

Board Governance A Concern for All

One of the fastest growing areas in the MAS service offering is board governance. The nonprofit sector is being swept along with the for profit sector by the demand for greater accountability and transparency among those ultimately responsible for the control and direction of organizations.

This is a marked departure in that board governance traditionally has not been an area of concern either internally or among those who fund nonprofit organizations. As an example of this seismic shift, those organizations being funded by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are expected to be able to answer a complex questionnaire about their governance structure and practices.

MAS has conducted more than 20 projects in the governance field during the past three years. These have covered a wide spectrum of nonprofit organizations from a small neighbourhood day care centre, to an ethnic settlement organization, to a performing arts theatre, to a large social service organization. The issues these and other client organizations faced included:

- Training directors dealing with governance for the first time
- Developing mission/value statements
- Advising on board/committee structures
- Assisting in determining needed board skills and how to acquire them
- Equipping boards to identify and address strategic issues
- Delineating responsibility between the board and management
- Above all helping boards to put in place systems for evaluating their effectiveness.

The MAS approach is based on an assessment of the needs of the organization, the level of instruction the board can assimilate and a step-by-step plan to take the board from where it is currently to where it wants/needs to be. Practical coaching is an integral part of every project.

As a capacity builder, MAS is committed to increasing capability at both the individual and collective level. Our approach differs sharply from those who recommend that board chairs or individual members be enrolled in governance training at the proliferation of governance courses that are now such a major thrust of business schools. Over the years, a cardinal rule of MAS has been to ensure that "all boats are raised by the same tide". This has proven to be particularly effective in raising the level of governance. *(Cont'd on p. 3)*

Networking Day A "Magical" Event

The first Networking Day, successor to Learning Days as a regular event to bring MAS volunteers together, was indeed a magical affair. Volunteer Mark Ellwood who organized the program, introduced Rick Ross, known as "Dr. Magic", a communications expert who uses card tricks as allegories for techniques for remembering and "keeping on" message during presentations.

Everyone was asked to bring a pack of cards to the meeting and MAS volunteers who were quick of eye and adept at sleight of hand certainly picked up tips for delivering focused messages. As a bonus they also took away a few tricks to entertain family (especially grandchildren) and friends. Dr. Magic certainly had the focused attention of his audience. *(Cont'd on p. 2)*

Board Works On Expansion Plans

MAS has had a very busy summer. With the expansion of the Board of Directors, this past March, both Board and Management Committee have been hard at work developing the framework for the establishment of a new governance structure. Three Board committees, Finance, Membership and Programming, have been established and their terms of reference approved. Under the respective Chairs, Rita Daniel (Finance), Chris Govern (Membership and Governance) and Bill Barley (Programme), each committee has been hard at work developing an interim report, expected to be presented to the full Board at its next meeting. One of the Board's first decisions was to plan for the expansion of MAS project activities over a five-year period. The agreed upon general objective is to increase the number of annual MAS projects by a factor of five over this period (5X5); and the Board committees are developing their proposals in view of this objective.

In addition to these three committees, the Board decided at its July meeting to strike a Joint Board-Management Committee Special Task Force to develop a MAS Vision statement that embodies and delineates this objective. The Task Force has held an initial facilitation session under the direction of Fred Simons to begin the process. The intent is to identify those factors that inhibit the development of MAS to meet these new project targets and then work towards eliminating them. All volunteers are being invited to participate in this important exercise.

Networking Day Magic

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Mark Ellwood explained the change in format of these regular meetings is designed to provide MAS volunteers, who often operate largely on their own, an opportunity to meet and get to know some of their fellow consultants. The first Networking Day worked well.

President Ed Monahan reviewed the activities of the Board of Directors during the summer and since (see President's Corner, above).

At the September Networking Day, Fred described in some detail what the vision exercise is all about and gathered the names of additional volunteers interested in participating. The next stage of the facilitation process will be held in early November. Interested volunteers who have not yet signed up are invited to contact Don Taylor to obtain more information and to get involved. The more volunteers who participate in this exercise, the better will be the result.

While these important governance matters are being dealt with, MAS continues its primary activities. As of September, MAS has some 70 projects on the go and the office staff (Don Taylor) is dealing with a further 34 enquiries. Thanks to the efforts of the MAS marketing team led by Rita Daniel, the number of client enquiries and projects this year continues to grow. Led by Dave Snow, the Evaluation Team has begun to increase the number of project evaluations.

Lastly, a word about MAS finances. Thanks to revenues from honoraria (now called client donations) and continuing contributions from corporate and private (VC) donations, MAS will end the current ('07) fiscal year in the black. That said, I note that the current annual operating MAS budget amounts to some \$15,000 only because all of our activities are provided by volunteers. When the proposed 5 X 5 increase in level of MAS activities is reached, our budget may require a 10 times increase.

Ed Monahan

Fred Simon reported in detail on the work of the MAS Board of Directors/Management Committee Task Force which is developing a MAS Vision statement (refer also to President's Corner).

David Snow who has been working hard on the evaluation program which provides valuable information on what and how we are carrying out our assignments and the reaction of our clients – fortunately mostly favourable.

