

Tom Little's **BIG IDEAS**

for Non-Profits

In This Edition

December 7 to 11, 2020

Diversity And Inclusion – Move Forward With A Policy

Non-profits can't be diverse and inclusive without a framework. Here is one for starters!

Emails... We Get Emails

Two new EDs were in touch this week to talk planning. Good on them for understanding its importance to non-profits.

Faith in the Next Generation

Tom cites an example of a teenager who has made Canada proud and won herself a \$250,000 US scholarship!

The Acknowledgement Disconnect

Volunteers want to be recognized in different ways than we might think. Learn more!

At CMCS, COVID means we Zoom more and travel less. Our work, including strategic planning, Board training and executive recruitment goes on. All continues to be possible.

Diversity and Inclusion – Move forward with a Policy

The Story

A number of BIG Ideas readers have been asking for resources related to diversity and inclusion at the Board of Directors level of non-profits. Diversity and inclusion are important issues that have gained significant profile on the world stage of late.

The Skinny

As with other non-profit issues, the starting point for diversity and inclusion is having a policy. Here is a sample I have taken from a book titled: “Building Inclusive Governance: A toolkit for not-for-profit boards”, from onBoard Canada through the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education, Ryerson University. The book can be downloaded for free.

This policy is intended to provide a framework for inclusion to promote diversity and inclusion in the board of [insert organization name]. The Board of Directors of [insert organization name] believes in the benefits diversity brings and it recognizes that diversity of thought contributes to the formation of a strong organization. Having a board composed of people with diverse skills, experience, backgrounds and perspectives can contribute to:

- *a robust understanding of opportunities, issues and risks*
- *inclusion of different concepts, ideas and relationships*
- *enhanced decision-making and dialogue*
- *heightened capacity for oversight of the organization and its governance*
- *sustainability of the organization*

For purposes of board composition, diversity includes, but is not limited to:

- *skills and experience*
- *gender*
- *race*
- *culture/ethnicity*
- *sexual orientation*
- *income*
- *ability*
- *age*
- *language*

The board will make good use of these differences and distinctions among individuals to determine the optimum composition of the board. All board appointments must collectively reflect the diverse nature of the environment in which the organization operates and be made on merit, in the context of the skills, experience, independence and knowledge which the board requires to be effective. The board is committed to ensure gender diversity and to diligently act to effect change. This policy applies to the

board of [insert organization name]. It is not intended to apply to employee diversity, which is covered by a separate policy created for that purpose.

Principles

Diversity of thought is enhanced through intentional effort. [Insert organization name] will be intentional in ensuring diversity and inclusion. Credibility is enhanced through board and leadership diversity. There is a significant relationship between board and leadership diversity, therefore [insert organization name] will pursue a well-rounded, diverse, and credible approach to ensuring board and leadership diversity.

The board values a diversity of voices and sees the value that they can contribute to creative and innovative thinking within the organization. To ensure the diversity strategy of the organization is viewed as a legitimate process, all appointments will be made on merit. However, the board acknowledges that there are many different skills and knowledges that will enhance the board and its decision-making and so understands that merit is relative to the particular needs of the board. Being transparent and public about the board diversity and inclusion strategy is a helpful step in holding the board accountable, setting an example and providing thought leadership in the sector. Accessibility is enhanced through a powerful collective voice. The board will balance the intent of this policy with the need to be a powerful voice for diversity in all of its forms.

Process

To achieve its diversity aspirations, the board will:

- ensure the board's composition considers the balance of skills, experience, knowledge, perspectives, independence and characteristics in alignment with the strategic needs of [insert organization name] and the environment in which it operates*
- identify suitable candidates for appointment to the board, considering candidates on merit against objective criteria, and with due regard for the benefits of diversity on the team*
- maintain an ongoing list of potential candidates*
- monitor and report annually, in the corporate governance section of [insert organization name]'s annual report and on its website its progress with respect to this policy.*

The BIG Idea

The proof is always in the pudding, so having a policy is only the first step. My BIG Idea for this week is to ensure your Board has an up-to-date policy on diversity and inclusion but goes beyond that to making the policy work. As with other policies, this is the challenge but with it comes the reward in the form of an even better organization.

