

Dianne: Hello, and welcome to module number 10 of volunteer management in the non-profit sector done in partnership with the University of Waterloo Renison University College and the Volunteer Waterloo Region organization here in Waterloo Region. I'm so happy to have a panel together to talk about number 10 module, which is on board members as volunteers. And we couldn't ask for better examples to share this conversation with us. And I'm going to have the participants introduce themselves. Starting with Jane Hennig who is the creator of the slides that you may have already seen. Jane.

Jane: I'm Jane Hennig. I'm the Executive Director at the Volunteer Waterloo Region. And I'm also a board member on a couple of different boards- national, provincial, and local. And so, have- my both hats on. So, I'm a board member and a executive director. So, get to see that from both sides.

Dianne: Thank you.

Jane. Cathy Brothers. Why don't you take it away?

Cathy: Yeah. Hi, good day, everybody. And, as the folks have said, I'm Cathy Brothers and I'm the CEO of a National Charity called Capacity Canada. And our role is to support non-profit leaders across Canada in areas that are pretty important to being able to bring in innovation and change to their organizations. The, the trust that we have really taken on in a big way is building the capacity of boards. That non-profits are nothing without volunteers. That volunteers are the heart and soul of, of our volunteer, of our non-profits all across the country. But the board members are volunteers with very, very crucial, critical function in terms of the future of our organizations. And so that's where we put a lot of our emphasis.

Dianne: Well, that's just the tip of the iceberg. I know, Cathy. So, we're really excited to have you here. And your experience in our region is very, very rich. Since, and in, on top of just learning something today, I'm very excited to share as we meet our new, our final panelist, Kathy Irwin, who comes from a recent job with the Alzheimer's Society Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Kathy: Thank you, Dianne. As Dianne said, my name's Kathy Irwin, I work for Alzheimer's Society Waterloo-Wellington. I'm the development administrator and volunteer coordinator there. I'm also one of the new members of the board for Volunteer Action Center- formerly, excuse me, Volunteer Action Center. Waterloo regi- Volunteer Waterloo Region.

Dianne: Thanks, I'm sorry we put you through that. I know we're going to the same thing. We've been Volunteer Action Center for over 35 years so it is going to take us a little bit of time, but transitioning is something that we've embraced. And we're very excited about our new brand and this project that we've been doing for this course is really helping us with solidifying this brand, which is ever growing and responding to community needs. When it comes to, to the discussing the importance of board membership. I think we have some great representatives here. I don't know if it would be good to talk to, Jane, would you like to start

with how your modules were addressing the topic? And then we can jump into topic talking about it from there.

Jane: Sure. So, for the two Kathy's sakes the, the module really covers the- really fundamentals of volunteer management as it relates to board members. And so, it's not, and I've made this very clear from the outset that it is not a course on good governance. It is not a course on how to run a meeting or how to delve into board action and, and the activities of a board, but it, what it is about understanding how volunteer management relates to board activity. So, in terms of onboarding, training, screening your board members, but also in terms of making sure that there's that distinction between when a board member acts as a board member and when they act as a frontline volunteer, or in Kathy Irwin's case, when you act as a member of our organization. Your role is very distinct and different as a member or as a frontline volunteer than it is as a board member. So, when we were talking about who we might include on our panel today, it just made sense that we- Cathy brothers with your expertise on board governance, but also understanding the role, the distinction of those roles that I would love to include you in this conversation. And Kathy Irwin, because you are a new board member, you've just gone through some of the onboarding process of a board. I thought you could speak to that too. So, starting with the intake of your board members. So, Cathy Brotehrs, we know that one of the things that we hold sacred as a board is the reputation of our organization. And so having the right person come onto your board is so important. How have you seen different boards bring on good fits for their organization? And what do you think The kinds of things that they look for in a board member?

Cathy: Yeah, it's a great question, Jane, because even Capacity Canada started, oh, 13 years ago now. And even in that 13 years, I've seen a real evolution in terms of what boards look for in this whole succession planning. And I've seen a maturing on the parts of boards all across the country, but also of all sizes and levels of maturity and sophistication. So, in many ways, the questions that you ask about, you know, how, how do you recruit and onboard? And, you know, like what kind of, they often use the word skills matrix, but what kind of a, a framework do you use when you're doing your volunteer recruitment? And who does that for the board? You know, that, I think there's an increasing understanding of board's needing to take ownership for their own succession planning and that I think there's an increasing appreciation on the part of executive directors and senior staff around the distinctions when you're bringing new people on board- in terms of when it's a board role and when, when the staff has a part to play in it. And everything I'm saying, I've been on many boards in my little career and, you know, what I'm going to say? Like I've been on boards, like the Alzheimer's society years ago before it had any staff and they were all volunteers, and many organizations are all volunteers. They haven't got paid staff. The discipline around the roles is just the same for those small entirely volunteer run organizations as it is for the board of a university or a big hospital- that in all cases, you have to really understand the difference between governance and day to day operations, you know? So, on the governance side, they are volunteers. But they're not responsible for the day-to-day operations. They delegate that to somebody else. You know, we used to say- and, and volunteer management people should never, ever, ever fall into the trap of being responsible for finding new board members. That is not your responsibility. It's the

responsibility of the board themselves and the boards like- good staff people will often jump into the lurch because they care a lot about the organization and the board's not fulfilling its duties. You're on the road to oblivion in that case. Because, you know, once the board gives up the ownership, pretty soon the ship is just going to be cast, you know, afloat or ashore, or some bad place, you know.

