



TVD Associates Helps Aphasia Association Set Strategic Plan in Place

Setting up a national association is no easy task. Even if you have a strong consensus about the purpose of the group, you must still write a mission statement, define your audience(s), and develop a strategy to gain members. After wrestling with the big-picture issues, you've got to tie down all the logistics of governance—organization type, committees, committee chairs, election rules, and more.

That was precisely the situation facing the board members of AphasiaAccess in the fall of 2013. The New Jersey-based national organization seeks to advance communicative access for people with aphasia by changing the way the condition is treated. Its founders, who believe passionately in the Life Participation Approach to Aphasia, came together in 2011 to create AphasiaAccess. In 2013, the organization elected five board members who planned to hold a Strategic Planning Retreat in January 2014.

In anticipation of the retreat, aphasia expert and board member Kathryn Shelley posted a query to the American Society of Association Executive's online community. She received several responses from association consultant's eager to provide insight about how to shift models of service, but only one mentioned providing more detailed advice and gave a phone number. Kathryn took Todd Von Deak, owner of TVD Associates, up on his offer.

"I gave Todd some information about aphasia and our organization, and he asked whether we want speech pathologists to change how they deliver their service or change the entire system," said Kathryn. The answer was both, but with an emphasis on the latter. "Todd told me he'd been involved with associations that had attempted this and described a pathway by which systemic national change can happen. I had been waiting years for that."

Comprehensive pre-session preparation

Kathryn then invited him to facilitate the January retreat. "We had always intended to have a facilitator, but we didn't realize we would end up bringing in someone we had never met," she noted. In the two months prior to the meeting, Kathryn, board member Roberta Elman, and Todd spent time talking through the goals for the meeting. In addition, Todd interviewed each board member, performed an environmental scan, and developed materials that would guide the sessions and educate the board on best practices in association management.

"Todd made it easy for the board to spend our time working through what mattered most. He has an open, inviting approach to facilitating dialogue and a keen sense of when to let a group 'go' and when it's time to move along."



Experienced, organized facilitation

That preparation and the dedication of all involved helped make the retreat a resounding success, with 100% of those stated goals accomplished. On the morning of day one, after reviewing the organization's history, the group quickly turned a lengthy paragraph describing the organization to a concise, powerful mission statement. It then powered through identifying key audiences and defining how membership would be structured, giving them the entire second day to work through key governance decisions and create three-month, six-month, and 12-month goals.

"Todd was incredibly organized and helped us stay focused on strategic issues. Several times, he recommended we 'parking lot' an item and circle back to it later, rather than letting it slow our momentum," said Kathryn. "And his experience with national associations helped us look beyond our central audience to define secondary and tertiary ones."

In fact, his work during the retreat and the detailed work plan he subsequently drew up made it clear to Kathryn and her fellow board members that it was precisely Todd's skillset the group was missing. The board created an RFP and sent it to 10 association management companies. After reviewing the submissions, the AphasiaAccess board hired Todd as executive director in May.

Collaboration results in successful launch

Strong progress continued during the second half of the year, with the association quickly receiving 501(c)3 status, determining membership pricing, selecting association management software, and launching the group's website. Concurrently, the group began work on several projects, including the association's public launch: Leadership Summit 2015, taking place in March in Boston. Both Kathryn and Todd are eagerly anticipating the conference, the first event dedicated solely to this aphasia treatment approach.

"It all began with that initial connection to the stakeholders. Those conversations allowed the group to hit the ground running during the retreat," said Todd about his work with AphasiaAccess. "You only understand the truly strategic issues by doing your homework prior to the planning session. That homework allows you to be prepared for unexpected topics and ideas that flow when you bring a group of passionate stakeholders together."

For more information:

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