Organizational revitalization: A case study of a leisure professional association creating an action plan for change

Part 2

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Chapter Summary

In 2016 North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association (NCRPA), a leisure and recreation professional association, implemented an organizational change with the hopes of becoming more relevant and vital to recreation professionals. In the Innovative Leisure Practices: Cases as Conduits between Theory and Practice – Volume 2 (2016), James and Weddell documented the initial process leading to organizational change. The NCRPA Board president tasked an Ad Hoc committee to read the book, “Race for Relevance” (2011) and make recommendations to revitalize the organization. For more details on the beginning process, see James and Weddell’s (2016) Case study “Implementing organizational change: A case study of a leisure professional association’s structural change, to remain relevant to its members as well as in its support of the profession.” Organizational change includes more than making recommendations to a board and having a unanimous board vote to implement the recommendations. Once the vote passed, the real work began. This case study continues the investigation by describing the implementation process of the recommendations leading to NCRPA organizational revitalization for 2017. The main players of innovation included the NCRPA Executive Director, its Board President, and the Executive Board as well as several committees appointed by the President. NCRPA continued to use the book “Race for Relevance” (2011) as a primer to change, requiring each committee member to read the book to understand the impact of the changes and future decisions. The impacts of this change will be examined in Part Two of this case study, revealing the building blocks from recognizing the need for change and taking recommendations to implementation to create a relevant and nimble organization that meets the needs of its members.
Learning Objectives:

After reading this Chapter, learners will be able to:

1. Review the processes that lead to organizational change.
2. Gain a greater understanding of how to structure a model of organizational change through committees.
3. Identify elements of organizational processes, recommendations, and implementations of change.

The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Professional associations have been entrenched in traditional operational models of providing services. Traditional approaches encompassed a hierarchical organizational structure encumbered with outdated processes that undermine its ability to recruit new members and serve them effectively in a changing landscape. While some members prefer the traditional approach, evidence is mounting that change is necessary. Professional association memberships have been in decline since the 1970s (Bauman, 2008; Coerver & Byers, 2013) in unison with a changing workplace demographic. Research indicates that it is imperative to draw members within first five years of their career into a professional association making recruiting the younger generation imperative to an association’s success (Myers, 2016). Millennials (more diverse than previous generations) have grown up technologically savvy in a more globalized world with economic uncertainty (Pew Research Center, 2014). This has shifted their interest in what they expect professional associations to provide them. Specifically millennials are interested in job opportunities and networking, whereas past generations were interested in industry information and ethics (Myers, 2016). At the same time, professional associations cannot ignore other generation’s professional needs. This challenge has made it especially difficult for professional associations to adapt to the changing workforce and stay relevant.

In 2015, the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association was not unlike most professional associations with a decline in membership (particularly young professionals), working with a more traditional model of operation and a recognition that radical change was necessary. In its efforts to address these issues, NCRPA initiated an organizational change process by tasking an Ad Hoc Committee to brainstorm change using the book Race for Relevance (2011) as a primer and to make organizational change recommendations to its board. “In April of 2015, the Ad Hoc Committee presented its recommendations to the NCRPA board: reducing from 28 voting board members to a five member board, going from elections of board members to nominations, as well as reviewing region structures and strategies for engaging the membership” (James & Weddell, 2016). For a full examination of the Ad Hoc committee’s process,
see James and Weddell’s (2016) Case study “Implementing organizational change: A case study of a leisure professional association’s structural change, to remain relevant to its members as well as in its support of the profession.” However, organizational change is not simply completed by making recommendations to a board. More steps were necessary to implement the recommendations. In this case, it took many volunteers and a participatory approach to creating the foundation for implementing the radical recommendations.

The Innovation

Case Context

The NCRPA Board accepted four recommendations for change: 1) decrease board size, 2) implementation of a nomination process for its board members rather than an election, 3) re-examine the association’s regional structure, and 4) create strategies for meeting membership’s professional development needs across the state. The NCRPA Board then created three committees to determine logistics of implementing the recommendations. This case study examines the process of this organizational change.

Stakeholders Involved

Once NCRPA decided to reorganize the association through a unanimous board vote, the process of change took place. The key stakeholders included the President, Ad Hoc Committee, past board, new committees, and new board. In April of 2015, the Ad Hoc Committee presented its recommendations to the NCRPA board which included reducing from 28 board members to five board members, going from elections of board members to nominations, as well as reviewing region structures and strategies for engaging the membership. These recommendations were unanimously approved by the board and thus began the road to revitalizing the association. Many changes were made through these recommendations with the intention of creating specific committees tasked to develop the action plan and provide a timeline for implementation. For example, current NCRPA board members were asked to remain in their positions for an additional year to ensure a successful transition and not lose the associations history. In addition there were new committees developed that selected old, new, and unengaged members to ensure everyone had a seat at the table. The three committee’s created included nominations, finance, and awards and citations. The Ad Hoc committees in charge of creating the NCRPA manual of procedures for the newly formed committees were lead by academics from the state institutions. This was a way to engage the Universities and faculty who support NCRPA to become more involved as well as provide a pipeline for student engagement. By having faculty lead Ad Hoc committees, it allowed a neutral leader to assist the reorganization process. The three new committees that were created had to wait on the Ad Hoc committee to meet in order to set the charge. This required strategic scheduling to ensure when committees met, they had the necessary information from another committee to create the new
responsibilities and by-laws. Over a year long process that included meetings, workshops, and member feedback a solid action plan for the future was created. In the following section, the committee outcomes are outlined with the processes and responsibilities for each.

