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PROMISING PRACTICES



Cutting-edge techniques for gathering input lead to transformational changes

When [Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania](#) (SWPA) began developing a three-year strategic plan, the nonprofit human services organization faced a grim reality: after serving the Pittsburgh community for nearly a century, Goodwill SWPA had entered a mature stage of a business lifecycle. It faced possible decline and closure if it failed to take action to renew and sustain itself.

Goodwill SWPA identified this undeniable challenge during the early stages of a rigorous and comprehensive input-gathering process that was made possible through cutting-edge technology.

With guidance from a development and planning consulting firm, the Goodwill SWPA board of directors and key staff members met in an off-site retreat to strategize the future of the organization. In preparation for the retreat, participants submitted an online survey designed to collect information about the organization's accomplishments and broad input on goals and objectives.

During the retreat, directors and staff members used handheld clickers to anonymously identify and rank priorities for the organization. The electronic audience response polling tool, which is similar to the devices used on audience-participation TV shows, ensured that every participant registered an opinion.

The organization obtained additional input from the persons served in focus groups and from staff members, families, and

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An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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other stakeholders in information-gathering sessions. Interviews were also conducted with foundations, governmental agencies, educational leaders, and community groups that interact with Goodwill SWPA. A previous [CARF](#) survey report observed that the thoroughness of the input-gathering stage of the organization's strategic-planning process was exemplary.

The results of the online survey, electronic audience response polling, focus groups, information-gathering sessions, and interviews made it clear that Goodwill SWPA had reached a crossroads. It needed to make transformational changes if it was to continue to carry out its mission of helping people improve their quality of life through work and related services.

Members of the board of directors were engaged in all aspects of the input and decision-making processes. Several directors participated in the stakeholder meetings and substantially contributed to the development of the new strategic plan.

Extensive communications to staff members explained why the organization needed to move in a new direction. These communications continued throughout the planning process and after the plan was finalized to enable staff support of the organizational changes.

As a result of all these efforts over several months, Goodwill SWPA created an ambitious strategic plan for dramatic, forward-looking changes to be implemented organizationwide over a three-year period. The plan calls for transforming Goodwill SWPA's service delivery model and strengthening the organization's capacity to deliver a continuum of workforce development and support services for persons with disabilities and employment barriers.

With the aid of cutting-edge techniques to gather input from internal and external stakeholders, Goodwill SWPA was able to launch a new era of growth and success. The most recent [CARF International](#) survey report concluded, "An enthusiasm for strategic planning shown by leadership appears to ensure that there is buy-in from personnel, the participants, and other stakeholders."

For more information about the strategic planning process used by Goodwill of SWPA, contact Patricia Trainer, COO/chief compliance officer, at patricia.trainer@goodwillswpa.org or (412) 632-1900. The organization's website is at www.goodwillswpa.org.



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