

Some Current Assignments Reflect MAS Diversity

A professional service organization

This client defined the assignment as improving the productivity of their board meetings “to be more productive, timely, inclusive and even enjoyable”, a common problem with small organizations. The MAS volunteer followed what has become standard practice in such situations: familiarizing themselves by interviewing many of the members, preparing a position paper outlining the difficulties and arranging for and facilitating a full board meeting. The client looks forward this fall “to implementing the solutions developed with their expert help”.

A downtown service group

This client, with whom MAS has worked on several occasions, serves a largely immigrant population with problems concerning housing and related issues.

They have been operating for many years and during this period their funders have expanded their mandate requiring considerable growth in staff and services.

It seemed appropriate to review the formal legal and administrative policies and practices of the organization. A preliminary review revealed that several of these basic documents were significantly inappropriate for their current operation. MAS provided two experienced volunteers: a lawyer to review their by-laws and organizational requirements and a human relations specialist to review their human relations policies and practices.

Fundraising

MAS does not undertake to manage or participate
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Varied Program Draws Praise

The second MAS Learning Day on September 12 drew some 25 volunteers with a varied program. Julia Howell of Imagine Canada provided an overview of the extensive work that organization does in support of Canada’s many volunteer agencies. Julia’s talk was followed by a Question and Answer session. (Did you know that Canada has one of the world’s largest, most varied and vibrant volunteer sectors?)

Another section of the agenda involved an “I need help with.....session” in which Volunteer Consultants asked for and received assistance in dealing with some of the problems they experience on projects involving different management disciplines.

The most interesting and lively portion of the morning featured a case study presentation by Michael Landa involving a project on which he had worked as a volunteer in assisting a metropolitan legal services agency to resolve some management /staff issues. After a brief study of the case, members

were divided into small groups and invited to provide their analysis of the issues and to provide solutions. This produced a lively and informative exchange of views.

The participants agreed that the Learning Days should be continued. Thanks were extended to Mark Ellwood and Barbara Lang for the arrangements and to Julia Howell and Michael Landa for their presentations.

Friends for MAS

During the past 13 years, MAS has accumulated many loyal volunteers and supporters. Many are no longer active but want to stay involved. To recognize this important group, MAS has created a new associate category of “FRIENDS”. So far 15 have joined us. Welcome!

Outreach Efforts Basis for Growth

While business has slowed somewhat during the summer season, MAS continues to be active. The number of project enquiries and new projects continues to expand and by the end of this calendar year may be 50% better than last year's total. This is good news but we need to do more. There are many nonprofits out there that need help and many volunteer consultants anxious to help -- if we had more projects.

Efforts to improve MAS outreach continue. Our website has been upgraded and brought up to date, with more work ongoing. Plans are underway to have the newsletter appear on a regular basis, four times a year. The reorganization of our governance continues to receive attention. Expansion and strengthening of the Management Committee will be the first step. Several vacancies currently exist among the program directors and these need to be filled. Work is under way to develop program teams which, under the leadership of a director, will work together to expand outreach.

Marketing MAS to Nonprofits

After a couple of years of reinventing ourselves as an independent, incorporated entity with official charitable status, MAS has begun again to market our services to nonprofits and their umbrella groups. There have been a number of initiatives, including meetings with all Toronto City Councillors and mailings to targeted nonprofit groups. We are expanding that effort and have developed a marketing plan that outlines a strategy for increasing business.

The main goals of the plan are to increase the amount of repeat business from current and past clients, increase the number of new clients, raise our profile with the various umbrella groups that can refer their affiliates to MAS, more clearly focus what we have to offer in our sales information and improve the research we have on the volunteer sector to better target our sales efforts.

The plan is set up so that it can be divided into small projects that can be handled individually or in small groups. Some are ongoing projects, others are short term in nature.

Which brings me to marketing. VCs are our most effective marketers and we need more of you to get involved in this essential area of MAS activity. The old saw tells us that "If you build a better mouse trap, the world will beat a path to your door". Unfortunately, that is not quite true. MAS has a good product, one that many Toronto nonprofits need. But many out there do not know about MAS and what it has to offer. We must change that.

During the past few months, initial steps have been taken to expand and improve our efforts to tell the MAS story. The MAS website and newsletter are two means. Now MAS is planning a major marketing campaign. Rita Daniel, one of our most energetic VCs, has put together an ambitious marketing plan. She is looking for volunteers to fill out her team. For further details see her article on this page.

Ed Monahan

A small group of Volunteer Consultants has worked on the plan and others have indicated they are willing to participate in our marketing efforts. However, we can always use more volunteers.

If you are interested in joining us or would like to get a copy of the plan, please contact Rita Daniel at 416-932-3094 or rsdaniel@rogers.com.

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.

In keeping with our policy of suggesting to clients that an honourarium be given on successful completion of a project, tax receipts will now be issued.

