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52 Free Development Opportunities for Nonprofit Staff

Bridgespan Group Partner Kirk Kramer led a session on organizational effectiveness at Bank of America's Neighborhood Excellence Initiative (NEI) leadership program in October 2010. One of the topics discussed was nonprofit staff skill development, which surfaced many creative ways NEI participants offer on-the-job development opportunities to their employees for free.

Provided below is a list, organized by skill type, of ways nonprofit leaders can engage promising staff members in critical skill development areas without sending them to formal external trainings. Use these suggestions as a checklist, identify which opportunities best fit with your staffs' development (or your personal development) needs, and put a few into action!

Team Leadership and management

Organize meetings and events

- Lead monthly staff meetings

- Participate in annual or strategic planning with board members and organization leadership

- Identify organizational challenges and lead working sessions with other managers to address them

Manage junior staff

- Manage interns that are assigned to the organization through training programs (e.g., college preparatory high schools, IT training programs)

- Assume responsibility for the management and training of junior staff members and/or volunteers

Train and be an apprentice

- Shadow a senior executive (perhaps monthly) to learn leadership and management activities through direct observation

- Cover duties for leader/manager when assigned leader/manager is on vacation

- Engage in "stretch" assignments that are out of usual scope of responsibility

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Serve as staff support on specific board committees

Participate in committees, task forces, etc. outside of regular job (e.g., HR committee)

Communication

Present at and organize meetings

Present at monthly all-staff meetings

Present status of team or division metrics at organization-wide meetings

Present new programming and/or other updates at board meetings (*emerging leaders from different departments may alternate doing this*)

Present on a topic of expertise at organization-wide meetings

Provide a short "training" in board meetings on program-relevant topics

Prepare written materials

Develop internal newsletters that representatives from each department will have a chance to write for and/or business contracts

Write a speech for a more senior executive in the organization

Draft sections of annual report

Organize activities and programs

Organize and execute a team-building activity in monthly meetings

Participate in communications training conducted by more experienced staff or local volunteer consultants (sourced through contacts or local colleges)

Work on a project that requires coordination across the organization

External relations

Attend and present at meetings

Accompany senior executives on outreach and sales opportunities to take notes and observe

Present at events and meetings with external constituents such as donors and community leaders

Represent the organization in professional or community networks

Participate in other external activities

Identify and participate in external opportunities of interest (e.g. participating in conferences)

Serve on boards of other nonprofit organizations

Fundraising

Write proposals

- Participate in drafting portions of grant proposals and/or business contracts
- Read and provide feedback on proposal drafts
- Draft portions of business contracts

Participate in fundraising events

- Participate in meetings with potential funders
- Take the lead presenting to and following up with funders
- Help cultivate future funders
- Participate in a call with a major donor to learn the fundamentals of major gift solicitation
- Participate in internal fundraising meetings and provide input on strategy and tactics

Participate in donor management

- Take responsibility for coaching a division of volunteers in the annual campaign
- Develop and implement a plan that assures donors and volunteers feel appreciated for their involvement

Financial and business economics

Participate in budget-related activities

- Develop budgets for grants or own departments
- Participate in annual budget process/financial reviews
- Participate in ongoing management of budget line items throughout the year
- Participate in annual audits (fiscal, government, insurance)
- Participate in board finance committee
- Review and give input on budgets of other departments
- Actively engage in financial updates presented at monthly all-staff meetings

Training and apprenticeship

- Use books/external training materials on how to read, interpret, and use data from financial statements
- Shadow a finance analyst on a task or project to learn fiscal management process and skills

Project management

Organize initiatives

- Spearhead major organizational initiatives (e.g., move to a new facility, website overhaul, CRM system implementation, creating an SROI model, revamping training structure)
- Organize events with beneficiaries
- Organize annual staff retreat or board off-site
- Plan and facilitate annual fundraising events
- Plan and facilitate quarterly company-wide training/learning seminars
- Engage board and alumni in focus groups on new program design ideas
- Help plan quarterly staff seminars related to programs or professional development

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