**Approach Used and the Impact**

The approach to create a new organizational structure was purposeful and included a wide range of diverse members. Attention was paid to populate each committee with members from different regions of the state, engaged and unengaged members, as well as different size park employees, and years in the industry. This created a domino effect in regards to engaging a core group across the state and impacted other members as they learned of the new structure. These committees created a new system of protocols, by-laws, and organizations structure for the Association to meet future demands while engaging members. The new structure is outlined below by committee.

The Board of Directors was reduced to five members, with positions including: President, President-Elect, Past President, Professional Development and an At-Large member. Each year, the Nominations Committee selects two new board members. One of these positions is the President-Elect and the other is for the Professional Development or At-Large position. The President-Elect serves three years while progressing as President Elect, President and Past President. The Professional Development and At-Large positions serve two years on a staggered rotation. No board member may serve more than five consecutive years. Any vacancies are appointed by the Nominations Committee during one of the six required meetings each year. The three newly created committees are the nominations, finance, and awards and citations. Below outlines their purpose and structure, which was created during the yearlong reorganization process.

First, the purpose of the **Nominations Committee** is recruiting and locating qualified candidates to serve on the Board of Directors, Standing Committees, Region Leadership Teams; and other positions as appropriate and make recommendations to the Board of Directors for each of the association offices of President-Elect, Professional Development Member, At-Large Member and Standing Committee members. Additionally, the Nominations Committee creates and forwards other nominations, including nomination applications, forms, and materials, to the appropriate entities for reviews. The Nominations Committee has a minimum of three voting members. The maximum number of committee members shall be equal to the current number of standing committees. The chair of the Nomination Committee is elected by the committee membership.
**Annual Nominations and Selection Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year-Round</th>
<th>The Board Nomination Committee recruits and locates qualified candidates eager to serve.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Application Period (1 month long) Application materials and instructions are available on NCRPA website. Application materials are only accepted online through the website. Individuals willing to serve must complete their own application.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July-August</td>
<td>Vetting Process: All completed and qualified applicants are scored individually by all members of the Board Nomination Committee, and then scores are compiled and ranked by one designated member of the committee. Top Candidates: Two references (character and professional) are checked by designated committee member(s). Personal communication/interview with designated committee members are used to confirm willingness, motivation and ability to serve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Nomination Committee presents recommended candidates to the NCRPA Board of Directors for a vote prior to the annual state conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Board Members are installed and the Standing Committee members are recognized during the annual state conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>New Board Members and Standing Committee members take office.</td>
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Next, the **Finance Committee** is responsible for the planning and monitoring of the fiscal program – policies and procedures – of NCRPA. It is required to study the financial needs of the Association and make recommendations to the Board of Directors on matters pertaining to the budget, including the annual budget review. All budget requests and revisions are referred to the Finance committee for analysis and recommendation prior to being submitted to the Board of Directors for consideration. The Finance Committees purpose is to review recommended budget requests from Committees, Regions and Association staff relative to their budget request by December of each year prior to the beginning of a new Association year. The committee is comprised of three members, the Executive Director and one board member. Committee members serve three-year terms, with one new member yearly. No member may serve more than two consecutive terms. New members are selected through the nominations process. The chair of the Finance Committee is self-selected from amongst committee members.

Last, the **Awards and Citations Committee** purpose is to carry out the selection process of individuals to receive specific Association awards and any other general association awards and citations which may be determined by the board. The Committee is comprised of six members, all of which are past recipients of the Fellow, Meritorious Service or Young Professional Awards. One member must be a prior recipient of the Young Professional Award. Committee members serve three-year terms, with two new members yearly. No member can serve more than two consecutive terms. New members are selected through the nominations process. The chair of the Awards & Citations Committee is self-selected from amongst committee members.
Implications & Lessons learned

This case study takes a more in-depth look at a professional leisure association’s road to revitalize an organization and make it more relevant for its members. While this is focused on a leisure organization, it can be applied to academic and non-academic audiences as other associations or organizations inwardly reflect and call to action a plan for change. Part Two of this case study allows readers to understand why change was needed in the association (Part 1) and then read about the processes to create and implement an action plan. While in hindsight the need for this change seems evident, the process and outcome was uncertain. There were board members and Association members that did not support the change and was skeptical it would lead to success. With that said however, many stakeholders involved in the process stated that after they read the Race for Relevance (2011) book, the need for change was evident, especially coupled with declining Association membership. Furthermore, stakeholders said that while the process was difficult and challenging, they felt more buy in to the Association and was more likely to stay involved. This implication, perhaps not intended, is important to note. While unengaged members often noted the past the only way to get involved was through a traditional good old boy system, the new structure allows nominations and engages younger members. This building of community and open organization was created through the restricting process as committee members worked to set a new and more inclusive system. As a result association members feel more buy in and committed to the mission of the Association. In the past it was difficult to get volunteers to fill committee positions and now committees have more nominations than seats. The restricting process has created a focus on involvement and volunteering that was not present before allowing volunteers to feel they are contributing and valued. They now are part of a larger community and network of professionals that was created the actual process of restricting of the organization as much as the outcome. By NCRPA being open to new possibilities and creating a clear system for volunteering, they have created a nimble organization ready to meet the demands of members in a fast changing world.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you implement change in an organization you belong to?
2. Once board members agree to move forward with organizational change, how would you reorganize to meet the organizations and members needs?
3. What are unexpected outcomes that may be a result of an organizational change?
4. How can the committees created continue to adapt to organizational and membership changes?
5. What can you learn from the reorganization process that applies to your career?
References


James, J.J. & Weddell, M.J. (2016) Implementing organizational change: A case study of a leisure professional association’s structural change, to remain relevant to its members as well as in its support of the profession. *Innovative Leisure Practices Case Vol II* pp.5-17


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