Don Hutton: Teaching Living With Change

One doesn't meet many people these days born and raised in Toronto (Dufferin & St. Clair) but Don Hutton is one of that minority. He is also one of an even smaller minority – those who started their careers in accounting and “graduated” to using automation since the days they were called punch card tabulating machines. He was trained on such ancient systems as Tape Drives and RAMAC (Random Access Method of Accounting and Control). He has seen the machines evolve into the vacuum tubed computers and then the famous Univac with its special climate-controlled environment. He was there when the marvellously flexible “mini” was introduced.

People like Don have wonderfully challenging careers because they have lived with constant change. He worked for a number of the leading and innovative firms in the retailing, manufacturing, government and financial services sectors. But what fascinated Don Hutton was not so much the technical wizardry of these ever-changing machines but rather how their introduction forced changes on the people and the organizations that used them. He became a superb trainer, teaching others how to adapt to and use the new tools. Those are the skills that he offers to MAS clients.

He was introduced to MAS while running workshops for the Volunteer Centre of Toronto on how to prepare for retirement. For 20 years he has conducted school tours at the Metro Zoo and at the Kortright Centre. He has completed more than 15 assignments for our friends at CESO in their aboriginal program plus four overseas assignments.

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Feedback from clients has been very positive and word-of-mouth recommendations are an important source of new assignments. It is expected that this flow will accelerate in the future as the number of assignments grows.

Don Pollock is a long time MAS volunteer, a former senior executive and a (partly) retired Presbyterian minister.

Volunteering is now the focus of his life. Through this he has met a legion of interesting people, keen and hard working staff, volunteers and leaders facing enormous tasks with few rewards.

At first glance, there is too much needlessly wasted effort in many nonprofits. But it soon became apparent to Don that his method of operation in business did not always work in the nonprofit world. In business, all the debits and credits had to balance; the ultimate goal was the well being of the organization as recorded on the balance sheet. Everything was neat and tidy!

The priorities of the nonprofit community are different. The bottom line is often the successful resolution of individual situations, be they emotional, supportive or financial. To bring the business experience into nonprofit environment without disrupting the good work of the organization is the challenge every MAS consultant faces. The good work of the nonprofit sector and the labour of the individuals involved is amazing and must be respected.

There are rewards for Don Hutton and his colleagues when they can make a difference. However, it is sad but true that assignments are not always successful. This makes the job of the MAS volunteer even more challenging.

Need help in developing a plan or resolving an issue?

Management Advisory Service has helped hundreds of Toronto nonprofits. Our volunteers have extensive experience and knowledge in management and technical areas. If you need help with strategic planning or facilitating a board meeting, finance or accounting issues, call us. Our services are free of charge. Call 416-963- 5792, e-mail at info@masadvise.ca or visit www.masadvise.ca

"Thank you so much for the opportunity to work with this fabulous volunteer and seasoned manager."

Bernard Betal Centre Centre for Creative Living
(several projects)

"Your consultant was phenomenal. The project exceeded our highest expectations."

Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation.

"More people should know about MAS!"

PEACH – Promoting Economic Action & Community Health

Fundraising

"Thank you very much for your magnificent support...It was wonderful to have someone with your experience and expertise providing leadership, advice and insight."

Heritage Skills Development Centre.

Facilitation

"It is impossible to express the thanks...for the competent assistance to our Access Work Group over the past several months. We could not have accomplished our development goals without her knowledge and facilitation skills."

Ontario Community Support Association Toronto, Central LHIN District

"I am writing to express our deep appreciation for the critical role MAS played in making our Consensus Building Workshops a tremendous success."

Community Outreach Program in Addiction
(several projects)

"The MAS consultant had a wonderful way of getting into one's heart and mind to pull out the ideas/concerns needed for an organization to identify who they are and what they want to do...what is their purpose. Very productive day and group would not have done it without her."

International Black Women's Congress

MAS Charitable Number

MAS has official charitable status (**Number 86043 1667 RR0001**) which means we can issue receipts for income tax purposes for donations in various forms.

Marketing and Communications

"MAS's help with developing communications plan has been invaluable."

Safehaven Project for Community Living

"MAS is great and more people need to know about it. MAS is of great benefit to nonprofits who are always struggling with zero budget for this kind of consulting work."

Clarendon Foundation

"The contribution of both time and expertise provided a great support in the process."

Canadian Hearing Society (several projects)

Finance and Accounting

"Most helpful in clarifying our financial and administrative requirements."

West Toronto Support Services

Strategic and Business Planning

"Our strategic planning session was the most productive workshop this organization has ever held. The MAS consultant's firm guidance kept us focused and, as a result of a lot of hard work, we left with a concrete plan of action that is the basis for achieving our goals."

Turner's Syndrome Society

Board Development

"Overall, both Board and staff were very pleased with the training provided by MAS consultant...and would like to stay on list of contacts for future training sessions."

The Korean Canadian Women's Association

Board effectiveness is key to nonprofits

Do your board members know what is required of them? MAS volunteers are professionals and can help with governance and in other areas such as facilitation, accounting, human resources, marketing and IT. We've worked with hundreds of nonprofits free of charge.

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