Jane: That's why those tools are so important, right. So, if you hand, as a senior leader in the non-profit- whether you're a CEO or a, maybe a, a volunteer board member of a fully volunteer organization, it's really important to make sure that the tools there are in place. So, like you talked about a skills matrices.

Cathy: Yeah.

Jane: Just really understanding, you know, giving the board the tools to do that kind of recruitment.

Cathy: Don't do that as a volunteer organ- like that the board needs to come up with that themselves. That's not the product of the internal people. That's the board. Board matrixes are out of fashion in many ways. Because traditionally we had the accountant, the lawyer, the HR, the tech, you know, we looked for all the specialties that got mirrored in the organization. So, we tried to bring onto the board people that understood various aspects of the operations. Right there, you're setting yourself up for failure. You don't need all those, like you need all those specialties and the executive director, you know, is able to find consultants or pay people like, or volunteers, like at the operational level that can help them with the HR and the finance and so on. At the board level, what you want are really big picture thinkers. You want visionaries, you don't want people that know about your operations. That's the job of the staff, right? The CEO is going to be responsible for everything that happens in the organization as far as staff is concerned. But at the board level, they need to really stay up, up at that very macro, high level where they're providing insight, but not into the operations, you know. Insight into what, what the community's needs are, what's happening in the broader systems, what's happening to volunteer agencies or capacity building agencies all over the world, and how that might impact the future of your organization. So, the board member now- like when we look at the skills matrix, we don't want people with all these specific kind of, kind of professional disciplines unless they also are, like generative thinkers is the language of the day, but big picture thinkers that can look 10 years out and say, what, what in our community do we want our volunteer center to be doing 10 years from now?

Jane: Yeah.

Cathy: Now, ten's a long time. So, sometimes we can kind of hook up with a five-year idea of more. But no one person on the board is any more responsible for the finances or the HR than anybody else. They all have equal responsibility. And so, you want, like, you want people on the board that are like up to date, you want people that understand current like government policy and how it might affect your organization and the organizations that you support. You want

people that are comfortable with networking and relationships at a high-level. Not at the level that staff to staff with other organizations, but you want, you want people that can figure out who's in power and who's got influence over, you know. And not, and not ones that can run the organization. If you're looking for board members that can run the organization then the board needs to look and see if they got the right CEO in place. Because if the CEO can't run the organization and they're finding all these replacement CEO's is to be on the board, they're on the road to hell because the disciplines will get like the- there's no order in the system if you're following me. So, long-winded answer to your question, Jane. It's really like I have seen boards go to the volunteer managers and say, find us three more board members. And if volunteer managers are dumb enough to fall into that, like the whole organization is like nobody's in charge.

Jane: Yeah.

Cathy: And like, I don't mean in a dictatorial way. I mean that we're all safer and protected when everybody can go. They know the extent of their role and they can go the full distance, you know. Where, where- boards need to know that, but you know, executive directors and senior team members need to understand it too because many executive directors bring operational things to their boards and say- for example like what do you want me to do about getting our volunteer management to find you three more board members? You know, like it's the executive directors often that don't get the difference and don't understand and appreciate and, and sort of embrace the full like spectrum of their responsibility.

Dianne: I wonder.

Jane: So, the board, the board always has to decide too, right. And so even with the tools that exist, and you can find them anywhere. I mean, there are lots of governance organizations that support the work of boards and, you know. But, but it's really up to the individual board to decide what the needs of their board and their organization are in terms of governance. And so that is very clear. It still means though that there's a process that needs to be followed and who, but being very clear I loved what you said about emphasizing the responsibility of the board to take that on themselves. So, that has always been, I know for our organization, the board has always decided what the needs are on the board. They, they do include me in a lot of the onboarding process from, you know, different aspects, but it's always as- to bring the perspective of the organization into an answer. And answer any operational questions that come up in a board interview or whatever in terms of the culture of the organization, the issue that we face, that we're addressing that kind of thing.

Cathy: And on top of that, Jane, you have like a long history with the organization, and you know many of the people that care deeply about the organization. So, your networks become like an important contribution to the board conversation. Like when the board does their brainstorming around, you know, who, who would they like to invite to come on the board?

