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The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute Publications

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

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Phase B: Community Outreach

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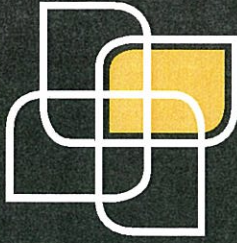
Leadership Development Program

10th-Anniversary Project Analysis – Phase 1 • Team B – Community Outreach

Team Members

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Based on information provided by Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute administrative staff, a survey was designed and distributed to the 55 members of the eight community outreach project teams for classes 2004 to 2009. Actual responses numbered 21, a 38% response rate.

Project Goals

Initial goal: to collect data to facilitate the 2010 GEHLI class in determining the degree of success of the eight community outreach projects in preparation for Phase 2 of team projects.

Evolving goal: to present an evaluation of the GEHLI project process and its possible effect on the success of the institute.

Strategies

Team members determined that a survey of participants would be the best discovery method to achieve the following:
  1) assess community outreach project results for GEHLI classes of 2004 to 2009, and

  2) tap into exhibited behavior and opinions of the participants.

Action Steps

- Assessed team strengths, weaknesses and skill sets
- Divided project into manageable tasks
- Designed survey questions soliciting quantitative and qualitative results
- Delivered survey instrument
- Compiled data
- Discussed findings and analyzed results
- Extracted observations
- Developed presentation

Outcomes/Results

Positive effects on the outcome of project

- Individuals viewed working within a group as a strength or an enjoyable aspect of the entire experience.
- Team members exhibited a genuine respect and appreciation for the diversity and knowledge of each member.

Negative effects on the outcome of project

- Most of the group projects lacked process, definition and focus.
- The teams did not believe GEHLI administration defined the projects nor stated expectations clearly enough. Some university advisers were of no help.

Team composition and behavior

Of the 16 descriptor roles suggested — facilitator, wizard, leader, fixer, quiet one, critic, dominator, peacemaker, story teller, organizer, spoiler, motivator, bully, follower, pollyanna — "facilitator" was the most common listed and each of the roles was chosen by at least two responders in describing other team members.

Implementation

While none of the projects were implemented during the 10-month GEHLI period, VCU Health Careers Pipeline and VCU Community Solutions were established at a later date. The over arching concepts of four other projects — VCU Volunteers, University Without Walls, VCU Gives Back and Focus on the Future — were included in various other university initiatives. Internet Safety and VCU Unite have not been implemented.

Quantitative analysis

The results of eight questions designed to obtain quantitative opinions on such concepts as value, completion, merit analysis, implementation, transformational nature, etc. of the projects indicated team members of the same projects viewed the process/project through VERY different lenses, with widely variant conclusions.

Process observations

Previous class projects

- The lack of a response to our project survey from 62% of the previous team members could indicate a disconnect with the institute or its project process.
- The Phase 1 process analysis could be seen as serving as a referendum on the 10-year project history of the institute.

Class of 2010

- The 2010 class as a whole needed constant clarity on instructions for Phase I.
- Team B experienced a particularly difficult time getting started. We were unsure of the project goals and had to overcome some internal dissension in the manner in which we should proceed.

Recommendations

- Six of the eight community outreach projects have been implemented in some form. Any refocus on these projects could be considered redundant or irrelevant.

- Internet Safety, a project proposing a collaborative curriculum for middle school-aged children and their parents, has not been implemented. Team B determined it should not be pursued based on the length of time that has passed since it was first proposed and the current atmosphere in which excellent sources of information come from parents and teachers who consider it an educational/development tool.

- VCU-UNITE, a project designed to determine what process would be appropriate to recognize significant contributions of university and community partners in joint community engagement projects, has not been implemented. The team recommends such a reward process should be accomplished at the departmental or program level in conjunction with the Division of Community Engagement.

Conclusions

As we deliberated on the merits of the eight community outreach projects, we found our attention drawn to the team members' experience during the actual project process.

Although the groups can be perceived as socially "getting along" a majority of the time from a standpoint of productivity, the respect for team member talents, abilities, similarities and differences did not appear to be enough of a force to overcome the apparent confusion about how to accomplish the team project.

If the intent of the 10-month leadership development program is for participants to learn valuable, collaborative leadership techniques in a hands-on group setting while using a project to achieve that experience, then by all means continue to do so. The project is but a by-product and the participants are enriched, regardless of project outcome, with real, useful knowledge on how and when to recognize the moment to lead or when to follow, to speak or to listen, work independently or work together.

But if the success of this program is defined by the implementation of actual projects initiated and/or produced by the classes, then the process by which these projects are generated must become more systematic, methodical and organized

In summary, the participants from eight previous projects were surveyed and the data compiled demonstrating that group dynamics were considered a positive aspect while the project itself a less positive experience. For future classes to provide a transformational impact on university, improvements to the project process seem to be in order.