WHAT WE HEARD

Finishing Strong: Confidence and Courage in Turbulent Waters

Presented by Tracey Lorenson, CivicExcellence
11-28-2024

Session Overview

The session, hosted by AVICC President Ben Geselbracht and facilitated by Tracey Lorenson of CivicExcellence, focused on strategies for effective governance and leadership in challenging times. The aim was to equip participants with tools to finish their terms strong, despite the turbulent environment.

Key Points Discussed

1. **Introduction and Acknowledgements**:
   - Ben Geselbracht welcomed participants and acknowledged the traditional territories of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.
   - The session was inspired by a previous successful workshop on fostering a culture of engagement and respect.

2. **Engagement and Participation**:
   - Tracey Lorenson emphasized the importance of active participation through chat, Q&A, and breakout sessions.
   - Participants were encouraged to introduce themselves and engage in discussions.

3. **Governance and Leadership**:
   - Tracey discussed the concept of governance as a verb, focusing on the actions and decisions made in real-time.
   - The importance of maintaining high-quality decision-making and building trust within the community was highlighted.

4. **Challenges and Risks**:
   - Participants identified various challenges, including public impatience, burnout, fiscal pressures, and social media incivility.
   - The need for councils and boards to be deliberate and courageous in their decision-making was emphasized.

5. **Breakout Sessions**:
   - Participants discussed the biggest risks in their communities and strategies to address them.
   - Key risks included changing public priorities, fiscal pressures, and staff capacity issues.

6. **Celebrating Successes**:
   - Tracey encouraged participants to share and celebrate their successes.
   - Strategies for celebrating included public acknowledgments, social gatherings, and regular check-ins.

7. **Decision-Making Framework**:
   - Tracey suggested using a policy framework to guide decision-making, focusing on alignment with strategic goals, community impact, and resource availability.

8. **CAO and Governance Check-Ins**:
   - The importance of regular check-ins with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and governance reviews was discussed.
   - Feedback should be constructive and aimed at continuous improvement.

9. **Preparing for Elections**:
   - Tracey advised councils and boards to prepare for elections by building momentum and focusing on long-term goals.
   - Encouraging diverse and qualified candidates to run was highlighted as crucial.

10. **Trust and Collaboration**:
    - Building and maintaining trust within the council or board and with the community was emphasized as essential for effective governance.
    - Collaboration and mutual respect among council or board members were encouraged.

Key Issues Identified

1. Public Priorities and Impatience
Issue: Changing public priorities and growing impatience among community members. **Details**: As communities evolve, the priorities of residents can shift rapidly. This can lead to frustration and impatience, especially if they feel their concerns are not being addressed promptly. Managing these changing expectations requires effective communication and engagement strategies to keep the public informed and involved in decision-making processes.

2. Burnout
Issue: Burnout among council/ board members and staff. **Details**: The demands of governance, especially in turbulent times, can lead to burnout. This is exacerbated by the need to constantly address new challenges and maintain high levels of performance. Strategies to mitigate burnout include setting realistic goals, ensuring adequate support and resources, and promoting a healthy work-life balance.

3. Fiscal Pressures
Issue: Financial constraints and budget pressures. **Details**: Many councils and boards face significant fiscal pressures, which can limit their ability to implement new projects or maintain existing services. This requires careful financial planning, prioritization of essential services, and exploring alternative funding sources such as grants or public-private partnerships.

4. Social Media and Incivility
Issue: The impact of social media and a lack of civility in public discourse. **Details**: Social media can amplify negative sentiments and incivility, making it challenging for councils and boards to maintain constructive dialogue with the community. Addressing this issue involves setting clear guidelines for online engagement, promoting respectful communication, and actively managing the board or council's social media presence.

5. Staff Capacity
Issue: Limited staff capacity to meet ambitious board and council goals. **Details**: There is often a mismatch between the ambitions of the council/board and the capacity of the staff to deliver on these goals. This can lead to overwork and decreased morale among staff. Solutions include realistic goal-setting, prioritizing key projects, and ensuring staff have the necessary resources and support.

6. Community Trust and Engagement
Issue: Building and maintaining trust within the community. **Details**: Trust is essential for effective governance, but it can be fragile. Councils and Boards need to be transparent, accountable, and responsive to community concerns. Regular communication, public consultations, and demonstrating tangible results can help build and sustain trust.

7. Governance and Decision-Making
Issue: Ensuring high-quality governance and decision-making processes. **Details**: Effective governance requires clear processes and frameworks for decision-making. Boards and Councils should regularly review and refine their governance practices, ensure alignment with strategic goals, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

8. Preparing for Elections
Issue: Navigating the lead-up to elections and ensuring a smooth transition. **Details**: The period leading up to elections can be politically charged, with increased scrutiny and pressure. Councils and Boards should focus on maintaining momentum, achieving key milestones, and preparing for a smooth handover to the next council. Encouraging diverse and qualified candidates to run is also crucial for a healthy democratic process.

9. Collaboration and Mutual Respect
Issue: Fostering collaboration and mutual respect among council/ board members. **Details**: Effective collaboration requires mutual respect and a willingness to work together despite differences. Councils/ boards should invest in team-building activities, establish clear communication channels, and promote a culture of respect and inclusivity.

10. Strategic Planning and Execution
Issue: Aligning strategic planning with execution. **Details**: Councils and Boards need to ensure that their strategic plans are realistic and achievable. This involves regular check-ins, setting clear priorities, and being disciplined about new initiatives. Effective execution of strategic plans is key to achieving long-term goals and demonstrating progress to the community.

Take-Away Actions:

These actions aim to enhance governance, improve decision-making, and ensure a strong finish to the term.

1. **Focus on Governance**:
   - Treat governance as an active process, making deliberate and courageous decisions.
   - Maintain high-quality decision-making and build community trust.

2. **Address Challenges**:
   - Identify and address key risks in the community, such as fiscal pressures and public impatience.
   - Develop strategies to manage these challenges effectively.

3. **Celebrate Successes**:
   - Regularly acknowledge and celebrate achievements.
   - Use public acknowledgments and social gatherings to highlight successes.

4. **Use a Decision-Making Framework**:
   - Implement a policy framework to guide decisions, focusing on key policy questions such as: strategic alignment,resource availability, complexity etc..
   - Ensure decisions are well-informed and consider community impact.

5. **Conduct Regular Check-Ins**:
   - Schedule regular check-ins with the CAO and governance reviews.
   - Provide constructive feedback aimed at continuous improvement.

6. **Prepare for Elections**:
   - Build momentum by focusing on long-term goals and preparing for the next election.
   - Encourage diverse and qualified candidates to run for office.

7. **Build Trust and Collaboration**:
   - Foster trust and collaboration within the council or board and with the community.
   - Demonstrate mutual respect and work together towards common goals.