Usually the, there's a lot of respect for the CEO's or the ED's voice in commending people from their network. But as CEOs, we have to not fall into the trap of taking on the responsibility of finding all the new board members. But more being part of the conversation.

Dianne: I'm wanting to give Kathy a check, check-in point too. Because as a new board member at the volunteer action, action center and also a member. And I just wanted to clarify that before Cathy went on further because that's a very unique relationship that we have with Kathy as a former customer. But now, part of our visionary team. So, what was your intake like Kathy? I'm sure you, you knew a lot before you even decided to join the board. What was your motivation?

Kathy: As to my motivation for joining this organization specifically was that I really loved that by volunteering with one place, I could actually help support so many other places. And I felt with my time limits, that was kind of perfect for me. I saw a lot of opportunity for it to continue to grow and I wanted to be part of that and help in any way I could. So, it was a great fit and I was super happy to be accepted onto the board. My previous board experience was actually more the admin side. So, I would be an EA. I'd be taking minutes. I'd be doing those kind of backend things. So, I would be in the room, but a very different take on it than a board member or an ED or a CEO. So now sitting on the board, I think Jane did a really fantastic job when I was onboarded. Kind of setting all of those expectations and giving me a very clear understanding, right from the beginning, you know, the governance board and how that worked. And so, there was no question, and it was just something I knew right from the beginning, and everyone follows the expectations. Honestly, I think it's just worked out beautifully.

Jane: And I should just qualify that the orientation that we do here at our board was actually written by a past chair of the board. So, you know, it's again, it's giving the responsibility back to the board member on what, what did they need in order to make the best decisions? Have the most in-depth conversation? Cathy, I've taken the bootcamp at Capacity Canada a number of times, and you brought up generative thinking and I, an, and discussion. And I really firmly believe that's a huge responsibility of the board. So, giving and making sure that new board members have enough understanding of the role of our organization within the community so that they can actually have those generative conversations- I think is the fundamental component of the orientation. And when I speak of- so it was actually out of the bootcamp at Capacity Canada that the board chair at the time went with me to that boot camp. And as her project that she took on coming out of it was to develop the orientation and focus it on the three areas. So fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance. And so those are things that, we learned. And, and, you know, we talk in this module about the importance of orientation and onboarding, but then also of evaluation. So, making sure that the board evaluates itself and the board members evaluate themselves within that board structure on a regular basis. And then, filling in the gaps of learning. And there are a number of organizations that have expertise in that area and Capacity Canada being one of them. So, maybe you could speak to, your, and Cathy because you have such broad knowledge, understanding and the importance of that evaluation piece and self evaluation piece at a board.

Cathy: You know, did you mean me?

Jane: Yes, yes, Cathy Brothers.

Cathy: Yeah, no, I think you've hit on something really important because, you know, feedback and discussion and communication and trust are all like essential components of a healthy organization. And then, the most important sort of components of, you know, sort of, like just a healthy, thriving, you know- a board that is accomplishing its purposes is their ability to reflect on what they're doing. And so, Jane has really brought up an important part of that whole process of planning and delegating and oversight of being strategic- is then to put your, you know, sit down and put your feet up on the table and have a conversation about how are we doing, you know? In the past, like a bunch of robots use to think they were responsible for evaluation, and they'd come up with checklists of 500 things and people would check that off how they're doing. Absolutely meaningless. Doesn't help at all in building relationships. Doesn't help the board move forward. The only real purpose of evaluation is to improve the conversations at the board level and to keep the board focused on what their goals are. So, the best evaluations are held in camera without any staff, just the board at the end of, I'd say at the end of, every board meeting, you know, five minutes of saying, how do you think we did today? And having a conversation about it and the more they do that, the more trust is built up. The more they communicate. The more there's an expectation, a culture of evaluation as I think Jane was alluding to. But within that culture, there becomes a trust where you can say, you know what, Fred, you talk so bloody much today that Harry never had a chance to say a word. You know, and, you know, Mary, you might be the board chair, but you just let Fred, you know, like dominate the whole thing and the shyer people here didn't have a chance to talk, you know. Or whatever it is, you know. But you can't do that if you evaluate once every five years because you haven't set the context for it, you know? So, it has to be a continuous process. And unless, you know, you're, you know, Stanford University or something, that's loaded. What, what people, they hear the word evaluation and they run out and they hire, you know, expensive researchers who know nothing about your culture, know nothing about the board's goals, but they're really good at setting up a survey monkey, you know? And a whole lot of like you just generate, like there shouldn't be more than one question in an evaluation of a board.

Dianne: I like that, that's good.

