



Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
Community Development Renewal Initiative

Transferable Strategies & Case Studies
December 2008

Boards of Directors and CD

Issue:

What are ways that the Board of Directors can actively encourage community development?

Background:

Three years ago, the Board of Directors at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre named community development (CD) and working to address systemic issues as strategic priorities. This in turn enabled the agency's CD work to be integrated into their structure, with Board and program-level processes that support relevant community action. Key structural innovations included creating a Social Action Committee of the Board, and standing cross-program action committees discussing systemic issues and linked to the Board.

Solution:

The Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre Board created a Social Action Committee to act as an advocacy voice within the agency and the community. This committee involves staff and Board members, and has the following mandate: "On behalf of the Board, the Social Action Committee remains current on social justice and advocacy issues to inform the Board; writes letters, attends deputations and meetings; reviews requests for actions or campaigns; and identifies and recommends advocacy initiatives".

The Social Action Committee receives support from the Executive Director. The Committee engages in advocacy, fundraising and campaigning and letter writing. Further, in collaboration with staff the Committee develops outcomes and indicators for the agency's Strategic Priorities.

Through the Social Action Committee the Board is better positioned to engage in discussions about systemic issues, and to support or endorse relevant campaigns and associated community-based mobilizing.

Some of the letters the Social Action Committee has written on behalf of the agency respond to inflammatory comments made by politicians, address concerns about policies, and advocate for services. Key issues the Committee has worked on include advocacy regarding the rights of residents without legal status and promoting poverty reduction.

In addition to the Social Action Committee, Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre has established three other issue action committees at the program level

which provide opportunities for staff from various programs and department to identify common areas for action that address systemic concerns. The three program level action committees are focused on newcomer/non-status population, crisis support and intervention, and cultural competence.

Other examples of Board practice supporting CD include:

- LAMP's (Lakeshore Area Multiservice Partnership) Board member selection process reinforces key CD values and systemic analysis by exploring prospective Board Members' commitment to the "determinants of health" before they are nominated to the Board. The determinants of health link structural factors of poverty, inequality and discrimination to individual health outcomes.
- St. Christopher House and North York Community House have recently established or revised advocacy guidelines for their Board of Directors.

Results:

Linking CD work to board structures is an essential part of a CD positive organization. Through these systems Boards remains informed and can be more responsive to relevant social justice and advocacy issues.

Committee that support Board and staff members to work together help reduce hierarchical barriers and promote a greater understanding and appreciation of people's diverse roles and strategic contributions to advancing social change.

Agencies with explicit Board engagement in CD can develop a clearer direction regarding the systemic issues they focus on and how they relate current programs and community needs.

Staff from different programs have a greater opportunity to work together, and identify gaps and areas for collaboration. Through this process staff also develop an increased awareness and commitment to strategic priorities.

Reflections/Conclusions:

A Social Action Committee at the Board level is an excellent vehicle for staff and Board members to discuss how programs and services might address broader community concerns; to identify how the agency can act on strategic directions; to discuss how programs are engaged in preventative action; and to determine how programs/services can better work together to meet client needs.

Contact:

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Resources:

Appendix: Social Action Committee Terms of Reference

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Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre

Social Action Committee Terms of Reference

Approved October 17, 2007

Goal/Purpose

The purpose of the Social Action Committee is as follows:

- To educate ourselves and the Board about social justice issues,
- To speak on behalf of the Board on matters of social justice,
- To ensure the Board and the Centre remain informed about concerns in the DPNC community by soliciting information from the community, and
- To help to establish the Centre's Strategic Priorities in matters of social justice

Accountability/Reporting Relationships

The Social Action Committee makes recommendations to the Board of Directors and carries out tasks as assigned by the Board of Directors.

The Committee shall report via its Chair to the Board of Directors.

The Chairperson shall submit a verbal report to the Board of Directors at Board meetings and will submit written reports on an as needed basis.

Membership

The membership of the Social Action Committee shall consist of the following:

A Chairperson appointed by the members of the Committee,

- The Executive Director (ex-officio – non voting), and
- Such other persons as the Social Action Committee and the Board may nominate, and who are volunteers at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre or community members.

Responsibilities/Duties

The Social Action Committee shall:

- Remain current and inform the Board about social justice and advocacy issues (e.g., funding, health and social services),
- Recommend advocacy initiatives to the Board,
- Take action on behalf of the Board (i.e., letter writing, deputing, meetings with decision makers),
- Monitor the Centre's Strategic Priorities on matters of social justice,
- Attend SAC meetings and
- Complete tasks as agreed

Meetings

The Social Action Committee shall meet at the call of the Chair. The Chair and the members of the committee shall determine the number of meetings. The Social Action Committee shall also meet upon the request of the Executive Committee.

Minutes

Minutes of each meeting shall be prepared and kept on file at the Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre and such minutes shall be presented to the Board upon request.

Quorum and Decision-making

The committee will attempt to make decisions by consensus. If no consensus can be reached the discussion should be taken to the Board. If the matter requires an urgent resolution, committee decisions must be approved by a majority of committee members.

Review

The Committee shall review these terms of reference at least annually in the fall of each year.