PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STATEMENT
Building and Sustaining a Culture of Innovation

BACKGROUND

The environment of today’s association is filled with rapid and disruptive changes that can have a profound impact on the value experience for association members. Changes in the political, legal, social and technological fabric of our society present both opportunities and threats to how associations plan and operate to meet the value expectations of members. More than just creativity, systematic and sustainable innovation involves making meaningful changes to improve products, processes, or organizational effectiveness and to create new value for members. To remain competitive in this environment, it is important for association leaders to create the conditions that foster innovation in a governance and operating environment that is risk adverse, often undercapitalized and which frequently lacks leadership continuity.

POLICY POSITION

Innovation takes place in many forms and can occur on various levels. It can be large in scope or a small adjustment resulting in something new or a simple process improvement. The Association Forum believes that associations and the executives who lead them should be prepared to innovate. This involves creating a culture that embraces the innovation mindset. Employee professional development should include a deep knowledge of member expectations and needs so they can develop superior member solutions and training on how to notice trends, anticipate threats and discover hidden opportunities. Associations must develop a systematic process for generating, developing, testing and implementing innovation so the organization can process an abundance of great ideas. Lastly, associations must build the confidence of the governing body in the abilities of its staff organization so they can be nimble to get new initiatives done.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES FOR THE GOVERNING BODY

- Define expectations of innovation by supporting creativity and expecting a culture that encourages the free flow of ideas
- Require innovation be integrated throughout the organization’s operations, that it be continuously evaluated and results be communicated
- Ensure the organization supports strategic experimentation and testing of new ideas by allowing for some strategic blunders
- Commit funding for ongoing innovative initiatives

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES FOR ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONAL

- Observe the world like anthropologists; monitoring trends, and determining how it applies to their organization and their members
- Ask provocative questions and challenge assumptions
- Foster diversity in staff recruitment to create a culture that benefits from new experiences and different perspectives
- Look for opportunities to solve problems members are encountering which haven’t been fully or successfully addressed
- Look for opportunities to improve quality or eliminate waste
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RESOURCE LIST

Innovation is Everybody’s Business How to Make Yourself Indispensable in Today’s Hypercompetitive World by Robert B. Tucker; John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011

Three Rules for Innovation Teams by Harry West; Harvard Business Review www.hbr.org (http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/03/making_innovation_teams_even_m.html)

4 Qualities of an Innovation Association by Stephanie Schall; Associations Now (http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=53452)

How Innovative Leaders Maintain Their Edge by Hal Gregersen, Jeff Dyer; Forbes www.forbes.com (http://www.forbes.com/sites/innovatorsdna/2012/09/05/how-innovative-leaders-maintain-their-edge/)

Confronting the “no” in Innovation by Harry Hertz; www.nist.gov (http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/archive/insights_0212.cfm)

Innovation is a Discipline, Not a Cliché by Scott Anthony; Harvard Business Review www.hbr.org (http://blogs.hbr.org/anthony/2012/05/four_innovation_misconceptions.html)


