Community Literacy of Ontario

Our Voice

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Nominations—the key?

Source: The Association Consultants Report, Winter 2002

In most organizations the board positions are filled by elections. It says so right in the bylaws: "the members shall elect…" In most situations, the word "elect" or "election" conjures up images of parties, rallies, canvassing, debates, voters lists, and finally ballots and scrutineers. All very interesting, but in most organizations it's only a theory.

The reality is that board members are elected—by acclamation! They are acclaimed into office because the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies. There is, at the annual general meeting, the usual question, "are there any nominations from the floor?" And, with few exceptions, there aren't any.

This generally means that anyone nominated is almost certain to be elected by acclamation. So, in many organizations, the nominations committee has tremendous power and thus an onerous responsibility.

In our experience, the nominations process is a weak spot in too many organizations. We have seen cases where the nominations committee was a secretive group of old-time power brokers who neither sought nor welcomed advice or suggestions. Also, in complete disregard of the fact that the Executive Director probably knows more members than anyone else, we have read bylaws that state, "the Executive Director shall be an ex-officio member of all committees except the nominations committee."

How then should a nominations committee function? As we see it, the nomination function is a year-long talent scouting process. The committee should invite and welcome input from all board members and committees and particularly from the Executive Director.

Ideally, we prefer to see the nominations committee nominate more candidates than there are vacancies and thus force a vote. We recognize, however, that many organizations are reluctant to take this step. They should then ensure that the nominations process in open, proactive and progressive—that it is a search for new blood, the young, the imaginative, the talented. This approach will guarantee your organization's future.

**THE ASSOCIATION CONSULTANTS REPORT**

"Planning, finance, chairing, supervision, presentation, teamwork, leadership–the list of BOARD SKILLS sounds like a course in business administration. Which is why staff recruitment specialists attach importance to an applicant's resume when it lists serving on the board of directors of a non-profit organization."

Strategies of our own: learner recruitment and retention for community literacy agencies

By Judith Fowler, Project Coordinator
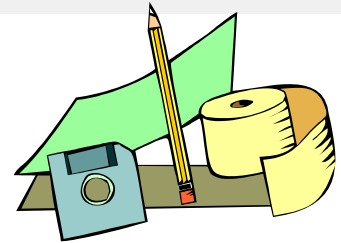
Overview of project:

Two current topics of significant importance to Anglophone community-based literacy agencies are learner recruitment and learner retention. Despite the high literacy needs identified through International Adult Literacy Survey, literacy programs across Canada serve less than 10% of the population who could benefit from improved literacy skills. (Long, & Middleton, 2001) This issue is not unique to Canada but is a challenge that is faced across North America and internationally. There has been increased attention in the research field concerning these two issues over the past 15 to 20 years.

Community Literacy Ontario is exploring current and emerging research focusing on the goals, motivations and demographic status of learners and the corresponding relationship to their commitment to learning and achievements.

The research has been compiled and a tool kit will be produced to highlight the results of the data. In the month of May 2002, CLO will be conducting focus groups across Ontario to ensure that the material in the tool kit is relevant and of value to community-based literacy agencies. We plan to host focus groups in Toronto, Thunder Bay, Simcoe County, Niagara and Kingston. The tool kit will be sent to Anglophone community literacy agencies and to regional, sectoral and umbrella literacy networks in November 2002.

A "SNEAK PEEK" at some of the research findings:

In order for community literacy agencies to be successful, they must spend the majority of their energy planning before implementing any recruitment efforts. If programs want to **inform** the public about their program and the issue of literacy then they should use traditional channels such as the media and posters/flyers. If a program wants to **change attitudes** and effectively reach non-participating learners then personal contact needs to be made.

> **"If a learning situation does not suit their needs and interests, they will simply stop coming"**
>
> **(Imel, 1994)**

Although this quote refers to learner retention it can also pertain to recruitment. Recruitment and retention must be given equal priority and energy in the literacy program. Prior to a learner entering the program, retention policies and procedures should be well established in order for a program to expect a high probability that the learner will continue until they meet their goals.

Recruitment efforts that aim at targeting groups that a literacy agency can best serve is the first step to an effective learner retention strategy. As soon as the learner enters the program, retention efforts should be built into every part of the literacy program.

