Fiscal Responsibilities of the Board

As promised, this article covers the fiscal responsibilities of the board. Finance is the most important obligation you will have to monitor and evaluate. All board members have fiscal responsibilities, not just the Treasurer! Although the finance function is often considered challenging, the basic principles and responsibilities are relatively simple and should be covered in Chapter Board training. If you need help, your CSC is available to conduct Chapter Board training.

Your fiscal responsibilities as a Board member are:

Paying careful attention to the budget. The budget is the financial plan for the organization. It is prepared by the Finance Committee and approved by the Board before being presented to the Chapter membership for approval. Board members should ask the Finance Committee whatever questions are necessary to understand the Chapter’s financial plan. The Committee Chairman should instruct committee members that it is necessary to remain within the Committee budget, and the Chairman should monitor committee expenses.

Reviewing financial statements on a monthly basis. Your Treasurer should provide the Board and Membership a written financial statement each month. The financial statement is then attached to the meeting minutes. Financial statements should include the previous month’s ending cash balance, the income received during the current month, the expenses paid, and finally, the statement should show the ending cash balance for the current month. It is also helpful to show the line item budget for the year so that Board members can evaluate whether committees and projects are within the budget. You should review what was budgeted, what has been collected and spent to this point, the variance between what was collected or spent and what was budgeted, and the reason for the variance.

Monitoring the monthly bank statements and cancelled checks as provided by the Treasurer for your review at each Board meeting. Checks made payable to “Cash” and checks to vendors you are not familiar with should raise a red flag.

Make sure your Chapter is following good fiscal policies by requiring two signatures on all checks and receipts for all disbursements. The Treasurer should not make a payment without a receipt and the receipts should be kept in her files. When reimbursing members, Chapters should also require a reimbursement voucher which documents the project the expense pertains to, a description of the expense and approval of the expense by the committee chairman.

You do not have to know everything about finance, but enough to assure yourself that money is flowing in and out according to the budget plan. Be sure to ASK questions if there is something you do not understand. It is your responsibility to understand the financial status of the Chapter.

Reinventing a Service Project

It’s one of your Chapter’s signature service projects, one that you’ve done as long as people can remember, and one that members vote in each year with little to no discussion. So why aren’t members signing up to work on it? Why does no one want to be the chair? Where did the enthusiasm go?

Chapters annually take a hard look at their roster of service projects, voting in new programs, eliminating some, and handing off some with a fond goodbye to other community organizations. But when a project merits continuation, yet isn’t garnering true member support, it’s time for the projects chair and Chapter to reinvent it. Just like a kitchen remodeling, the goal of reinventing a project is to make it better than before, more functional than before, more attractive than before and more inclusive than before. How, then, do you transform a project to make it one that re-engages both members and the community?

First, look at what might be obvious problems that keep members from wanting to be on its committee:

Is the project held during working hours? Could it instead be held during the evening? Is there a compromise time and date?

Plain and simple, is it boring? Same thing every time? You can only mix up eye screening or book collections so much. Are members instead choosing the projects that are more dynamic and interactive, more hands-on, and less predictable?

Is the community tired of it in its present form? Does it no longer have good buzz in the schools or within your target audience?

Is the project’s budget a challenge? Is the cost draining resources from your other work?

Give it an honest evaluation. Ask members why they don’t want to work on the project, but also don’t want to kill it. Ask why the community isn’t participating like it used to. Then, begin your redesign. That’s what happened with the Junior Auxiliary of Clinton’s “Backpack Pals” service project in which members purchased school supplies and backpacks for children screened for financial need, then delivered them to a partner nonprofit for distribution. JA members never saw the recipients and didn’t involve the community. It was a big shopping trip for a good purpose.

The Chapter revolutionized the project. They involved the community by staging several “Stuff the Bus” events in which shoppers could purchase supplies and donate them as they left the store. Taking a page from their signature Angel Tree project, members created wreaths bearing apple ornaments, with each ornament representing a child in need. Residents visited area businesses serving as wreath hosts, chose an apple, shopped for the supplies and backpack needed based on grade and district supply list, then returned the filled backpack to the adoption site.

The Chapter didn’t stop there. Members invited the screened children and their parents to a special event featuring healthy snacks and a visit from local cheerleaders. While parents privately collected their children’s backpacks, JA and Crown Club members led the children in making a craft for their new teachers.

The Chapter added multiple elements to the project to make it a hands-on, child-centered endeavor, and members allowed the public to share ownership by adopting a child in need – freeing up hundreds of dollars in Chapter funds that could be used for other service.

By identifying a project’s weaknesses, then looking for opportunities, your Chapter can turn a struggling project into a success story. Begin the rebuilding process early!