

The Art of Governance - Boards of Performing Arts Organizations

Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia's March Spark Event of 2006

March 13th @ Prince Music Theater mainstage

***Remember the second Monday of every month is a new Spark event hosted by the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. Individual & Organizational members attend free, all others are charged \$10 per person. (This money may be applied towards membership dues!)**

Special Guests:

James Haskins - Executive Director, Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia (moderator)

Nancy Roche - Trustee of Center Stage in Baltimore & co-editor of *The Art of Governance*

Jaan Whitehead - Board Chair of SITI Theatre Company & co-editor of *The Art of Governance*

**Please note: The Theatre Alliance still has some *Art of Governance* books on sale for the discounted price of \$20!

Reserve your copy today!**

Future Spark Event and Theatre Alliance Announcements:

- **Monday, April 10th, 7pm at Mum Puppettheatre**
 - Our PR event - *Spin Me a Story* - with special guests and PR maharishis Heather Rogers from Mum Puppettheatre, 1812 Productions' Tyler Melchior, and Megan Wendell Public Relations for The Wilma Theater and the Barrymore Awards! There's limited seating so RSVP today at SPARKsvp@theatrealliance.org or call 215-413-7150!
- **Whole Foods Costume Contest**
 - Whole Foods will provide a \$250 gift certificate to any costume designer/theatre company who designs and builds an outfit made from the Whole Foods bags (Potato, Apple, and now Coffee). They will supply you with however many bags you need for your build. Best Design wins \$250 in Whole Foods bucks!

Work in the Theatre is uncertain

- Boards and trustees deal with lots of uncertainty and might feel compelled to standardize the product (ie. Produce crowd pleasers)
 - It is the nature of the artistic process to be uncertain
 - Trustees must learn to live with the challenge of uncertainty.
 - The artist and the board often speak in different terms and language to express their ideas.
- Role of the artist
 - Jobbed in for each production
 - The person that the Board knows the least about...
 - However the Board needs to understand that the artists are not paid well and how much that matters
 - Boards need to understand and need to learn about the artists
- Trustees think in a linear fashion whereas artists tend to think intuitively and in a more circular fashion.
 - There should be a sensitivity and a translation between these two languages.

Board Development

- This is the most important committee on your Board!
 - Should meet at LEAST once a year
 - Evaluates each Board Member.
 - How much of a contribution did they make?
- Start by identifying the culture on your own Board.
- The Board holds the future of the institution in their hands, fiscally and legally
 - The Board Chair and the Managing Director, and Artistic Director are usually in quite a bit of contact.
- When developing Boards you want to think of people who will be good connectors!

- When you know your Board culture it should be explained to any new comer.
- This is all about real people relationships
 - The Board should always work as a collaboration or partnership.
- Recruiting
 - Start with the bios and energies of your current Board.
 - Find out what your company needs from its Board and find out where your company is going.
 - Develop a strategic plan.
 - Start with loyal subscribers and donors to see if they would be a good fit for your Board.
 - Do they have footprints in the community?
 - Do they have leadership skills?
 - Get to know them better before you ask them to be on your Board.
 - Invite them to lunch in the Managing Director office (something simple - sandwiches) to discuss the possibilities.
 - This way you are creating a forum of getting to know them better.
 - Let them know the mission of the theatre and why it is so important.
 - Also let them know the fiscal position of the theatre.
 - Write out all the expected responsibilities of your Board
 - Create a pyramid of giving
 - How many meetings are in one year?
 - Must they become a subscriber?
 - Boards should always be giving (financially) 100% (meaning 100% of the Board gives a monetary contribution to your organization.)
 - Your organization should be in their top two or three for philanthropic giving.
 - Let them know how much they're needed!
- The Board Chair should visit with each trustee annually.
 - How do they like the season so far?
 - On which committee would be a better fit?
 - OR the Board Chair can write them a letter to let them know if they are working out or not as a Board member
 - OR the Board can have term limits as designated by your Board rules.

Stages of a theatre - Need different Boards for each stage

- Founding
 - One or two people with a vision
 - This Board must have at least three people and it is usually close friends and family
 - This is usually a close knit group who has little concept of governing
- Emerging
 - Professionals on staff and Board
 - Lawyers, accountants etc
 - By this time your company would have people in place for Marketing and Development
- Working Board
 - Are responsible for their own work
 - Know the difference between staff rules and Board rules
 - Loyalty shifts from the founder to the Mission Statement
 - It is no longer a personal journey but rather a professional business now
 - Board leadership separates from Staff leadership
 - Decide on own members rather than Artistic Director deciding.
 - Finally the Board has a definite structure
- Governing Board
 - Trustees need to learn how to use power
 - They can hire and fire even founding members of the company
 - May sometimes create a tension between the Board and the Staff

- Must be trust in how they manage power and share power as well
- This Board takes ownership of it own creativity and meetings

Helpful Tidbits

- Get an experienced Board Member on your team.
 - They can look ahead and even try to help with the process of Board Development as well as company development.
- Get a consultant for Board Development
 - Small companies may be able to write a grant together to help get the funds for the project helpful to all of them.
- Look into a Mentorship program for your Board Members
- Understand what's happening and see the options!

The Spirit of Governing

- Unite the Staff and Board.
- The Managing Director and Board Chair can create a culture on the Board and set the tone.
- Trust and respect
 - TRUST - Really say what's on your mind as a Managing Director - Don't be afraid to put yourself on the line - take a risk
 - RESPECT - how the trustees should react to the honesty
- Have a Social life together - know their names, ALL THEIR NAMES
- Be real, be genuine!
- Can't say "thank you" enough - be their cheerleader (on both sides -the staff and the Board.)
- What makes for a satisfied trustee?
 - What are you giving back? - the art of theatre needs to be nourishment for both sides.
- Don't underestimate the power of community

O & A

- Self evaluations are helpful
 - Questions should come from the Managing Director and be about Board responsibility (peer to peer)
 - Board Chair should interview/evaluate each trustee (or be on the Board Development Committee)
- Consultants are best used when trying to get rid of a trustee when you see your theatre moving on to its next stage of growth.
 - Create an Honorary Board - where they can still attend all Board Meetings but they no longer have a vote.
 - OR find some other ways to activate older Board Members - what are their other talents?
 - Board Members should do what they are supposed to do.
- Criteria on Consultant
 - Start with the Theatre Alliance or TCG as resources
 - Get recommendations from other theatres
 - Make sure to interview all possibilities
 - The fee range can be great or small - small theatres should definitely think of applying for a grant for this process
- Typical Board size - 15-30
 - Too big to know each other is no good
 - A bigger board means more work for your staff
 - End up having a small actual Board within that larger group
- Board is an independent viewpoint
- Assess what you need
 - Ask people to be in on a brainstorming session

- Benefits of artists on Boards
 - They experience the daily life of the artist and will champion the needs of artists
 - They will ask new and different questions

Notes prepared by Karen DiLossi, Director of Programs & Services for the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia.