



Practices Assessment

Guidelines & Principles for Nonprofit Excellence in Nebraska & Iowa

Nonprofit Association of the Midlands

2015



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About the Practices Assessment

This Practices Assessment is designed to help you identify what your organization is doing well and create an action plan for addressing organizational challenges. Honesty is critical to conducting a thorough assessment and establishing real goals. Whether your results are a cause for celebration, make you mildly uncomfortable, or send up multiple red flags for potential crisis or conflict, please remember that the results belong to your organization. They are the first step in moving towards making your organization stronger, more efficient, and having greater mission impact.

The Practices Assessment is:

- **A starting point for organizational assessment and planning** – it will present a broad overview of your organization's current level of functioning and provide resources to strengthen areas of weakness.
- **A non-judgmental resource**– *Guidelines & Principles* is an internal Practices Assessment, not an instrument for comparing your organization to others. It is designed for you to compare your organization's practices to the best ones in the sector to help you determine the strengths and challenges of your nonprofit. Your results should be considered within the context of your organization's stage of development as well. Organizations early in their development may naturally score lower in some areas than more mature organizations. Understanding nonprofit lifecycles and the interconnectedness of capacity and impact is critical in setting appropriate benchmarks and goals for your organization.
- **Brief and relatively painless** – rather than focus on one particular aspect of your organization, this tool provides a quick "first glance" of the entire organization, focusing on the interconnection and relevance of all actions to organizational accountability and mission achievement.

The Practices Assessment is NOT:

- **The be-all, end-all of organizational assessment** – many models exist; many models are effective. It is important to remember that this *Practices Assessment* is an objective source of information not reliant upon or designed to reflect

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on any particular paradigm or style for management or governance. *Guidelines & Principles* is designed to be a stepping stone, allowing you to assess your current strengths and challenges and then leading you to develop an action plan that will enhance your chance for success.

- **A quick fix for whatever ails you** – this tool will not solve all of your problems, but it will help you identify critical areas and identify specific actions that will bring you closer to resolution.
- **Accreditation or certification** – the experience of completing this assessment is personal in that it belongs to your organization. The intrinsic value in completing the *Guidelines & Principles Practices Assessment* comes in the knowledge of how to move your organization forward more effectively.

Potential Applications of this Tool:

- **Individual** – as a new executive or lead volunteer, you may find it helpful to complete the assessment as a way to orient yourself to the organization you serve. The results can provide a personal work plan or frame of reference as you move forward. Seasoned executives and volunteers will find the tool equally helpful as a reflection and assessment practice to aid in future planning.
- **Team/Focus Group** – for a broader sense, gather a team or focus group to complete the Practices Assessment. Involve a range of staff, volunteers, and service recipients as appropriate. Compile responses for an overall perspective. A more objective picture will be available if the post-assessment process involves an outside facilitator.
- **Board Assessment** – invite the board to complete the assessment as individuals or small groups and then compile the feedback. The results can provide a good starting point for a strategic planning retreat or program planning meeting, and can also serve as a positive first step for a new executive and his/her board.
- **Consultant** – a consultant could facilitate the *Guidelines & Principles Assessment* process for your organization, help to interpret the results, and work with you to design a plan of action. Having an objective outside party can be very helpful as they can often draw out thoughts and issues that might not otherwise be revealed.



How to Fill Out the Practices Assessment

- *The Guidelines & Principles for Nonprofit Excellence in Nebraska & Iowa: Practices Assessment* has twelve response grids, one for each of the guiding principles. Each grid lists recommended practices for that principle, followed by a *Walking the Talk* section.
- You should assess where your organization stands on implementing each recommended practice by checking **no/not begun, in process, yes/complete, not applicable, not sure** in the response grid.
- Recommended practices followed with a “**US**” denote items required by federal law. Likewise, practices followed by “**NE**” indicate items required by Nebraska law, and “**IA**” is for Iowa. Practices with any of these notations should not be considered optional - your first priority should be to ensure these requirements are **always** met.

After the Assessment

- After completing the Practices Assessment, you will easily see your organization’s strengths and weaknesses. The *Walking the Talk* section after each response grid has suggestions on ways to strengthen your policies and procedures in a given area by providing concrete examples of what good practice might look like.
- Completion of the tool will help you generate an organizational Action Plan that your board and/or staff can use to prioritize and assign tasks as appropriate. If you have multiple parties complete the assessment on behalf of your organization (the ideal process for an objective view), it is recommended that you participate in a group process to evaluate the summary scores and prioritize tasks. Allow the tool to provide a working framework for organizational improvement and, ultimately, mission achievement.



Disclaimer

Please be advised that *Guidelines & Principles for Nonprofit Excellence in Nebraska & Iowa* provided by the Nonprofit Association of the Midlands (NAM) has been made available for educational and informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide legal, financial, accounting, or tax advice and should not be relied upon in that manner. We suggest hiring an attorney, accountant, and/or financial advisor to answer any financial or legal questions. NAM is not responsible for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential or any other damages arising out of or in connection with the use of this document or in reliance on the information available through it. This includes any personal injury, business interruption, loss of use, lost data, lost profits or any other pecuniary loss, whether in an action of contract, negligence or other tortuous action, even if NAM has been informed of the possibility.

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COMMUNICATIONS

GENERAL	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We meet all federal requirements for public disclosure. US					
Our organizational communications adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards, as well as any industry specific standards that may exist, including principles of transparency, fairness and honesty.					
Our communication standards are clearly stated in writing and are part of the orientation of all employees, volunteers and board members.					
We have a clearly defined, written communication plan that guides both internal and external communications and supports our comprehensive organizational plan. The communication plan is directly related to the strategic plan and demonstrates accountability to constituents and the public.					
Our communication plan includes goals, target audiences, key messages, strategies, tools, intended outcomes and the means to evaluate results.					
Our communication plan ensures that we are making the appropriate information available to the public and communicating in a clear and timely manner with those who request information.					



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COMMUNICATIONS

GENERAL	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
Our communication plan is shared and regularly reviewed with our staff, board and key volunteers.					
Our communication plan is updated regularly to ensure the plan stays current with organizational priorities, technology and communication trends (such as social media).					
We have a social media policy that outlines clear rules around the use of social media and that designates one person to oversee such efforts.					
We have a written plan for communicating with the public and the media at a time of crisis or emergency that includes a procedure to communicate internally as well.					
We have established and promote a clear brand that provides strategic benefits to the organization as a whole and is supported by our logo, graphic standards, messaging, tone, and actions. All communications are consistent with our brand.					
We have clear policies regarding confidentiality of certain communications, images, and personal information.					



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COMMUNICATIONS

GENERAL	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We copyright or trademark organizational materials as appropriate.					
We have a system in place for promptly and respectfully responding to grievances or complaints from both internal and external sources.					
Our communications are clear, easily accessed and kept up to date.					
We openly communicate with other nonprofit organizations to share lessons learned and best practices.					
INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
Our internal communications are guided by clear policies and practices.					
Management actively solicits, carefully listens, and respectfully responds to the views of internal constituents.					
Our internal communication welcomes alternative perspectives and encourages participation at all levels in order to minimize defensiveness and build and maintain camaraderie.					



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COMMUNICATIONS

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We exchange information via regularly scheduled and attended meetings, regularly printed and/or e-mailed informational updates, and reports on meetings of the board of directors and its committees.					
We have an understood forum for suggestions.					
The line of communication between staff and the board of directors is clearly defined and well understood.					
EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
Our constituents are provided with ongoing opportunities to interact with the board and management regarding the organization's activities.					
We ensure that information provided to policy makers, the media and the public is timely and accurate, and that the social and political context of information is clear to avoid misunderstanding or manipulation of the message.					
We have a media relations strategy that includes frequently updating all major press, television, radio and internet news sources, builds relationships with individuals in the local media, and coordinates messaging across media.					



COMMUNICATIONS

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have written policies and procedures for developing public statements and positions on issues, and all internal constituents are aware of and trained on these statements, positions, and policies and procedures.					
We have one or more spokespersons that are authorized to make public statements on behalf of the organization and all internal constituents are aware of these spokespersons.					
We ensure that board and staff distinguish between personal opinion and organizational positions.					
In serving the public trust, we produce an annual report that contains information regarding activities and performance, including: 1) an explanation of the organization's mission, activities, results, 2) an explanation of how individuals can access programs/services, 3) financial information, including income and expense statements, balance sheet and functional expense allocations, and 4) a list of board members, management staff, partners/supports and donors.					
We have a graphics standards policy that governs the fonts, colors, logo and other such details used in all external communications, and this is employed consistently.					



COMMUNICATIONS

WALKING THE TALK: COMMUNICATIONS

- Develop an internal process for reviewing written material before it's disseminated to ensure accuracy, clarity, and consistency.
- Discuss the organizational branding approach/policy with board and staff to ensure everyone has a common understanding of intended message and impact of communications.
- Build a couple of key points into staff and board orientation:
 - IRS public disclosure regulations and organizational process for meeting them
 - Appropriate use of organizational logo, symbols, letterhead, statements and other official materials
 - An orientation to the basics of the nonprofit's communications plan – make sure everybody understands what needs to be approved by whom.
- Develop a centralized file of approved public statements (including an organizational “elevator speech”) regarding organizational mission, vision, history, and primary talking points. Share with board, staff, and other key volunteers.
- Encourage staff and board to collect and submit good stories on an ongoing basis for use in annual report, grant applications and reporting, evaluation reports, and other public communications.
- Develop and provide a safe forum for all constituents to provide feedback on organizational performance.
- Consider generational communication differences and expectations when planning your various communication strategies – make sure your delivery systems are targeted to your audience.



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- Develop a communications strategy to keep your community engaged and informed. Share annual reports, newsletters, and media releases with targeted individuals. Invite constituents to focus groups or town-hall meetings to discuss community needs and gain input on your work. Establish a context of partnership and stewardship of community resources.
- Ask board, staff and volunteers if there are ways to make your newsletter and annual report (and other external communication pieces) more effective. What are the highlights? What isn't captured? Who else should receive it?
- Consider a wide range of electronic communication and social media as options for communicating with constituents; engage staff/volunteers familiar with technology trends to help you make decisions in the absence of a formalized strategy.
- Develop a media specialist on your staff and coordinate communications efforts with your advocacy, lobbying, and policy efforts for consistency of message. Spend some time developing a database of local media, get to know their focus areas and deadlines, and identify the right contact in each outlet. Establish yourself as a resource for media outlets: in addition to releases about your organization's events, help them with breaking stories by sharing relevant data and background information on a particular topic. Give them leads on other stories that may be newsworthy.
- Communicate regularly with other organizations in your area. Share information and resources to establish your organization as one who is invested in improving the community rather than competing. Keep abreast of activities and events that impact your sector's work. Consider participating in networking events or conversation circles.
- Identify key contacts with local government units (city, state, county, various departments) and business leaders to keep them apprised of your efforts. Add contacts to your newsletter mailing list or email alert system. Schedule breakfast or lunch meetings that will help you build a relationship before there's an issue to address. Discuss mutual goals as well as opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

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EVALUATION

METHODOLOGY & MEASUREMENT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have defined, ongoing and sustainable procedures in place for evaluating our programs, procedures, and outcomes in relation to our mission.					
Our evaluation strategy is ongoing and includes input from a wide variety of stakeholders including staff, board, funders, community members, etc.					
Performance measures are realistic, specific, measurable and appropriate to the size and scope of the organization and its constituents. Measurement includes information on satisfaction, activities, results, and community input; both qualitative and quantitative data; and data on efficiency and effectiveness.					
We employ appropriate data collection and analysis tools in order to produce accurate, timely, and useful evaluation information.					
We conduct evaluations in ways that are culturally sensitive and appropriate to the communities we serve.					
Information that is collected from persons served is kept confidential, and we never identify specific persons served unless we have their written permission.					
We have a thorough understanding of the community in which we operate, including the needs of constituents, services provided by the government and other nonprofits, and applicable trends (i.e., economic, demographic, etc.).					



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EVALUATION

METHODOLOGY & MEASUREMENT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We regularly monitor the needs and satisfaction of stakeholders and provide a grievance procedure to address complaints.					
We utilize external evaluators when appropriate and feasible. These evaluators follow the Guiding Principles for Evaluators set forth by the American Evaluation Association. http://www.eval.org/GPTraining/GP%20Training%20Final/gp.principles.pdf .					
We have a written memo of agreement/contract with every external evaluator and/or consultant.					
USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
Evaluation results are communicated to a broad range of constituents including staff, board, constituents, funders, and community members.					
Measurement informs the operational plan and is used to evaluate organizational effectiveness.					
Evaluation results are used to strengthen and improve our programs and activities by incorporating evaluation findings into strategic planning processes.					
Our programs take into account and respond to the experience, needs, and satisfaction of the constituents they serve.					

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EVALUATION

USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We train our personnel in evaluation methods to improve their understanding and utilization of data developed from evaluation activities.					
We actively assess the usefulness and accuracy of our evaluation practices and modify them as needed.					
We share relevant lessons learned with other nonprofits and funding sources.					

WALKING THE TALK: EVALUATION

- When designing a new program/project, identify very specifically how it will impact your mission through measurable outcomes addressing identified needs.
- Consumer feedback should be a significant component of ongoing evaluation efforts. Develop an evaluation plan (including surveys, focus groups, post-service feedback and other tools) that includes regular consumer feedback. Have the board review results of the feedback and discuss both successes and challenges. Board recommendations should be carried back to staff (via the Executive Director) for program evaluation and adaptation as needed.
- Familiarize yourself with various methods of evaluation to determine which approach is best for individual programs and projects; one size does not fit all.

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- Establish with staff that evaluation planning is an up-front activity rather than a last-minute reaction. Solid goals and objectives lead to effective evaluation plans.
- Plan on at least 5% of a program's budget for evaluation costs. This is a commonly accepted range for funders, and includes the cost of staff time to develop and process evaluation tools, copying, postage, etc. If you use an external evaluator, the cost jumps to 10% or more. Research in advance what method/approach is best for each program.
- Establish a process for periodic review of evaluation feedback. If you run frequent programs/projects, you may consider compiling results of like programs for a thumb-nail sketch to present to board members.
- Review evaluation feedback with staff following each program/project. Generate a list of improvements or "lessons learned" and file it where it will be incorporated into planning upcoming projects.
- Develop a mechanism for sharing evaluation feedback with key stakeholders. Consider devoting a section of your newsletter to "recent feedback," or including anecdotal and hard data in your annual report. You should be able to show your impact on the issue as effectively as you can demonstrate your passion for the cause.
- Evaluators should follow the national Guiding Principles for Evaluators set forth by the American Evaluation Association. <http://www.eval.org/GPTraining/GP%20Training%20Final/gp.principles.pdf>.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

REPORTING & OVERSIGHT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We comply with all financial reporting and tax laws, including withholding and payment of federal and state income taxes, Social Security payroll taxes and unrelated business tax reporting (if applicable). US					
We clearly and appropriately categorize our donated funds as unrestricted, temporarily restricted or permanently restricted in our financial statements and communications in accordance with the donor or grantor wishes/stipulations. US					
We have an annual audit, financial review, or compilation. (<i>Audit</i> required if spent over \$500,000 of federal money/grants) US					
Our annual tax returns and tax exemption documents are available to the public. US					
We qualify as a public charity either under the “public support test” or the “facts and circumstances test” or by qualifying as a supporting organization to another public charity. US					
We file our biennial report with the Secretary of State on time. NE, IA					



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

REPORTING & OVERSIGHT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We keep complete, current and accurate financial records with supporting documentation in a manner that complies with standard accounting practices from FASB or GASB.					
We generate accurate, relevant and consistent financial reports which include the comparison of actual to budgeted revenue and expenses, and which identify and explain any significant variances.					
Board members understand how to read and interpret financial statements and the audit or financial review reports.					
We provide training to all board members on how to read and understand nonprofit financial statements, including an audit or financial review report.					
The board reviews financial reports at least quarterly.					
The board reviews and approves the organization's budget annually.					
Financial audits are approved by the board and certified by the Executive Director and CFO.					



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

REPORTING & OVERSIGHT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have an audit committee of the board that does not share members with, and works independently of, the finance committee.					
In the audit process, the auditor is given the opportunity to meet with the board separately from management and staff.					
POLICIES & PLANS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a policy in accordance with federal law to handle, store and destroy financial records and supporting documentation. US					
We have a whistle-blower protection policy in place that allows individuals to report financial misconduct without consequence for doing so. US					
We do not allow personal use of organizational funds or business credit cards. US					
We have a board-approved lobbying expense policy and follow all procedures and filings required by law (if applicable). US, NE, IA					
Financial loans to staff or board members are strictly prohibited. NE, IA					



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

POLICIES & PLANS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a board-approved financial management policy that is periodically reviewed and updated.					
We have a board-approved risk management plan that is periodically reviewed and updated.					
We have a board-approved investment plan that is in accordance with all legal requirements and is periodically reviewed and updated.					
We have a board-approved credit card policy for the organization.					
We have a clear expense reimbursement policy for the organization.					
We have contract management policies & procedures appropriate for the size and activities of our organization (if applicable).					
We have a clear procurement and purchasing policy, including signature authority, for the organization.					
We ensure separation of specific financial duties as a system of checks and balances to the extent possible given the size of our organization.					



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FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

POLICIES & PLANS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have appropriate internal controls and procedures to monitor and record assets received, held and expended.					
Our annual budget devotes a significant portion of resources to programs that pursue our mission. It also provides sufficient resources for effective administration and for fundraising activities (if applicable).					
The board considers applicable industry benchmarks for expenditures on programs, administration and fundraising.					
We plan for a balanced budget. If a budget deficit occurs, the board is informed in a timely manner and participates fully in determining a plan to restore the budget to a balanced state.					
We maintain a financial reserve equal to three to six months of operating expenses.					
We project, monitor and adjust cash flow as needed to ensure appropriate cash flow.					
The funds we raise are used solely for the benefit of the organization.					
We expend funds responsibly and ensure that funds are used according to funders' wishes and requirements.					



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

POLICIES & PLANS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We do not consider bequests, planned gifts and pledges when determining the annual budget and do not include these dollars in budgeting for program expenditures until the gift is actualized.					
We work towards diversifying our funding sources as much as possible in an effort to strengthen the organization's sustainability and to lessen the impact of a potential loss of a significant amount of funding from any one source.					
When undertaking responsibility of fiscal sponsorship for another organization, we do so only with board approval and full knowledge of its legal obligations and liabilities.					

WALKING THE TALK: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- Monitor the cost of managing multiple funding sources and the overall ratio of the benefit vs. services delivered. A \$10,000 program grant that costs you \$7,500 to manage may not be worth the investment of staff time.
- While each board must determine the appropriate budget needed to achieve its mission, various industry benchmarks provide target ranges of 65-80% of expenditures for programs, and 20-35% for administration, fundraising and evaluation.
- Frame financial reports with relevant data points for comparison. A simple monthly statement of revenue and expenditures means nothing if not put in the context of year to date projections vs. actual activity. Explain variances

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in a relative context as well: a variance of \$10,000 is worth consideration and deliberation if it equals 30% of your total budget but demands less attention if it represents 3% of a line item. Accuracy is important, but numbers put in context are too.

- Ensure that your board members are trained to read and understand your financial statements. They are legally accountable for your organization's finances and it is your mutual responsibility to make sure they can fully meet their obligations.
- Before a crisis occurs, discuss contingency options for the event of a budget deficit. Investigate a line of credit, and determine which programs/services could be minimized or temporarily discontinued if cost-cutting measures are needed.
- In your annual fund development planning, develop a strategy to build a reserve fund to sustain your operations during low cash-flow months and to provide for program expansion and enhancements.
- Develop a policy and procedures regarding the acceptance and valuation of gifts of property to the organization.
- If appropriate, identify a legal expert with nonprofit experience to help you investigate and understand the difference between fiscal agency and fiscal sponsorship before engaging in such a relationship.



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FUNDRAISING

ETHICS, RESPONSIBILITIES & POLICIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We comply with all federal, state and local laws and regulations concerning fundraising practices. US, NE, IA					
We have secured the appropriate liquor and gaming licenses from the state (if applicable). NE, IA					
We register our professional commercial fundraisers with the Iowa Attorney General, obtain a permit and update it as required. IA					
We are prepared to provide financial disclosure information to any person requesting it, for all fundraising done in Iowa. IA					
Our board and Executive Director are familiar with the Association of Fundraising Professionals' Code of Ethical Principles and Standards of Professional Practice, and ensure that all fundraising professionals acting on behalf of the organization adhere to these. www.afpnet.org					
We comply with all Do-Not-Contact list laws.					
We pursue and accept only the funds that are in alignment with our mission; that will not bring about adverse conditions for our constituents; and that we need to reasonably work toward achieving the mission over the foreseeable future.					



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FUNDRAISING

ETHICS, RESPONSIBILITIES & POLICIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
The board assumes overall responsibility for raising sufficient funds to meet our budgeted objectives. This includes 100% of board members financially supporting the organization in accordance with a written board giving policy, and board members raising funds from external sources.					
We have a board-approved fund development plan that strives to raise funds efficiently so that a significant percentage of funding can be applied to programs/services.					
We work towards diversifying our funding sources as much as possible in an effort to strengthen the organization's sustainability and to lessen the impact of a potential loss of a significant amount of funding from any one source.					
Fundraising communications include clear, accurate, honest information about the organization, its activities and the intended use of funds.					
Compensation for fundraising personnel and consultants is not based on a percentage of funds or on other commission based formulas.					