Gail Whitbeck: A Low Tolerance for Boredom

"I have a low tolerance for boredom. I have to keep active" says Gail Whitbeck, and her resume contains a long list of interesting jobs, projects and volunteer assignments during her career. She has since 1987 been one of the most active volunteer consultants on the CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) roster. At home in Grey County, where she moved in 2000, she is active in volunteer work with the Town of Blue Mountains and several community organizations. In Toronto, now her second home, she is kept busy by MAS where she has had almost two dozen assignments

From an early age she remembers being interested in analysis; how did things work; how did one thing relate to another. She was attracted to mathematics and the physical sciences and won a scholarship to Wellesley College. A summer job as a key punch operator for a small research group working with wind tunnel turbulence introduced her to computers. She worked with computers when they were still known as tabulating machines and became a systems analyst before that term was invented (information systems were 'administrative procedures').

Early on, she programmed the second computer mainframe installed in Canada. Her curiosity led her to a wider range of jobs which usually expanded quickly into general managerial responsibilities. On one occasion she was asked to take on a large warehouse operation with a difficult workforce. She is still amused recalling the surprise of visitors when they demanded to talk with the boss and were introduced to her on the back of a forklift. In addition to machinery operation she also taught herself accounting, earning a CMA qualification and, inevitably, became a consultant.

Her father provided a model, having become an enthusiastic volunteer upon his retirement. But why wait for retirement to experience such enjoyment?

So by the late 80's she saw herself increasingly as a volunteer, picking interesting assignments that would expand her horizons, only returning to professional work to meet economic necessities. She discovered MAS in 1998 and, needless to say, there has been no shortage of work for her.

What makes Gail so much in demand by MAS clients is that she long ago realized that organizations were not just a matter of charts of authority, information systems and accounting statements. Organizations are essentially groups of people trying to perform a function as best they can; systems and statements are created only to help them perform better. Systems analysis is the process of building better tools using information to enhance performance.

In the nonprofit sector there are organizations and people with enormous tasks who must cope, usually with quite inadequate supporting resources. The challenge is to innovate, to create ways of improving effectiveness through cooperation. Even greater was the recent challenge to build administrative systems in a Lesotho town where there was maybe one shared rudimentary computer and an internet connection that worked only sometimes.

Back in Toronto Gail sees the challenge for our clients as being 'prioritization'. There is so much to do, so much that needs to be done, but we cannot do all that we would wish and if we try we will only meet frustration and failure. We must make choices. We talk about strategy and strategic planning as if it were some arcane technique but it is only a way to make choices, putting things in order, doing first things first and 'getting on with the job'. And that is where MAS and volunteers like Gail Whitbeck can come in handy.

Hiring New Staff and Human Rights

Despite much education effort on the part of both federal and Provincial Human Rights Commissions, as well as private sector professionals, we continue to meet managers in the nonprofit sector who are unclear as to the steps they should take when recruiting new staff.

They may be generally aware there are constraints placed on the hiring process by human rights legislations and regulations, but they do not know specifics of how to deal with these potential land mines. The result can be frustration and the potential for embarrassing events once the process is under way.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission has recently issued a guide to screening job candidates. Below are just a few examples of suggested questions that illustrate how you could get relevant information but not cross any forbidden boundaries.

RE AGE: Ask whether they are eligible to work under laws regarding age restrictions

RE SEX: Ask if the attendance requirements can be met

RE MARITAL STATUS: Ask if the candidate can meet all the travel requirements of the job

RE FAMILY STATUS: Ask if they can work the required hours and, where applicable, overtime

RE RELIGION: Ask if the required work shifts poses problems for the candidate.

A much fuller explanation of the steps you should take is available in this excellent Guide from the Commission at www.chrc-ccdp.ca.

Honour for Chris

Chris Govern, a MAS volunteer for the past four years, was honoured by the Board and management of SPRINT (Senior People's Resources in North Toronto). Chris helped the Board and management develop a strategic plan and SPRINT chose to honour Chris at this year's volunteer appreciation dinner. Chris was recognized as a valuable resource that helped the Board and staff to move the agency forward. Board Chair Hattie Reisman said "we thank Chris Govern for her generous volunteer assistance in guiding us so expertly through this exercise".

MAS Diversity (continued)

directly in fundraising activities but we spend considerable time, mostly with small organizations, coping with the demands made upon them to "diversify your revenue sources". Asking for money requires the nonprofit to provide: an understanding of what the organization specifically does for the community, what its plans and priorities are and the financial implications of those plans. Clearly, this relates directly to our strategic planning practice and we receive a continuing flow of requests which we call "Preparing for the F----- Word". We have found that fundraising approached from this basic starting point is much more understandable and doable.

Information Systems

In May, a medium sized community service organization asked us for assistance in simplifying their accounting and financial reporting system so that: the work could be brought "in house", be handled by existing staff; and provide management with improved operation information on a timely basis. The MAS consultant, who has had many years of nonprofit experience, has been working with the client during the summer.