboski, the CSS team of Anna Cierocki, Cindy Caron and Tasheena Lee has implemented a series of standards in maintaining and inputting data to ensure consistency in the information. Establishing consistencies in data input has helped to simplify data extrapolation and sorting. Consistencies range in complexity, but even simple standards such as using the two-letter state postal code (CT) in addresses has eliminated the inconsistency of using Ct, Connecticut and Conn. and made data extraction less confusing for the user.

Consider this—nearly 16% of the U.S. population changes residence in any given year. That number grows to approximately 45% of the population moving over a five-year period. Factor in the high rate of phone number changes, e-mail addresses and changes in jobs, and



(Left to right) The CSS team of Cathy Sluboski, Cindy Caron, Anna Cierocki and Tasheena Lee.

over 25% of your records will need an update throughout the year. Simply updating the records is not enough, but ensuring the record is input accurately will only reap benefits in the future.

The CSS team has virtually curtailed "dirty data" within client membership records. This investment in integrity has helped save clients time and money by avoiding e-mail kickbacks and returned mailings. The ROI in data management is seen every day at AR. Data requests and financial statements are run with ease and the AR staff and client volunteers have the confidence that requested information is perfect.

Tips & Tidbits

AR's Information Technology Administrator Peter Pagani was recently certified as a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE). The Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) credential is the premier certification for professionals who design and implement the infrastructure for business solutions based on the Microsoft Windows® 2000 platform and Microsoft Windows Server System™.

The MCSE on Microsoft Windows® 2000 certification is designed for professionals who implement, manage, and troubleshoot existing Windows 2000-based systems, including Windows .NET Server. MCSE candidates are required to have a minimum of 12 months experience working with desktop operating systems, network operating systems and existing

network infrastructures are required to pass a series of three core exams and one elective exam.

This certification adds to Peter's already-impressive credentials, including Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator (MCSA), Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) and Exchange 2000 Administrator experience.

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