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FUNDRAISING

ETHICS, RESPONSIBILITIES & POLICIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have written contracts with fundraising consultants that cover compensation; responsibilities; acknowledgment of applicable fundraising laws, disclosure requirements and proper fund handling; and appropriate fundraising behavior and techniques.					
We are familiar with the legal distinctions between staff, consultants, and contract employees, and ensure that we have the ability to adequately manage and supervise fundraising activity conducted by contractual providers.					
We have a grants management system (if applicable) in place to enhance efficiency and transparency, and to ensure proper and timely reporting.					
We have a fundraising budget and system to track expenditures.					
ACCOUNTABILITY TO DONORS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We provide appropriate acknowledgement and receipts to donors, in accordance with IRS code. US					



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FUNDRAISING

ACCOUNTABILITY TO DONORS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We clearly and appropriately categorize our donated funds as unrestricted, temporarily restricted or permanently restricted in our financial statements and communications in accordance with the donor or grantor wishes/stipulations. US					
We conduct our fundraising activities in a manner that upholds the public trust in stewardship of contributed funds.					
We use funds according to donor intent and comply with specific conditions for donations.					
We publicly recognize charitable contributions as appropriate and maintain donor confidentiality as requested. We never trade or share donor names with others unless given express permission by the donor.					
We have policies in place regarding the receipt, disposal and management of charitable gifts and grants.					
We regularly communicate with donors about our activities and make information available through multiple outlets.					



WALKING THE TALK: FUNDRAISING

- Develop an annual Fund Development Plan that addresses all programs, projects, and services.
- Be familiar with industry standards for ethical fund raising (www.afpnet.org) and ensure that your employees, volunteers, and consultants are both aware of and compliant with these principles.
- Establish a Fund Advancement Committee to develop key strategies and cultivate needed resources.
- In Iowa, visit the Attorney General's web site http://www.iowaattorneygeneral.org/protecting_giving/index.html and review the rules and regulations for charitable solicitation and licensure of fundraising professionals. There is no required registration of fundraisers in Nebraska, but gaming laws apply <http://www.revenue.state.ne.us/gaming/index.html>.
- Assure that all board members are clear on expectations for their individual financial support as well as the board's role in supporting fund advancement strategies through personal solicitations and relationship building.
- Make sure that your strategic plan addresses a broad range of resources needed to accomplish each goal/task, including financial resources, facility needs, and staff skills and training.
- Ensure that facilities, equipment, and technology needs are considered in developing new programs and services. Consider conducting a technology audit. Plan appropriately for staff expansion to ensure adequate space, furniture, phone lines, etc. are available.
- When seeking new/expanded funding sources, include all related costs and research any limitations or exclusions (i.e., some funders limit expenditures for equipment or technology expenses).
- Stay abreast of funding trends through regular reading and ongoing training. Subscribe to The Chronicle of Philanthropy and online journals like Philanthropy News Network Online (www.pnnonline.org) or The Fundraising Well (https://www.blackbaud.com/files/Newsletters/FundraisingWell/2008/FW_March2008.htm).

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GOVERNANCE

BOARD COMPOSITION & ROLES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have the required number of board members (3 in NE, 1 in IA). NE, IA					
We have all required officers (president, secretary, treasurer, or as indicated in bylaws). NE, IA					
At least two-thirds of the board is <i>independent</i> , as defined by the IRS.* US					
The board has no more than one employee (typically the chief executive) serving on the board, and he/she does not serve as the chair, vice-chair, secretary or treasurer.					
We have an established process to recruit and select new board members that ensures board members represent the best interests of the organization, the infusion of new ideas and community perspectives, and the preservation of institutional memory via staggered terms and term limits.					
The board includes members with the diverse skills, expertise and experience necessary to fulfill all needed board roles, including at least one person with financial expertise.					
We strive to have board representation that reflects the diversity of our community and constituency.					

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GOVERNANCE

BOARD COMPOSITION & ROLES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
The board is comprised of individuals who represent the best interests of the organization.					
Board members are provided with clear job descriptions and understand their roles and responsibilities.					
Committee members are provided with clear job descriptions and understand their roles and responsibilities.					
GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have our IRS determination letter. US					
We have up-to-date articles of incorporation. NE, IA					
We have an up-to-date registered agent and registered office filing with the Secretary of State. NE, IA					
We file a biennial report with the Secretary of State. NE, IA					



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GOVERNANCE

GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have up-to-date bylaws which include board liability & indemnification language.					
We have a code of ethics and conduct for the board.					
We have an up-to-date board member policies and procedures handbook.					
We have an up-to-date committee handbook with each committee's charter (or other clear statement of authority and purpose), policies and procedures.					
We carry the appropriate level of liability insurance, including Director & Officer insurance.					
BOARD POLICIES & PROCEDURES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have an up-to-date conflict of interest policy and signed disclosure forms for the board, staff, and volunteers. US					
We held an organizational meeting after incorporation to elect directors (if not named in the articles of incorporation), appoint officers and adopt bylaws. NE, IA					



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GOVERNANCE

BOARD POLICIES & PROCEDURES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a clear policy on board member term limits, rotation (term staggering), number of consecutive terms, and removal written in our bylaws, and we abide by these.					
Board meetings are held at least quarterly, and regular attendance is required.					
We have a board attendance policy and abide by it.					
The board follows the voting procedures as defined in the bylaws.					
Board members are provided with an orientation and board manual.					
We have an up-to-date board calendar with meetings and organizational events.					
We educate the board and staff about what constitutes conflict of interest.					
We regularly and consistently monitor and enforce the conflict of interest policy.					
All board members receive relevant financial literacy, legal, lobbying and advocacy training as needed.					
We have a process for educating board members to ensure they can carry out their oversight, fundraising and independence responsibilities.					



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GOVERNANCE

BOARD POLICIES & PROCEDURES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We keep as permanent records minutes of all board meetings and documentation of any actions taken by the board without a meeting.					
We keep as permanent records all financial information for the organization.					
We strictly prohibit financial loans to members of the board or to personnel.					
BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: OVERSIGHT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We are knowledgeable and in compliance with all applicable local, state, federal, international laws.					
The board reviews and approves new or revised fiscal and governance policies.					
The board annually reviews and approves the budget.					
The board or appointed finance committee reviews financial reports quarterly, at a minimum, and monthly if possible.					
The board reviews and approves the audit.					
Board members are given the opportunity to review and approve the 990 prior to submission, as well as any other federal, state or local filings.					



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GOVERNANCE

BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: OVERSIGHT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
The board conducts an annual evaluation of itself.					
Periodically, the board reviews its size, composition and operational structure.					
At a minimum of every two years, the board reviews the organization's bylaws, mission statement, articles of incorporation and corporate policies and amends them as needed to reflect organizational growth and development.					
The board actively participates in and approves the organization's strategic plan.					
The board conducts an annual performance review of the chief executive. The chief executive's performance assessment is based on organizational accomplishments, and the total compensation package is reasonable, reflecting his/her performance as well as industry standards.					
The board has a succession plan for the chief executive, board members and key staff.					
The board has an organizational transition plan to maintain daily operations during a change in executive or board leadership.					
We have a crisis communication plan written in the board manual.					



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GOVERNANCE

BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: FUNDRAISING & DEVELOPMENT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
All board members make personal financial contributions to the organization.					
Board members volunteer their time and raise funds from external sources.					
Board members are provided with fundraising training and support materials.					
We provide training and education so that board members can advocate for the organization.					
BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: INDEPENDENCE	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
Board members make decisions in the best interest of the organization and not in the interest of another entity, including themselves.					
Each board member discloses all material facts and relationships and refrains from voting on any matter where there is a conflict of interest.					
Board members (who are not employees) receive no monetary compensation from the organization.					



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* A trustee is not an “independent trustee” if, at any time during the fiscal year, the trustee: (a) received compensation as an officer or employee from the corporation or a related organization; (b) received compensation or other payments as an independent contractor of \$10,000 or more not including expense reimbursement or payment for services as a director; or (c) became involved or had a family member who became involved in a “reportable transaction” with the corporation, whether directly or indirectly through affiliation with another organization.

