

12. Support Services

Introduction

IT

Office Management

Legal Requirements

Management and Involvement

Outsourcing

Further Resources

Introduction

Support services are the practical operational areas that make the animal protection work possible. If these areas do not work well, the work of the entire organisation can be frustrated. Most animal protection societies require their support services to be as effective as possible, at the lowest possible cost. Ideally, the delivery of support services should not only meet every organisational need, but also be unobtrusive.

In fact, animal protection society managers often have problems in managing support service departments. This can be due to a tendency to concentrate on programme areas, or because they have little or no expertise in support service delivery. These problems can be remedied with training, commitment and application. They can also be minimised by appointing dedicated, skilled staff in these areas (although it can be difficult to appoint appropriate staff if you do not understand the work and its requirements yourself). Another option is to ‘outsource’ (contract out) these areas, or at least IT and financial services.

Problems that can occur with ineffective management of support services include: -

- Recruitment of ineffective staff
- Lack of training and development
- De-motivation of support service staff (especially feeling neglected or isolated from the main work of the organisation)
- Programme decision-making without due consideration and planning for impact upon support services
- Breakdown of certain support services, hampering programme work
- Overload and burn out in support service departments
- Development of bureaucratic systems in support services
- Recruitment of too many – or too few - staff in support services, due to lack of management understanding of their role

If they are not well managed, support service departments can create their own ‘kingdoms’ and associated bureaucracies. Whilst a level of bureaucracy is probably necessary in a service delivery organisation, in order to ensure consistent standards, campaigning organisation function better with minimal bureaucracy. This is because bureaucracy can stifle creativity, which is vital in a campaigning organisation. Ideally, bureaucracy should be minimised to facilitate the already difficult tasks of ‘front line’ staff.

IT

Information Technology (IT) is becoming increasingly important to the management of

animal protection societies. As with any support function, it can add efficiency and save valuable funds if well managed. Increasingly, IT solutions can also help towards mission fulfilment.

The whole work of the organisation can (and does!) grind to a halt these days if the IT system collapses. On the other hand, efficient modern IT systems can: -

- Assist with an exciting Web presence for educational, campaigning/lobbying (cyber activism), service delivery (e.g. re-homing centre) and fundraising purposes
- Permit e-mail list systems for mass communication with selected groups
- Permit sharing of all files, images, artwork and video through intranet (nationally and internationally) – for offices and networks
- Deal with accounts and fundraising data in an integrated software system
- Automate many previously manual processes, freeing up valuable staff time
- Permit automatic lobbying using specially designed software
- Run shelter management operations, using purpose built software systems

A reliable IT department or service is critical to the future success of the animal protection society. To achieve this, a manager needs a broad understanding of IT, and a good choice of IT Manager or contractor. If he/she is still building knowledge in this area of the organisation's activities, then any recruitment should be undertaken only with specialist advice and assistance. After all, nobody is able to judge suitability for a job that they do not understand?

Once a suitable IT professional is involved, a forward-looking IT strategy will help to chart the course towards the future.

Financial Management

The Finance and Accounts department is responsible for a variety of functions including:

- Budgeting and financial planning
- Payroll
- Payments and banking
- Credit control
- Investments and reserves
- Accounts (bookkeeping, financial reporting and management accounts)
- Audits

It is surprising how both standards and numbers of staff employed vary from organisation to organisation! Any manager would be well advised to look into this area, as it could lead to vast improvements in service and/or staff savings.

It is usually the responsibility of the Board to establish an investment policy for the organisation and, as with fundraising, this should ensure a mixed and balanced portfolio to deliver both security and growth. However, investment income can also be affected greatly by the day-to-day management of funds by the Accounts Department. Situations occur where enormous amounts are held in a non-interest bearing account, in 'readiness' – missing significant amounts of interest or capital growth. The opposite also happens - whereby insufficient funds are left in accessible/current accounts, necessitating the removal of long-term investments (with financial penalties) in order to meet running costs such as salaries! Such situations can be avoided with effective financial planning.

Managers can keep abreast of the organisation's financial situation through a number of routine measures, which are not 'rocket science'! These include:-

- Phased budgets (breaking budgets into monthly forecasts)
- Formal budget review procedures for any changes to agreed budget, including likely overspend
- Regular (e.g. monthly) financial returns, including expenditure and income against budget and comparison with previous year
- Regular (e.g. monthly) investment reviews, including cash forecasts (cursory if no significant change, to overhaul significant changes).

Most important, however, is a general understanding and overview of the finance and accounts function, together with regular review meetings with the department.

Office Management

As with accounts and IT, staff do not give a thought to their surroundings if they are efficient and suitable. Cramped inefficient surroundings can add enormously to frustration.

It is important to have one individual responsible for office management. If nobody is given the responsibility, then so many irritating things will go undone – despite the many lists and job allocations! It is counter-productive for programme staff to be diverted into support functions. They have too much to worry about without this, and this is quite simply not where their talents and motivations lie. An individual with responsibility for discharging office management duties in an efficient and cost-saving manner will be able to take pride in achieving these aims, and thereby helping the organisation to achieve its mission in the way he/she is best able.

