

Project Pointers

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Issue 20

Winter 2010

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I just finished my busiest consulting year and continue to think about how to manage the pace while remaining clear and truly present for colleagues who are balancing many issues. As the year begins, I am again struck by the value of good questions. Upcoming editions of Project Pointers will incorporate responses to the following critical questions:

1. In what developmental phase are you?
2. Are you in transition?
3. Is your mission still relevant?
4. Do your programs fit your mission?
5. Are you considering partnerships?
6. Are you supporting your staff?
7. Are you working with volunteers?

Prioritization of Programs

I want to thank my colleague, Jane Herms, CEO of the Family Nurturing Center, for her insights and research related to program issues, some of which will be shared with readers this year. Setting priorities and making clear decisions is central to organizational health and survival. Prioritization requires an understanding of mission fit, program impact and competitive position.

Mission Fit

Determining how well a program lines up with the organization's mission may well come down to honesty and common sense. Decisions about mission creep require tough conversations with the board, staff and funders and should clarify whether an offering is

core or supporting. For example, the program may be in line with your mission, but staff members are spending a significant portion of their time in activities not directly related to the program. As a result, mission goals may be compromised. If this occurs, do you want to continue in this role or can you meet the client's needs in other ways? Mission fit discussions should include the following questions:

- Is this a core strategy to further your mission?
- Was it implemented based on available funding or identified need?
- How much experience does your agency have implementing this type of program?

Program Impact

Once you've determined fit, have another honest conversation about program effectiveness. Look at all of your current programs and identify any that aren't yielding the desired impact. While it is tempting to always interpret data positively, this is the time to be realistic. Limited resources should be invested in the most needed, beneficial programs. Program impact discussions should include the following questions:

- Do you have the quantitative tools and data to support program effectiveness?
- Are you collecting helpful qualitative data to know if clients are satisfied and successful?
- Are you incorporating best practices in every part of the organization?
- Can you identify client usage, trends and other factors?
- Is the scale appropriate to the need? In other words, should you cut a program when capacity is significantly reduced?

Competitive Position

In addition to viewing mission fit and program impact through an honesty lens, learn how you are viewed as a provider in the community. The quality of your programs ultimately must be studied against those of other nonprofits who deliver similar services -- are

you as good? To assist in this challenging thought process, include the following tests:

- Who else provides the service in the area?
- What is unique or different about your program?
- Does your program provide a higher quality of service than other comparable programs in the area?
- Is your agency known for this service in the broader community?
- What is this program's reputation in the community?
- Does community need justify more than one program in the community?
- How does your program usage compare with usage of similar programs offered by other organizations?
- Are the funding sources the same for this program and the comparable ones offered by other organizations?

Resources

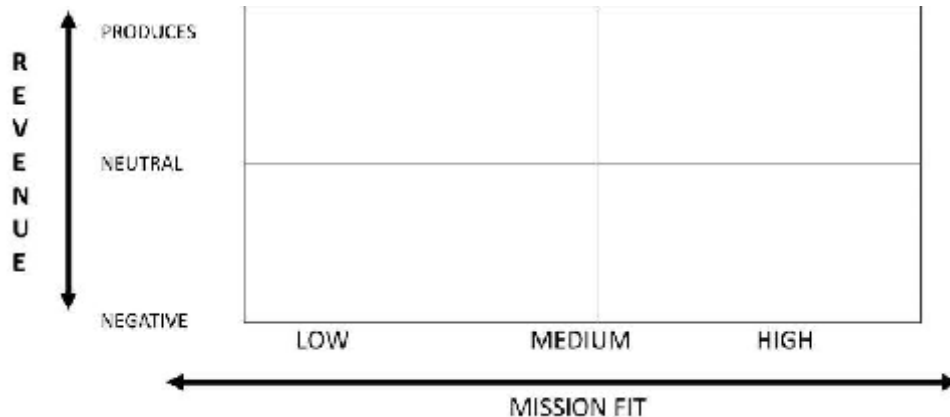
Once you are clear that the program effectively fits with your core mission, learn the true costs of the program.

- Is the funding base diverse?
- How secure is the funding? Is it long term, one time or year-to-year funding?
- Is the funding restricted to this program or could it be redirected to others?
- Does the program have enough revenue to meet the expenses?
- Do you utilize a portion of general donations/special event revenue or savings to support this program?
- Identify external cash and non-cash support for this program.

Putting It All Together

As a simple way of combining the above program reviews, place your

program where it best fits on the following chart:



This simple format allows you to compare findings across programs, prioritize your offerings and explain decisions to stakeholders. For example, a program with low mission fit and low revenues might be ended. There are no magic answers, but the process should enhance solid planning for the year ahead.

The next edition of Project Pointers will continue this discussion of strategic thinking and related decisions.

Best wishes for the new year,

Workshop Announcements

Marta's New Workshop! Think Strategically Before Making Tough Decisions

This workshop will include some methods for responding to these challenging times, including evaluating, refocusing and prioritizing your work and services, fostering resiliency and considering collaboration as a new or expanded strategy. This workshop is limited to executive leaders and board members. Attendees will complete a brief written assignment prior to the class date.

**Wednesday, April 21, 2010 - 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
at The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati**

3805 Edwards Road, Suite 500, Cincinnati, OH 45209

Register online at: [Workshop Registration](#)

Project Management Workshops

**Marta's popular Successful Project Management workshop
will be offered on**

Tuesday, April 27, 2010 - 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

at The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati

3805 Edwards Road, Suite 500, Cincinnati, OH 45209

Register online at: [Workshop Registration](#)

It will also be offered on December 9, 2010 - 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.



Resource Highlight:

In recent months, I've had wonderful experiences with the following professionals and highly recommend all three:

David Henshey and Jayne Futscher are both with Crawford Insurance, a full service agency serving the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area. Dave specializes in life, long-term care and disability insurance; Jayne provides individual life and health insurance expertise. While I contacted them for personal and small business needs, some of my nonprofit clients also work with Crawford, which is located in Bellevue, KY. 859.581.2088, www.crawfordins.com.

Craig Weiglein is the photographer who owns Mansion Hill Studio in Newport, KY. When I visited his studio, I recognized many familiar (and famous) faces and events in his gallery, reflecting Craig's solid history in the area. The entire "shoot" took 15 minutes and the proofs were emailed the next day. He was a delight! 859.491.4919, www.mansionhillstudio.com.

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