Generally speaking, reportable transactions include: (1) loans or grants to the director (or the director’s family members or entities in which the director or family members have an ownership interest, collectively “related persons”); (2) compensation to a family member of \$10,000 or more; or (3) a business transaction with the director or related persons that exceeds the greater of \$10,000 or 1 percent of the organization’s annual revenues, or multiple transactions that exceed in the aggregate \$100,000 during the fiscal year. Comply with the IRS definition of independence when filing the Form 990, but remember that independence means more—it takes into account financial and non-financial relationships that could lead a reasonable person to question an individual’s objectivity and loyalty to the organization. The gold standard for independence should be that the board is beyond reproach, in fact and appearance.

WALKING THE TALK: GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

- Frame board orientations around the mission. Lay out specific expectations of how board members will help achieve the mission; encourage the board chair to frame all board discussions around the mission; consider a board retreat with a specific mission focus; and provide each board member with a position description developed within the context of mission achievement.
- All board members should sign a Conflict of Interest statement, which should be updated on an annual basis to reflect any new affiliations and potential points of conflict. Once signed, the organization’s leadership needs to adhere to the Conflict of Interest Policy, and understand the appropriate procedure to disclose a conflict.
- Review the organization’s process for recruiting and screening potential board members. Develop a script of topics to cover during an initial meeting, including the ethics and values of the organization. Provide information on the organization’s values and ethics in a written format (i.e. board manual).
- To avoid potential conflict and confusion, your organization should consider a variety of operating policies beyond

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the bylaws. In addition to personnel policies, consider formal policies for technology use, confidentiality, conflict of interest, and customer grievance procedures.

- Strive for diversity on your board to bring in fresh/alternative perspectives and approaches to achieving your mission.
- Establish term limits for board members. Staggered terms should maintain at least a 50% incumbency rate to maintain continuity and organizational identity.
- Establish a transition plan to prepare for an immediate change in executive director: develop a process to select an interim executive and establish a strategy and timeline for posting the position, recruiting, screening, selecting, and orienting the new executive.
- While each board must determine the appropriate budget needed to achieve its mission, various industry benchmarks provide target ranges of 65-80% of expenditures for programs, and 20-35% for administration, fundraising and evaluation.



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HUMAN RESOURCES

GENERAL	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We comply with all federal, state and local employment laws in hiring and employing personnel. US, NE, IA					
We have established and abide by broad and encompassing anti-harassment and nondiscrimination policies. US					
We have established employee and volunteer record retention policies and procedures that are consistent with applicable laws and best industry practices. US					
We have an up-to-date conflict of interest policy and signed disclosure forms for the board, staff, and volunteers. US					
We have a whistleblower policy with specific procedures for reporting violations of organizational policy or applicable laws and ensure that those making such reports are protected from repercussions. US					
We have a personnel file(s) for each employee that includes all required federal and state documentation, as well as relevant employment, performance, disciplinary action and testing records with supporting documentation. This may be two separate files per employee—one accessible to direct supervisors and one held in confidence due to potential discriminatory information (i.e., health records, demographics, litigation, etc.) US, NE					



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HUMAN RESOURCES

GENERAL	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have workers' compensation insurance. NE, IA					
Our work environment is safe and healthy.					
POLICIES, PROCEDURES & PLANS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a plan in place for the succession of the executive director, key board leadership and key employees.					
We have a set of personnel policies and procedures. All employees receive a copy and submit a signed acknowledgement of such.					
We have board-approved employee benefit policies, including medical insurance, retirement benefits, vacation and other paid time off, etc.					
We have a set of volunteer policies and procedures; all volunteers receive a copy and submit a signed acknowledgement of such.					
We consider best industry practices as well as our own unique circumstances when establishing policies and procedures.					
We have all appropriate documents for our independent contractors on file.					



HUMAN RESOURCES

POLICIES, PROCEDURES & PLANS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a volunteer engagement plan that fits our needs.					
HIRING, DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a formal orientation program for new employees.					
We support the training and development of personnel and provide them with opportunities for growth and advancement.					
We provide clear, equitable procedures for taking disciplinary action with staff.					
We employ individuals and utilize the help of volunteers suitable for the positions they occupy and committed to the mission, values and objectives of our organization.					
We strive to employ staff and volunteers who reflect the diversity of the community, as appropriate for program effectiveness.					
We conduct background checks on those who come in contact with vulnerable populations, who perform financial duties, or who serve in other sensitive areas.					
We work to retain quality employees by providing and periodically assessing factors related to employee satisfaction, including fair compensation, training, and opportunity for advancement.					

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HUMAN RESOURCES

PERFORMANCE & COMPENSATION	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
All compensation paid is reasonable and substantiated. US					
The board periodically reviews our organization's compensation structure (including benefits) using industry-based salary and benefit surveys.					
The board conducts an annual performance review of the chief executive. The chief executive's performance assessment is based on organizational accomplishments, and the total compensation package is reasonable, reflecting his/her performance as well as industry standards.					
We provide staff and volunteers with clear, current job descriptions and the tools they need to produce quality work.					
We evaluate staff job performance annually.					
A record of all performance evaluations, along with employee signature and comment, are kept in each employee's personnel records, and used to help determine compensation.					



WALKING THE TALK: HUMAN RESOURCES

- When hiring staff, discuss the core values of the organization to ensure compatibility. You cannot dictate an employee's lifestyle, but you can outline expectations for representing the organization and interacting with clients, constituents, and partner organizations.
- Ensure that policies and procedures of human resource management (paid and volunteer staff) are within legal guidelines and address effective practices of risk management.
- When hiring an executive, encourage the selection committee to consider the potential for leadership and motivation in addition to management skill. A successful executive is well rounded, allowing him/her to advance the mission in myriad ways.
- The board should develop a strategy for annual evaluation of the executive. Determine the criteria for evaluation (progress toward mission achievement through what measures?); from whom feedback will be sought and in what format; and how the feedback will be compiled and presented.
- While the executive is responsible for staffing and managing the organization on a day-to-day basis, professional development of staff, retention, and turnover as it relates to the organization's ability to achieve mission should be discussed and monitored by the board. Estimates for replacing staff range anywhere from 25% to 200% of the annual salary for the position; investing in staff development through tuition reimbursement programs, conferences and trainings, and professional journals/publications has a significantly lighter impact on the bottom line and a conversely positive impact on mission achievement.
- Format position descriptions and evaluations to reflect individual contributions toward mission achievement.
- Regularly evaluate the organization's capacity from a staff standpoint: are you able to advance upon your mission with the current structure? Do you need more or less staff? Are all employees in positions that maximize their talents

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and abilities?

- Provide resources and opportunities for cross-training and professional development of staff. This will minimize the impact of staff turnover and create more well-rounded employees.
- Develop a formal recognition system to acknowledge and celebrate the work of both individuals and the collective team. Consider staff spotlights through newsletters or internal postings; make a big deal when a new benchmark is reached or a project/program enjoys a particular success. Take time to say “thanks” and “you make a difference here.”
- Display the organization’s mission prominently throughout the office - consider placing it in each office/work station; find creative ways to encourage staff to know the mission (i.e., conduct pop quizzes at staff meeting with small prizes for staff who can recite the mission); print the mission on the back of employee business cards; set screen savers with the mission statement; include the mission on company letterhead and all publications.
- Frame staff meetings around the mission; end each planning session with “and this will bring us closer to achieving our mission by...”; plan a staff retreat with a specific mission focus – ensure that each staff member understands their individual role as well as the role of others.



INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY

PLANS & POLICIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We are aware of and in compliance with all regulations and industry standards relating to the types of data the organization collects, transmits, and stores. Examples include health care information under HIPAA, credit card information under PCI DSS, and online information from children under COPPA. US					
We have a written document retention and destruction policy that also covers electronic files and voice mail. US					
We have a written technology plan that is integrated into our short-term and long-term strategic and operational plans.					
Our technology policy prescribes how all organizational information is gathered and stored, how accuracy is maintained, how and what information is backed up, and to whom information is made available.					
We have a technology use policy that addresses personal use of the organization's information and technology, such as computers, phones, social media, data, etc.					
We have a technology security policy, including measures to ensure security if employees or volunteers have remote access to proprietary/confidential information.					

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INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY

PLANS & POLICIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a social media policy that outlines clear rules around the use of social media and designates one person to oversee social media efforts.					
Our technology plan includes regular assessments and funds for maintenance and making necessary technology upgrades.					
We maintain and are ready to implement a catastrophic recovery plan that includes hardware and software inventory for insurance purposes, off-site back-up of key data and software information, and remote/alternative access in the event of an emergency.					
SYSTEMS & SUPPORT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have reliable information systems in place that provide timely, accurate, and relevant information to facilitate workflow and track our data.					
We have appropriate and up-to-date telecommunications equipment, compatible computer hardware and software, and internet access.					



INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY

SYSTEMS & SUPPORT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have up-to-date virus protection, firewalls, and password protection.					
More than one individual is responsible for maintaining our information systems. (One person should be primary and at least one should be back-up).					
Our support agreements are up-to-date.					
We allocate sufficient resources to train our board, employees, and volunteers in the use of technology equipment.					
All staff and volunteers receive ongoing training on those systems that are relevant to their work.					
We monitor ongoing technological developments that have the potential to impact our information systems or mission.					

WALKING THE TALK: INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY

- Consider conducting a technology assessment of your organization to determine what systems you need to effectively meet your mission.
- When budgeting for new or upgraded technology, make sure to consider the cost of updated training and the

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ongoing cost of maintaining the system (service contracts, software upgrades, etc.).

- Engage a core group of staff in cross training on your technology systems to make sure you can handle emergencies and provide ongoing service during times of transition.
- Develop written policies regarding technology use by staff and volunteers. They may not like the guidelines, but letting staff and volunteers know that “nothing conducted on office equipment is private” protects you and them.
- Research innovative ways to utilize technology to engage volunteers and deliver services. Consider the needs and preferences of your target audience for specific activities and make appropriate decisions. Ask key questions, such as: Will our customers get frustrated if they are caught in an endless loop of voicemail and automated attendants? Do donors and volunteers prefer to access information online, outside of normal business hours?
- Remember that you don’t always need all the bells and whistles, but you DO need to stay current in your ability to meet your mission and serve your constituents.



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PLANNING

MISSION	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a clearly defined, written mission statement that guides the overall aims and activities of our organization and is linked to our values and vision for the future. US					
We have a clear, motivating vision statement about the organization's future that reflects a world enhanced by the accomplishment of our mission.					
We have a values statement that reflects our core beliefs and principles and drives the work we do.					
The board periodically reviews our mission, vision and values to consider societal and community changes.					
Our board and staff can and do articulate a shared vision for the organization.					
STAKEHOLDER INPUT & RESPONSIVENESS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
When planning activities, our organization is responsive to community needs and solicits input from a variety of sources with varying perspectives: staff, board members, funders and other constituents.					



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PLANNING

STAKEHOLDER INPUT & RESPONSIVENESS	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We openly communicate with counterparts in our field to share best practices, ensure effective resource allocation, and prevent duplication of services.					
Strategic Plan	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We create a written strategic plan every three to five years.					
The strategic plan reflects the results of an environmental assessment that includes information on strengths/challenges the organization faces, as well as opportunities for, and perceived threats to mission achievement.					
The plan includes clearly defined, measurable goals and objectives that are set by the organization to achieve our mission.					
OPERATIONAL PLAN	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We create a written operational plan every year which aligns with the strategic plan and specifies how organizational activities will be implemented.					



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PLANNING

OPERATIONAL PLAN	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
The plan clearly defines specific operational, program, financial, fundraising, communication, personnel and evaluation activities; delineates timelines; and assigns specific responsibility for implementation.					
The plan clearly identifies goals and performance measurements.					
The plan is tied to an approved budget.					
The plan provides a framework for regular progress reports and is reviewed and updated regularly by staff and board members.					
RISK & CRISIS MANAGEMENT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have all necessary/appropriate insurance (i.e., general liability, property, directors and officers, etc.) to protect our organization, employees, volunteers and board members. US, NE, IA					



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PLANNING

RISK & CRISIS MANAGEMENT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have workers' compensation insurance. NE, IA					
We have a risk management plan that protects the organization's assets—its property, financial and human resources, documents, programmatic content and material.					
We work with our board to monitor the risk management plan on a regular basis and update it as new risks are identified or as circumstances change.					
Our bylaws include board liability and indemnification language that clearly define the circumstances under which the organization will indemnify its directors, officers, volunteers and employees against claims arising from the performance of their duties.					
We have a crisis communication plan.					
We have a data backup and recovery plan.					
We have a fund development (diversification of funds) plan.					
We have a leadership/executive transition plan.					
We have an advocacy plan.					



WALKING THE TALK: PLANNING

- Make the question, “why is our mission important?” a standard component of board, staff and volunteer interviews and orientation; revisit the mission at meetings to discuss why it continues to be important and ask for personal reflections on why the organization’s mission is relevant to the community; emphasize that “no one else will support us if we can’t support ourselves.”
- Include your mission statement on all written correspondence with board: at top of meeting minutes, on organization letterhead, and as the cover to the board binder/manual. Prominently display the mission at each board meeting (try printing it on the back of business cards and name placards, or making laminated cards that you can lay at each place on the table during board and committee meetings).
- Engage a staff member/consultant to research related programs, studies, and common practices. If research is not available, consider applying for a grant that will support a research project, or partner with a local college/university to initiate relevant research.
- Assign staff (or engage a consultant or volunteer) to conduct an environmental scan by researching programs that focus on similar mission or emphasis areas. Identify possible competition, collaboration, and innovative practices that may strengthen your program. This is recommended as an annual, ongoing activity (and should be considered before implementing a major new program or strategy), but should be conducted every three years at a minimum.
- Regularly monitor census data and other statistics related to community needs to identify trends and provide documentation for funders.
- Allocate a portion of at least one meeting per year to discuss the needs and demographics of target population, and how the organization can continue to meet those needs within the context of its mission. This conversation should also be a part of all new board member orientations.