The creation of an 'Office Manual' of procedures is an excellent discipline. This not only helps all staff – including new recruits and volunteers - to familiarise themselves with routine procedures, but it also provides an excellent opportunity for management to review all office procedures to ensure that all support services are effective and minimise bureaucracy.

Legal Requirement

Every organisation should make a point of researching – and following – the legal requirements its country (or its Charity regulatory body) imposes. Legal advice should be sought, if in doubt. This will include aspects such as company law, charity law, financial law, health and safety requirements and employment law.

Management and Involvement

There are also complex problems of a 'softer' human resource management nature as regards the management of support services. The reality is that some support service staff will be 'mission driven', whereas others will be motivated by other factors, especially financial and social. Different management styles will be needed for these very differently motivated staff. Actual needs can only be determined by knowing the staff involved (and in effect their 'psychological contract').

There is also a real need to involve relevant support staff in organisational strategy and operational planning. This is for both practical and motivational reasons. On the practical side, both strategy and operational planning are strongly influenced by financial and

technological factors. An organisation's finances and IT capability are both vital resource considerations. IT is central to modern campaigning methods. It is also a vital part of networking and maintaining contact with national and international collaborators. On the motivational side, support service staff who are mission driven will gain enormous motivation from being involved in organisational strategy and operations (providing their involvement is more than tokenism). They also frequently have a different perspective and range of skills, which can be extremely useful in the process (with their involvement avoiding pitfalls like 'group think' (i.e. the common situation where members tend to agree, as they have similar perspectives, and do not want to be marginalised from the group)).

It may also be beneficial to involve key support staff in evaluations of major projects. Accounts can provide input/thought of costs and cost effectiveness, and IT staff can evaluate appropriate use of IT.

Outsourcing

One very central consideration to the mission driven organisation is whether to outsource support services? This can result in the organisation being able to 'stick to the knitting', as recommended by management guru Tom Peters in his seminal book: 'In Search of Excellence'. The clear advantage to this is being able to concentrate fully on mission achievement throughout the organisation – giving focus and direction. A number of specialist companies have been built up that concentrate on support service delivery to NGOs. They are familiar with the NGO environment and its needs, and because they specialise can deliver effective and cost conscious services. This can solve the management dilemma of how to select and manage staff in these specialist roles. There is no need to motivate or manage, as this is outsourced. The service provider can simply be replaced if the service does not meet expectations.

The main advantages of outsourcing are: -

- Leaving the organisation free to concentrate on achieving its mission
- Contract companies are specialists in their field, and can be consulted and (usually) trusted to deliver what the organisation (as customer) wants
- It overcomes problem with how to recruit and manage staff in specialist roles
- Contract companies can sometimes be cheaper, as they provide such service to a large number of clients (causing 'economies of scale')
- The contracting company can simply be replaced if the arrangement does not work out (without usual staff dismissal procedures)

The main disadvantages are: -

- Loss of control and flexibility with managing support services
- Could be more costly in the longer-term (costs rising once customers rely on the company)
- Difficulty of managing professional companies (not wanting to question professional judgement)
- Difficulty of knowing whether you are being cheated

If the organisation decides to outsource, it minimises risks in a number of ways, including:

- - Prepares a good contract with the company, using legal advice to ensure that its concerns are covered, and that it is free to terminate the agreement if not content at any time

- Requests regular reports/updates (well designed to give an overview), in order to monitor the service being delivered
- Regularly reviews the situation (including competitors costs) and immediately takes up any problems with the contractor in order to resolve these or finish the agreement

Further Resources

Web Sites

Internet Use: NGOs

<http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/internet-ngos.html>

NGO Networking

<http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/ngo-networking.html>

NGOs Directories (electronic)

<http://www.etown.edu/vl/ngos.html>

Online advocacy

<http://www.wiredstrategies.com/inter-sample.htm>

Non-profit and NGO finance

<http://www.exinfm.com/nonprofit.html>

Management accounting for NGOs

<http://www.mango.org.uk/>

Financial management for NGOs

<http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/financial-mgmt.html>

NGO management courses worldwide

<http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/ngo-curriculum.html>

Books

Delivering IT Strategies (Computer Weekly Professional)

By: Leslie Willcocks, Nancy Olson, Peter Petherbridge

Publisher: Butterworth-Heinemann

ISBN: 075064821X

Financial Management for Development: Accounting and Finance for the Non-specialist in Development Organisations (INTRAC NGO Management & Policy S.)

By: John Cammack

Publisher: INTRAC

ISBN: 1897748523

Financial Management for Charities and Not for Profit Organisations (Charity Management S.)

By: Keith Manley

Publisher: ICSA Publishing Ltd (Institute of Chartered Secretaries & Administrators)

ISBN: 1872860524

A Practical Guide to Financial Management: For Charities and Voluntary Organisations

By: Kate Sayer

Publisher: Directory of Social Change

ISBN: 1873860846

Charity Bookkeeping and Financial Management: A Step-by-Step Guide for Finance Workers and Treasurers in Charities and Voluntary Organisations

By: Sam Karuhanga

Publisher: Oak Park Consultancy

ISBN: 0953858103