Attention to the following issues will assist programs in improving retention:

1. Literacy programs need to have a support system for learners that is readily accessible.

2. Instruction should be based on students' goals.

3. Program staff should be available to re-evaluate students' goals and make revisions as these goals change.

4. Instructors, staff, tutors and board members must be willing to confront the retention needs of all students.

5. The issue of student retention must be high on the list of priorities for the entire organization. (Malitz & Nixon-Ponder, 2000)
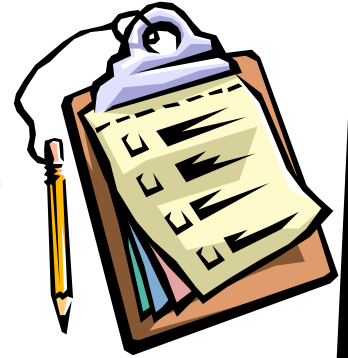
We need your input!

Have you implemented some effective learner recruitment and retention strategies in your program and would you be willing to share them with your colleagues? Do you have any suggestions, comments and/or questions about this project?

If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, I would love to hear from you. CLO is committed to developing a tool kit that truly reflects the needs of community-based agencies. You can contact Judith Fowler – Project Coordinator at jtfowler4@rogers.com.

References:

⇒ Imel, Susan. (1994). Guidelines for Working with Adult Learners. *ERIC Digest, 154*. From: http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed377313.html

⇒ Long, E., & Middleton, S. (2001). *Patterns of Participation in Canadian Literacy Programs*. Toronto: ABC Canada.

⇒ Malitz, Kari, & Nixon-Ponder, Sarah. (2000). *Research to Practice: Increasing Student Retention Through Student Success*. From: http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0200-11.htm

THE CANADIAN CODE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Setting a standard for volunteer policies, the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement provides a unique opportunity for voluntary organizations to "measure up". Easy to follow steps clarify the starting point for organizational policies and procedures relating to volunteer management. Volunteer Canada challenges all organizations to formally adopt the code!

You can contact Volunteer Canada at 1-800-670-0401 or at www.volunteer.ca to order copies of the code (it is available for the cost of shipping and handling).

Source: Volunteer Canada

CLO's Board of Directors

- Debra Barrett (Toronto)
- Joyce Bigelow (North Frontenac)
- Laurie DesLauriers (Napanee)
- Betty Ffrench (Sault Ste. Marie)
- Jan Goatcher (Ottawa)
- Margaret Maynard (Beamsville)
- Dan McGibbon (Barrie)
- Valerie Sadler (Hamilton)
- Penny Smith-Jensen (Dryden)
- Lee Torvi (Renfrew County)
- Denise Tremblay (Iroquois Falls)

CLO's Staff

- Joan Beaudry—Administrative Assistant
- Jette Cosburn—Co-Executive Director
- Judith Fowler—Learner Recruitment
- Joanne Kaattari—Co-Executive Director
- Lindsay Kennedy—Practitioner Training
- Vicki Trottier—Administrative Capacity

CLO's "Founding Five"

At the Annual General Meeting held in October 2001, Joanne Kaattari paid tribute to CLO's founding members.

⇒ Carynne Arnold, Kingston Literacy
⇒ Lindsay Kennedy, Wellington County Learning Centre
⇒ Doug Rankin, Core Literacy, Kitchener
⇒ Vicki Trottier, The Literacy Council of South Temiskaming
⇒ Sheila Vlachos, John Howard Society of Victoria, Haliburton, Simcoe, Muskoka

"It is my very great pleasure to honour CLO's five founding members. Carynne, Lindsay, Doug, Vicki and Sheila first met in January 1994 to plan the creation of Community Literacy of Ontario. They had a vision of creating a new organization that would be the voice of community based literacy programs in this province.

These individuals had the passion, patience, commitment and work ethic to create something wonderful where nothing had existed before— and when a collection of brilliant minds, hearts and talents come together, expect a masterpiece! Thank you for your vision, your hard work, your dedication and for never underestimating the power of a dream."

They Really Like Us!

Source: The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

Recent research from the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy found that 77% of Canadians trust charities "*some*" or "*a lot*". Only doctors and nurses are more trusted than charitable workers!