

A Pathway to Good Governance: Philanthropic Culture and Capacity Building in Local, Community-Based, Family and Child Serving Agencies

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This paper focuses upon the beneficial impact of capacity building efforts directed at the philanthropic culture of local, community-based, family and child serving agencies and its possible facilitation of board engagement and consequent improved governance.

The authors examine the data from a recently completed evaluation study of child member agencies of the Alliance for Children and Families. Over a period of ten years 225 members have participated in a capacity building program primarily funded by three national foundations. The program consisted of a series of workshops and seminars as well as a six-part, self-study, curriculum that was developed specifically for the child and family serving sector to enhance their philanthropic cultures and capacities. The evaluation study completed at year five, utilizing a random sample of participants, found a number of outcomes; most striking was that participating agencies each increased their annual fund-raising by an average of \$163,000. The author's will discuss the possibility that there was also an important impact on governance functioning due to the change in philanthropic culture as well as board member engagement as mission ambassadors.

The governance literature offers little examination of philanthropic culture as a part of board governance. When found it is most frequently as a negative reference to the "dysfunctional fundraising board," with the implication that such a board is affluent and disinterested in issues of appropriate compliance and ethics, worse it is distant from the mission and community served. However, the work of Paul Light and others gives support to the paper's central premise that strong commitment to and engagement with mission by board members will positively correlate with indicators of good governance. The paper develops operational definitions of philanthropic culture, board engagement processes and behaviors (e.g. mission ambassadors) as well as indicators of improved governance so as to allow for further discussion and testing of the thesis.

The authors conclude that the direction of current literature and the evidence found in the evaluation study suggest that there is merit in further examination of the thesis that: *capacity building efforts directed at the resource development function in community-based, charitable, child and family serving agencies will correlate with improved board engagement and governance.* The authors are planning research to test this hypothesis; its results will be presented upon completion.