Emails... We Get Emails



Reason for Hope In 2021 – Part 1

I was contacted last week by two people from various parts of Ontario who recently joined new organizations as Executive Directors, assuming that senior position for the first time.

What was reassuring in my discussions with both was that the first thing they wanted to do in their new positions was to create a long term plan.

It took me a number of years as a manager before I understood the importance of planning. If I remember correctly, my enlightenment came not from my university studies but from a book called “Manage More By Doing Less”. I was especially attracted by the back cover which showed the author at his desk with his feet up. That concept appealed to me. If managing more by doing less could get me there, I was all in.

One of the tenets of that book had to do with the need for planning, and once I started developing plans for my area of responsibility, I understood why. It made life so much easier. No more ad hoc decision-making, no more surprises, no more crises (well, almost never anyway). Soon life was good and my feet were up, all because we had a plan.

I can’t tell you why planning is not a prerequisite for every organization, regardless of size and purpose. Really, there could be a law about it: you can’t have a non-profit unless you have a plan. But these two new EDs had already drunk the Kool-Aid, and I give them credit. It’s a sign of real leadership.

This Week's TomBit



Reason for Hope in 2021 – Part 2

Some people despair the next generation. I am not one of them.

For those of you needing reassurance, look no further than Maryam Tsegaye, an Alberta high school student who is the first Canadian to win the Breakthrough Junior Challenge and a cool \$250,000 US post-secondary scholarship, plus \$50,000 for her teacher and other perks.

All Maryam had to do was grasp an important scientific theory, concept or principle, then create an inventive video to explain it, in three minutes or less. Entrants were encouraged to keep in mind that “video is a dynamic visual medium – using diagrams, simulations, physical demonstrations etc. is a lot more effective than standing in front of a blackboard talking”. Further, they were advised that their videos would be judged on engagement, illumination, creativity and difficulty.

Sound easy? Well sure, especially since Maryam decided to explain quantum tunnelling, which the website LiveScience explains as follows:

“Quantum tunneling is a phenomenon where an [atom](#) or a subatomic particle can appear on the opposite side of a barrier that should be impossible for the particle to penetrate. It's as if you were walking and encountered a 10-foot-tall (3 meters) wall extending as far as the eye can see. Without a ladder or Spider-man climbing skills, the wall would make it impossible for you to continue.

However, in the quantum world, it is rare, but possible, for an atom or electron to simply "appear" on the other side, as if a tunnel had been dug through the wall. "Quantum tunneling is one of the most puzzling of quantum phenomena," said study co-author Aephraim Steinberg, co-director of the Quantum

Information Science Program at Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. "And it is fantastic that we're now able to actually study it in this way."

Oh, and one thing I forgot to mention: Maryam had competition. As in 5,600 other participants. Piece of cake, no?

If you too want to understand quantum tunnelling, or appreciate how smart Maryam and the coming generation are, or both, take three minutes and watch Maryam's video:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/fort-mcmurray-maryam-tsegaye-khan-1.5829840>

or

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_5Nfeje8rI&feature=emb_rel_end

And be sure to catch the ending.

Blast from the Past

Blast from the Past is a selection of previous BIG Ideas articles that you may not have read, or if you did, may have forgotten how helpful and insightful (i.e. brilliantly written) they were. This article is from 2018.



The Acknowledgement Disconnect

If you use volunteers, you need to know that there is a big disconnect between how volunteers want to be recognized, and how most non-profit organizations go about providing it. And it may be that there are lessons here that can be applied to recognizing front line staff as well.

The “2013 Volunteer Recognition Study”, conducted by Volunteer Canada and funded by Investors Groups, showed that 80% of volunteers want to be thanked by hearing about how their work made a difference to the organization and 70% by being thanked in person, and on an ongoing, informal basis.