Cathy: Are we clear, are we clear on our mission? Do we make sure at the beginning of every meeting that all of our discussion is going to be focused around, how are we doing in reaching the mission? Do we stray into the, you know, talk to me about who sold how many daffodils or why Fred didn't sell any tulips. You know, like when we get off into the kind of peripheral started discussions because we've, we've lost the purpose. We've lost our, our direction. The best way to do that is, is through, you know, continuous evaluation that's built on trust, relationships, mutual, you know, kind of, values around communication. It's not wrong for the CEO to be involved there, but in my experience, the board then looks to the CEO to either lead the process or give them feedback- not appropriate. It needs to be a self-evaluation where the board takes responsibility for their own.

Jane: I agree, I agree totally with that. And I, I think that, and especially for smaller organizations and smaller boards so where I will differ just lightly is, you know, if you can find board evaluation tools. I think that's a starting place. It just helps you to think about what kinds of questions you should ask. And start the conversation going because if you don't even know where to start, that's where you use those tools.

Cathy: Yeah, yeah.

Jane: It's a place to get an idea of where to start so that you start those conversations. But you're right, Cathy trust is hugely important on a board.

Cathy: And keeping it simple and meaningful.

Jane: Yeah.

Cathy: Because honestly, I've been on a university board. I've been on a hospital board. I've seen really sophisticated evaluations. And they mean, I'm trying to think of good English for bugger all, but they mean- they're irrelevant.

Jane: Exactly.

Cathy: Because they don't, they don't get at the heart of what's going on. So, it that's old, like, you know, the operation was perfect, but the patient died. You know, that you can have, you can have a perfect operation according to your evaluation, but there's no level of trust. There's no level of commitment. There's no, there's no reflection on is like, in- you'll find this Kathy, you know, as a board member now that if you go to a meeting and nobody really ever gives you a chance to talk, you're not, you're going to wonder after a while, why you're there, why you're there, everybody around the table has to have a voice. And that doesn't happen unless you talk about it.

Jane: That's that. Go ahead, Kathy.

Kathy: Sorry. I was just going to say, I think what you're saying is really true of so many situations. Helping someone succeed is checking in and making sure that the goal is still in sight and you're heading in that right direction. And what's working, you continue with, and what isn't working, you figure out how to adjust. And having feedback from other people on any of those items is so important and so invaluable to tap into their skills and their experience.

Cathy: You know, sometimes boards put it on their poor- I feel so sorry for these directors and volunteers that they get set with the task of evaluating the board members as volunteers in the same way as they do other agency volunteers. Wrong. But if it's, it just changes the power dynamics in ways that nobody wins on that one, you know?

Jane: Yeah.

Dianne: That's awesome. It's really awesome having you here. This has been really invaluable. And I know-

Cathy: Yeah, it's fun. Now you have to, I have to say one of the plug, because I thought I'd say this, but she's so freaking modest that when Jane talked about your board chair, at one point who wrote up the sort of orientation planning. What Jane neglected to mention is that after bootcamp, the volunteer centre totally transformed the way they went about their board work, and they actually are in our board of directors hall of fame at Capacity Canada. They were one of the, for- each year, we award a membership into that hall of fame for outstanding board excellence. And the volunteer centre was one of the ones that were first to receive that award. We continue to use as a model of how organizations with a bit of education and a bit of a framework, hey Jane? Can totally transform themselves.

Jane: Yep.

Dianne: And the confidence to do that with, with new board members. Kathy, I hope, Kathy Irwin from Alzheimer's who is a new board member at Volunteer Waterloo Region. Cathy Brothers from Capacity Canada. Jane Hennig of Volunteer Waterloo Region. It's been a privilege to have us together to talk and hopefully everyone benefits and realizes the history here in this room. And did Kathy Irwin, did you want to say why you enjoyed meeting Cathy Brothers today? Because this was your first meeting. I'd like this on reco-

Cathy: And I enjoyed meeting Kathy Irwin.

Kathy: Yes, it was lovely to meet you, Cathy. And I had no idea that you have started our local Alzheimer's Society chapter here in our region. So, I am blown away by that. I think it's incredible. And I'd love to sit and have a chat with you sometime about that and probably about a hundred other things.

Jane: That's why we love Cathy Brothers.

Cathy: She likes to chat, but Kathy you're with a great cause and a great organization. And it's reinvented itself many times as times change. My information is really, really old and out of date, but I love the fact that you're like leading an organization. You're a member of the volunteer center and you're on the board because you're a really good example of the kind of good people that are in our charitable sector that wear many hats. And those- and the discipline that it takes to know what hat you have on at any point in time. You and I should have a conversation about that at some time, because-

Kathy: That would be wonderful.

Cathy: Yeah.



Dianne: Thank you all very much. It's been an absolute pleasure and I should let you go. And let's, let's talk again soon.

Jane: Thank you.

Kathy: Thank you.

Dianne: Thanks guys.