Topics for discussion

• How are nonprofits different from for-profit businesses?
  - First, they are the same in one important way: they are dedicated, hardworking and creative
  - Leaders and employees are motivated by the mission and other (often intangible) factors
  - Revenue comes from funding sources that are usually different from the people the nonprofit serves
  - Often they are focused on issues that involve multiple organizations (nonprofit, government, business)
  - Success and impact are sometimes difficult to define and measure
  - Boards of directors often play a more important and active role
  - Decision-making is slower and involves the collaboration of many stakeholders
  - Emotions may play a larger part in all aspects of the organization

• Why is it important to figure out who the client really is?
  - Is it the ED? If so, is there Board support?
  - Is it the Board chair? If so, is there staff support?
  - Need to flush out what motivated the client to seek ACT’s help
  - This will also help in figuring out what the client really wants from the ACT team

• What are the roles and expectations of team members?
  - Enjoy their involvement in the project
  - Volunteer to do tasks that they are good at - or that they are interested in exploring / developing
  - Carry their share of the workload
  - Work effectively in sub-teams with other team members
  - Understand that they are all “team leaders” and need to help lead the project
  - Commit to a regular meeting schedule
  - Quickly alert their leaders to planned/unplanned time away from project activities
  - Communicate if their ongoing availability / commitment changes

• What are the roles and expectations of clients?
  - They are part of the team and we should have continual interaction with them
  - Help the ACT team understand their objectives, constraints, timelines, etc.
  - Respond promptly to requests from the ACT team -- or say why they can’t
  - Give the ACT team feedback during the project -- positive and negative

• How do you lead and motivate teams of volunteers?
  - Make the project tangible by arranging a field trip so team members see the client’s work.
  - Allocate a portion of team meetings to socialization. Get to know one another. Have FUN!
  - Ask members why they decided to be an ACT volunteer, what their goals are for this project, skills, interests, willing to be a sub-team leader, time commitment, concerns.
  - Tell volunteers that they should take responsibility to recognize when they feel out-of-the-loop and talk with the team leader about it.
  - Present a draft work plan to the team, and then ask for the team’s input and concurrence. The team will almost always improve the work plan, and they will have an opportunity to buy into it.
  - Play to the strengths of your team members. Try to build the work plan around what people want to do and are good at.
  - Define the project to reflect the interests of the team. Keep doing this as the project progresses. Ask the group whether they want to get it done and if so, who will do what. Keep listening to what people like.
  - Have clear deadlines for all tasks. Work backwards from key milestones, like the mid-term presentation and final presentation.

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o Assign specific responsibilities and due dates to team members, and send reminders about deadlines before each team meeting.
o Ask team members to volunteer to pick up responsibility for team members who expect to be tied up during certain periods.
o Manage team members who seem to disagree with the project objectives or work plan. Sometimes their points of view can strengthen the project. However, when their points of view have been thoroughly considered, they must accept the team’s consensus or you should ask them to leave the project.
o Be certain that all team members perceive that there is enough challenging work so everyone knows they are needed.
o Avoid volunteers feeling out of the loop by providing frequent email updates and occasional phone calls.
o Re-engage volunteers who drift away from active participation during the project. Call them (don’t use email) as soon as you notice this and try to find out why.
o You might assign wavering team members to sub-teams addressing topics that interest them, and try to pair them with energetic people.
o Mix team assignments, change who works with whom.
o Provide snacks at each meeting and ask the client if they are willing to pay for them.

- Do we ever have to modify the project objectives and/or deliverables during the project life?
o An ACT team often identifies issues that go beyond – or change - the project scope
o We may discover that the client’s real problem or goal is different from what the client thinks
o Important to discuss modifications with the ED and perhaps the board chair as soon as possible
o Mid-project review is often a time to modify project objectives, activities, deliverables
o But be careful of scope creep which may dilute the project focus and stretch team resources

- How can we help a client implement our recommendations?
o Review preliminary recommendations with the client as early as possible
o Ask the client about their ability to implement them -- priorities, staffing, etc.
o Include an implementation plan with our recommendations -- suggest metrics of success
o Ask if any team members want to help implement them -- perhaps join a board committee

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