Compare this with the recognition practices of organizations, where 60% use banquets and formal gatherings and 50% some form of public acknowledgement. The study showed that only a few volunteers wanted to be recognized at a public forum.

If current practices don’t cut it, how should volunteers be acknowledged? The study concludes that there are a variety of ways to say thanks that resonate with the recipient, but that each volunteer should be acknowledged individually, according to her/his own preferences. “Volunteer recognition is a continuum that requires a variety of initiatives. It’s important to try to offer different forms of recognition (formal and informal), customized for different individuals.”

Other criteria apply to acknowledgement as well. The study suggests that volunteers want recognition that is sincere and authentic. It concludes that people appreciate a personalized thank you. But pay heed to the demographic of your volunteer pool: “Younger people expressed a higher preference for more concrete expressions of recognition – certificates, letters of reference, small gifts and nomination for awards.”

Looking beyond acknowledgement of impact and receipt of “thank-you’s”, volunteers of all ages like the idea of getting together socially on an informal basis. The point isn’t to spend a lot of money on the event, but to allow people to meet their peers and enjoy time away from other aspects of their lives.

To help you uncover personal preferences, and to custom-tailor your approach for each volunteer, *Volunteer Canada* has developed a free “Volunteer Recognition Tool”, which you can learn more about https://volunteer.ca/vdemo/rec_tool.html

The tool will identify a volunteer’s preferences regarding recognition, based on the input that person provides. You can use this information to plan meaningful and effective recognition activities.

If some of this sounds familiar, it should. A few weeks ago, I wrote about the importance of acknowledgement of staff performance. At that time, I noted that acknowledgement should be:

- As Soon As Possible - Timing is important; don't delay praise
- As Sincere As Possible - Do it because you're truly appreciative
- As Specific As Possible - Give details of the achievement
- As Personal As Possible - Do it in person (or a handwritten note)
- As Positive As Possible - Don't mix in criticism
- As Proactive As Possible - Don't wait for perfect performance

So, my BIG Idea for this week is to build a culture of acknowledgement for volunteers and to use what you learn to enhance your approach to staff. Identify a range of recognition options and choose those that appeal to each person individually. Bear in mind that your staff may be like the volunteers in the research study, and not be looking for the kind of recognition you have been providing. Be aware too that your demographic will influence what resonates and therefore the options you choose.

Current CMCS Clients

We are pleased to be working with York Region Centre for Community Safety, Community Living Thunder Bay, Canopy Support Services (formerly Tri-County Community Support Services), Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Community Visions and Networking (Quinte), Chatham-Kent Family Health Team and Community Living St. Catharines. Recent clientele includes Literacy Network Northeast, Durham Youth Services, Community Living Trent Highlands and Mill Creek Care Centre.

Testimonials

On behalf the Board of Directors, we would like to thank you very much for facilitating the work of creating a new strategic plan for our network. It was a pleasure to work with you and everything flowed smoothly. It is great to have this project complete! I hope we will get the opportunity to work together again in the future.

Rita Delaurier, Executive Director, Literacy Network Northeast

Thank you so much (for your Board training)! Looking forward to the notes and your presentation was very well received! Lots of growth happening with the board and you helped steer more of that in the right direction. Really enjoy working with you and will keep you in mind for my other boards.

Natasha Cosulich Vemb, Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Clarington

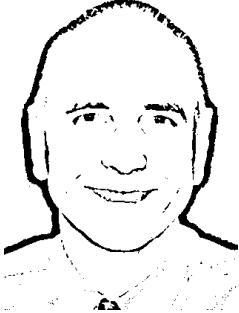
Thank you again to you and Nancy for all the work, dedication and effort put into this Operations Review. We made the right choice in hiring you to do this project and on behalf of the board of directors, I express our deep gratitude.