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- Engage a consultant, or consider one of many quality resources for self-directed planning to establish a focused strategy for the organization which guides planning. All components of the plan should have direct relevance to mission achievement.
- Engage a sub-committee of the board to develop a plan for engaging target constituencies through involvement on the board, participation in programs, and formal evaluation and feedback processes. Avoid token representation and ensure meaningful participation. Discuss relationship development at regular board meetings.
- Board members should be cognizant of the impact of cultural differences and perspectives in relation to defining community need and delivering programs. A variety of perspectives should be considered before a decision is made that will impact programming and customer service. Employees and volunteers should be able to effectively relate to and work effectively within the target population. Cultural values and norms must be considered to ensure acceptance and utilization of services by constituents.
- Consider relation to mission before deciding to implement any new project or program. Discuss the cost-benefit ratio in relation to likelihood of advancing toward mission achievement. Prioritize the programs with a higher likelihood of mission impact and reduce or eliminate low-priority programs.
- Establish a plan to respond to a possible decrease in funding. Prioritize positions and functions, prioritize services, programs and projects and identify a list of potential new funding sources that may be pursued. Consider questions such as: In the event of layoffs, which positions will be targeted? Can any projects be put on hold? Can any services be provided by another organization? Are there individuals, civic groups, foundations or corporations that may support us? Can we adapt any programs to a fee-for-service model?
- Establish an organizational culture where it's OK to say "no" to an opportunity that does not impact your mission.
- Consider the capacity of staff before implementing a new project/program. Ensure that funding is available to

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adequately staff and support the activity: if new staff cannot be added, what projects or programs can be down-sized or eliminated to free-up other staff time?

- Consider sustainability beyond initial (perhaps grant-based) funding for a new program. What other funding, including earned income, might be available?



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PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY

PUBLIC POLICY & LOBBYING	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We are aware of the 501(h) election. US					
We ensure that the activities of the organization are nonpartisan. US					
We adhere to all electioneering laws and regulation, including remaining non-partisan in position, communication and activities. US					
When we promote public participation, we ensure that our activities are nonpartisan and within permissible lobbying limitations. US					
We never use federal funds to pay for lobbying activities. US					
We understand that we may support/oppose legislation subject to lobbying limitations. US					
When we engage in lobbying, we adhere to legal expenditure limitations. US					
Our lobbyists are properly registered at the federal (if applicable) and state levels. US, NE, IA					
We file accurate and timely reports on our lobbying activities. US, NE, IA					
We participate in and support the formation and amendment of public policy consistent with our mission.					



PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY

PUBLIC POLICY & LOBBYING	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have an understanding of the current public climate and the resulting impact on policy.					
We assist our constituencies in public and civic engagement by encouraging voting and other participation in local, state and federal policy-making efforts.					
We ensure that board and staff distinguish between personal opinion and organizational positions.					
We have procedures in place to track lobbying expenses for reporting purposes.					
ADVOCACY	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We proactively develop strategies to address key issues facing our organization, its constituencies and the nonprofit sector, and we include our stakeholders in those efforts.					
We advocate publicly on behalf of our mission and organizational values.					



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PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY

ADVOCACY	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We encourage our board members, staff, volunteers and constituents to act as advocates and ambassadors for our organization and the entire nonprofit sector.					
We ensure that individuals who are authorized to act as advocates and ambassadors for our organization are knowledgeable and prepared to speak on our behalf.					
We ensure that information provided to policy makers, the media and the public is timely and accurate, and that the social and political context of information is clear to avoid misunderstanding or manipulation of the message.					
For our public policy and advocacy activities, we have adopted a written policy that clarifies the scope of the work, as well as the time and resources to be allocated to those activities.					
We build relationships with elected officials, community leaders and other nonprofits in order to strengthen our ability to effect change and impact public policy.					
We provide stakeholders with nonpartisan resources and training on issues important to us and our constituencies.					



WALKING THE TALK: PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY

- Subscribe to online policy alerts to keep abreast of current policy trends, issues and action needed.
- Engage in regular conversation with colleagues regarding the legislative and social environment. Maintain your awareness of trends and activities impacting your constituents or your mission.
- Build discussion regarding advocacy and issues awareness into your meetings, at the board and staff level.
- Participate in a good training related to lobbying and advocacy. Make sure staff and board members understand the opportunities, responsibilities and restrictions. Don't allow fear or misinformation to limit the work you do on behalf of your constituents and mission.
- Encourage your constituents to be advocates: encourage them to vote and to make their opinions known.
- Develop a media specialist on your staff. Correctly formatting and submitting media releases, opinion editorials, and public service announcements is critical in getting attention – make this part of somebody's job. Spend some time developing a database of local media, get to know their focus areas and deadlines, and identify the right contact in each outlet.
- Establish yourself as a resource for media outlets: in addition to releases about your organization's events, help them with breaking stories by sharing relevant data and background information on a particular topic. Give them leads on other stories that may be newsworthy. Build relationships with reporters and editors by meeting periodically to discuss community issues and innovative strategies to address them: when they know you're interested in more than just promoting your organization, you will earn their respect and attention.
- Establish yourself as a resource for policy makers and community leaders by following the strategies outlined above. Relationships are built on time and trust.



STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

ASSESSMENT	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We are open to strategic alliances as a means to help achieve goals, improve effectiveness and efficiency, ensure effective use of resources, improve services, and strengthen community connections with constituents and others.					
We carefully consider how entering into strategic alliances will affect all parties involved and identify the key staff, board, and other stakeholders that should be involved.					
We do not create strategic alliances purely to meet funding challenges.					
We only create alliances with competent and functioning organizations.					
The board regularly conducts environmental scans to identify organizations providing similar services and to assess our relationship to those organizations.					
Decisions regarding alliances are consistent with the strategic goals of our organization and will positively impact our brand and image.					
RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & STRATEGIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We are aware of and coordinate with other organizations providing similar or complementary services in our community.					



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STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & STRATEGIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We identify, promote, and provide referrals to other organizations that may be better able to meet the needs of constituents.					
As appropriate, we foster relationships with similar organizations; state, regional, and national associations; government; and business to ensure effective use of charitable resources and to advance our mission.					
We receive assistance from larger, more experienced nonprofits through alliances and resource sharing.					
As appropriate, we assist smaller and/or less experienced nonprofits through alliances and resource sharing.					
We openly communicate with other nonprofits to gather information and share lessons learned and best practices.					
Our board of directors is open to consolidating or merging with other organizations if it would be in the best interest of our constituents, community, or service area.					
We have written policies and procedures governing the activities of our chapters, branches, and affiliates.					



STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & STRATEGIES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have researched and understand the tax implications and the potential exempt status impact of partnering with a for-profit entity.					
We ensure board approval with full knowledge of our legal obligations and liabilities when undertaking responsibility for fiscal sponsorship of another organization. (<i>Note: the IRS views fiscal agency differently from fiscal sponsorship; get legal advice before proceeding</i>).					
We have written policies and procedures that guide our organization in assessing, establishing, working in, and dissolving strategic alliances.					
We work to establish communication channels, mutual understanding, and natural alliances among the government, nonprofit and for-profit sectors.					
We have a written memo of agreement/understanding for every collaborative commitment.					

WALKING THE TALK: STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

- Make it a habit to communicate regularly with current, past and potential funders. Add them to your mailing list for newsletters, annual reports and e-bulletins. Keep them apprised of significant happenings in your organization. Make it a point to network with key representatives at conferences and trainings.

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- Communicate regularly with other organizations in your area. Share information and resources to establish your organization as one who is invested in improving the community rather than competing. Keep abreast of activities and events that impact your (and their) work. Consider participating in (or establishing) director's networking breakfasts or brown bag lunch conversation circles.
- Identify key contacts with local government units (city, state, county, various departments) and business leaders to keep them apprised of your efforts. Add contacts to your newsletter mailing list or email alert system. Schedule breakfast or lunch meetings that will help you build a relationship before there's an issue to address. Discuss mutual goals as well as opportunities for partnership and collaboration.
- Seriously consider collaborative ventures with natural partners for program implementation. Also consider the possibilities of formal alliances and/or mergers as appropriate. Effective use of resources through cost-sharing mechanisms will allow a greater level of financial support to direct services.
- Where formal partnerships exist, be thoughtful about the natural life of the relationship. Decide when and how relationships will be evaluated and/or terminated. Consider formal partnership agreements—particularly when sharing financial resources—that make provisions for both intellectual and real property when the relationship ends.



TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

ACCOUNTABILITY	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We comply with all legal, tax, financial and other filing/reporting procedures required by the federal government, including the 990. US					
We have a written, mandatory document retention and destruction policy, including guidelines for handling electronic files and voicemail, back-up procedures, archiving of documents and regular check-ups of the reliability of the system. US					
We meet all federal and state requirements for disclosure. US, NE, IA					
We comply with all legal, tax, financial and other filing/reporting procedures required by the state, including the biennial report and liquor and gaming licenses (if applicable). NE, IA					
We register our professional commercial fundraisers with the Attorney General, obtain a permit and update it as required. IA					
We use our resources responsibly for the purpose of serving the public interest. Financial audits are approved by the organization's board and certified by the Executive Director and the CFO.					
We adhere to established, professional standards for the nonprofit sector, our subsector and our particular activity area(s).					

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TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

ACCOUNTABILITY	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have established and regularly measure clearly defined levels of performance in our activities, and we share those with the public.					
ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC INFORMATION	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have our EIN, IRS determination letter, articles of incorporation, bylaws, resolutions, board meeting minutes, records of actions taken by the board, accounting records, current list of board members and current membership list (if applicable) as readily accessible permanent records. US, NE, IA					
We provide our constituents with ongoing opportunities to interact with the board and management regarding the organization's activities.					
We engage all stakeholders in the development of goals and service delivery methods.					
We provide multiple means for contacting the organization to request information and provide input.					



TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC INFORMATION	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
<p>We make information about our operations, governance, finances, programs and activities widely available to the public. In the form of an annual report, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explanation of our mission, activities and results • An explanation of how individuals can access programs/services • Overall financial information, income and expense statements, balance sheets, functional expense allocations • A list of board members, staff, supporters and donors 					
<p>We openly communicate with other nonprofit organizations to share lessons learned and best practices.</p>					
FAIRNESS & EQUITY PRACTICES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
<p>We have a whistleblower policy with specific procedures for reporting violations of organizational policy or applicable laws and ensure that those making such reports are protected from repercussions. US</p>					



TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

FAIRNESS & EQUITY PRACTICES	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have a written conflict of interest policy that is signed by board members, staff and volunteers. US					
Information regarding our fees and services is readily available to the public.					
We ensure confidentiality and non-discriminatory service to our constituents.					
We have a written code of ethics that our board members, staff and volunteers adhere to.					

WALKING THE TALK: TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Review core values and principles of other organizations and discuss models that may reflect your organization's values; develop and adopt (through a retreat or sub-committee) values and principles and then integrate them into all conversations regarding policy and program. Answer key questions such as: What practices are ethically acceptable? Are there funding sources that are 'taboo' or would create negative perceptions about our work? How will staff be best utilized in achieving our goals/mission? Are volunteers an important part of how we want to deliver services?

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- Research and adopt good practices recognized within your field of service. Share these practices with other organizations to generate a professional standard.
- Review and consider Codes of Ethics for your industry. Allow your board to discuss formal adoption of a particular code, or the development of a hybrid code unique to your organization.
- Develop a marketing and community relations strategy that keeps key constituencies informed: governmental units, donors, for profit and nonprofit organizations. Share annual reports, newsletters and media releases with targeted individuals.
- Develop a communications strategy to keep in contact with community members and key groups/organizations. Invite them to focus groups or town-hall meetings to discuss community needs and gain input on your work. Establish a context of partnership and stewardship of community resources.
- A nonprofit must meet all federal requirements for public disclosure. These requirements state that a nonprofit must provide the last three years' information returns (Form 990 or its variants), as follows:
 - Public access must be provided immediately on request by allowing inspection of the documents at the organization's office or offices;
 - Copies of the documents must be provided within 30 days upon written request;
 - Organizations that make their materials widely available through publication on the Internet do not have to provide copies;
 - If the IRS determines that the organization is being subjected to a harassment campaign, copies do not have to be provided; and



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- o 501(c)(3) organizations not classified as private foundations are not required to publicly disclose the list of names and addresses of individual contributors and may block out that section of Form 990 and other materials for public viewing.



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VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
<p>We have a volunteer engagement plan that includes the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose statement – identifies what benefit(s) the organization gains from the effective use of volunteers • Organizational assessment – analyzes the organization’s readiness for volunteers • Budget – determines if organization has the financial resources to support a volunteer program • Roles and responsibilities – clearly defines roles, responsibilities, and relationships between staff and volunteers 					
We have a written position description for every volunteer position.					
Volunteer recruitment activities are targeted and specific, clearly identifying the work to be done, the hours to be committed, and the intended impacts of the volunteer activity.					
We have established screening procedures to ensure the safety of clients and minimize potential liability to the organization.					
Volunteer assignments are made with careful consideration of the volunteer’s skills, needs, and interests.					

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VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have current written volunteer policies and procedures that are accessible to all volunteers, including attendance policies, confidentiality policies, grievance procedures, and other key information to minimize risk and maximize effectiveness.					
We have a system whereby volunteers are oriented and trained for the specific skills and knowledge needed to perform their volunteer roles, as well as to understand the limits of their work and the latitude they may have for decision-making on behalf of the organization.					
We have an ongoing orientation/communication plan to keep volunteers apprised of changes within the organization as well as enhanced opportunities for volunteer involvement.					
Each volunteer has a direct connection to an identified supervisor and understands with whom to communicate when the supervisor is unavailable.					
We have a clear and documented grievance procedure whereby volunteers may address issues including (but not limited to) harassment and discrimination.					



VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

	YES/ COMPLETE	NO/NOT BEGUN	IN PROCESS	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT SURE
We have clearly articulated and documented accountability and discipline procedures for volunteers that address lack of performance as well as policy violations.					
We have a thoughtful recognition system which provides individual and group recognition and celebrates the impact of volunteers.					
Volunteer performance is evaluated regularly (at least annually) with the supervisor through a formal process. <i>**Note: the depth of performance evaluations should be appropriate to the role and scope of service the volunteer provides. One-time (or episodic) volunteers can be evaluated in much less detail.**</i>					
The volunteer program as a whole is evaluated annually to assess cost and benefits of the program, to document impact on mission achievement, and to direct future volunteer initiatives.					

WALKING THE TALK: VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

- Design your volunteer management and support systems to meet the scope of your volunteer involvement. Strategies may be different for one-time, episodic or short-term volunteers than for long-term, ongoing volunteer projects.
- Build collaborative relationships with other programs/organizations similar to yours; consider sharing recruitment,

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training, and recognition activities.

- Talk to staff and volunteers about how volunteers can expand programs, or take tasks off paid-staff workloads that would allow staff to maximize their expertise in other ways.
- When reporting volunteer impact to funders, the community at large and your internal constituents, make sure to factor in the established value of a volunteer hour.
http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html
- Listen to your volunteers. Ask them how the programs are going, how clients are feeling, what general community members are saying. Ask them how they're feeling about their work, if they feel valued, if they understand their role in achieving mission. They will be the first to let you know what works, and what doesn't.