Roz Werner-Arce, Board Chair, Durham Youth Services

Our Strategic Plan is moving along better than I could have imagined. I chair the group of around 20 Board and staff who have been meeting monthly for the past 6 months and plan to continue through the fall. Great enthusiasm from all involved and much is being accomplished already, particularly on renewed focus on our Mission and Vision. Thanks again for getting us off on the right foot!

Frank Moore, Board Chair, Community Living Central Huron

About Tom Little and Nancy Collins



Tom Little and Nancy Collins are the principals of CMCS.

In addition to consulting for many years, Tom has been Executive Director of a large human service organization, experience he brings to the table when working with his non-profit clients. In his younger days he was lucky enough to be part of three Canadian champion hockey teams while attending the University of Toronto.

Nancy's background includes a degree from Wilfrid Laurier and working at a downtown Toronto law firm. In her spare time, at least when there is no pandemic, she plays goal in women's hockey and catcher in summer slo-pitch. A life-long Leafs fan, she no longer apologizes for her unwavering commitment, given their resurrection in recent years. Now if they could just win a playoff round!



Free Resources From CMCS

We offer a range of free resources to help non-profits be better. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca

- Board Duties
- Policy Board Model
- Board Meeting Minutes
- Board Decision-Making Checklist
- Board Evaluation Form
- Dealing with Risk
- List of Possible Board Policies
- Board Recruitment (Stop the BIG LIE)
- Management Principles
- Member and Director Qualifications
- The Importance of Planning
- Canada's Great Non-Profit Websites
- Transitioning to the New Not-for-Profit Corporations Act

Tom's Book For Boards of Directors



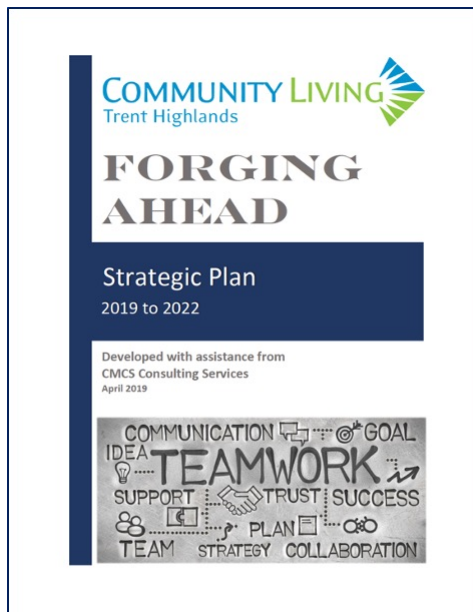
One hundred and ninety-pages. Thirty-six *BIG Ideas*. Thirteen of them are *The BIGGEST of the BIG*, ideas Tom's experience says are critical to any non-profit. Then come twenty-three *BIG Ideas*, more ways to enhance the governance of your organization.

You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

Tom Little's BIG Ideas is formatted as a work book, so it can be used on a continuous basis by the Directors. It is easy to read and has a fun quality your Board members will appreciate.

Just \$40 plus HST and shipping. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca.

More About CMCS



At CMCS, our specialty is strategic planning. Since the start of 2018, the following 14 organizations have completed their strategic plans with help from CMCS:

- Kenora Association for Community Living
- Community Living Dryden-Sioux Lookout
- Community Living Trent Highlands
- Elmira District Community Living
- Literacy Northwest
- Durham Region Child Care Forum
- Tollendale Village
- Centennial College School of Transportation
- York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee
- Autism Home Base Durham
- Canoe FM Community Radio
- Toronto Island Residential Community Trust
- York Region Centre for Community Safety
- Literacy Network Northeast

We provide Board training that comes with a bonus: A Board action plan developed by participants based on the discussion.

Tom wrote his book for non-profit Boards, which you can buy and use as an ongoing resource. We are great facilitators and can help develop agendas for Board and management retreats.

Much of our past work has been in the human service sector, especially disability. But we have assisted in other sectors such as community colleges, local workforce authorities, family health teams, Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Ways and violence against women. We have even assisted a community radio station.

We have built our reputation on producing quality products that have great content and are appealing to look at.