Growing Your Organization?
Put the 3 C's into Action in 2013!

ASCD Constituent Services groups serve their members in a variety of viable ways. And while each group has its own unique charism, the world in which we operate is characterized by a common set of successes and challenges. Based on our work with Constituent Services groups, there are three specific immediate opportunities on which all CS groups can capitalize: communication, connections and continuity.

Preparing for the new year and looking for new opportunities for growth and impact for your Constituent Services (CS) group? Consider these possibilities as you plan:

1 Communication

For all the good work we do as educators, we are not experts in public relations and promotions. But the reality is if we do not create public awareness and interest in our work, we are not truly serving our members as we intend. We need to move beyond a Field of Dreams premise that "If you build it, they will come." The reality is educators are inundated with so many messages by so many voices as they tend to the overload of daily responsibilities to which they must tend, you will not get their attention by relying on traditional means of promoting your programs. CS groups need to rethink their approach to communications. How?

First and foremost, effective organizations today are not simply posting and blasting out announcements, they are participating in ongoing conversations with educators. Make comments about topics being discussed that are important to educators. Ask questions that extend and enrich the conversation. Share a well-timed resource that will be of value to those in the discussion. In this way, when you offer a program or product or service for consideration, you will already have the attention of members and prospective members who know you as a trusted voice and valued colleague.

Select one single social media channel and use it to monitor educator discussions and share your insights. Twitter is fast, easy and currently the most effective at reaching everyone from thought leaders to practitioners in education. Use a unique Twitter #hashtag that educators can start to follow as they see your posts and want to hear more of what you have to say. Post your hashtag on your website, in your email signature, on your business cards, and anywhere else that will let create an awareness of your online influence.

Write a regular blog post (a minimum of once a month) using your CS group ASCD EDge site that speaks with a strong, clear voice about issues and opportunities for educators in the realm of your CS group. Then parse out significant sentences from the blog on twitter…even one sentence a day…so that educators get used to seeing you online as they go about their business every day. The more educators see you actively engaged online, the more they will pay

attention when they see your messages. Cultivating the sense that you are engaged and available is key in earning credibility in today's world of communications.

Don't take this on yourself! Talk to your board and identify a member of your organization with the prerequisite skills to create a sustained everyday online presence on your behalf. It's a great opportunity for a younger member looking for leadership experience to work with you. You feed him or her the content you would like shared, and trust them to get the word out there and report back to you on the responses they see on a monthly basis.

To make this happen, every program, product and service you offer should have a corresponding communications strategy through which you will promote it to ensure its success. Yes you can still use ad space in journals and on websites, but if you're not promoting your offerings through social media today, you are not giving your organization the exposure it needs to be successful in today's education marketplace. As you prepare to craft your plans for the next two years, be sure to include communications in a meaningful way that will increase your value for educators and your impact on education.

2 Connections

No matter how good you are, standing alone on today's education landscape will render you less than effective. The best organizations today are characterized by a myriad of connections that strengthen their capacity to serve membership needs and add value to being a member. These connections run both horizontally and vertically, creating a matrix of ideas, resources and opportunities that your organization cannot possibly offer on its own.

For starters, develop strong working relationships with other ASCD Constituent Services groups: affiliates, connected communities, professional interest communities, student chapters and emerging leaders. Some connections may be based on a geographic connection as opportunities to work regionally arise, expanding your impact on educators across a larger area. Other connections may be with CS groups that offer completely different programs and services that augment your own. Still other connections may help you access a specific audience of educators by demographic or expertise. If every CS group had strong working connections with three to five other CS groups, all of us would be stronger and more effective in serving educators worldwide.

Effective Constituent Services groups develop meaningful relationships and partnerships with other organizations outside of ASCD that are also within their sphere of influence. These groups can include but are not limited to departments or ministries of education, job-alike professional groups, subject-matter expertise groups, curriculum groups, policy groups, research organizations, public agencies that serve the community, private entities that support your group's area of focus, and other education non-profits whose mission is consistent with your own. In seeking out partnerships with other organizations, we ask that you be mindful not to work with companies whose work is in direct competition with ASCD.

In considering potential partnerships, Managing Director of Constituent Services Theresa Lewallen offers the following questions in determining which connections are right for your organization:

- What is the purpose of this partnership?
- What is the goal of the partnership?
- Does the partnership align with our current strategic priorities and activities?
- What will we accomplish together that we could not accomplish alone? Does it offer synergy to our work (1+1=3)?
- What needs in the field will we be able to meet through this partnership that we would not be able to meet otherwise?
- Will this partnership assist us to improve our organization, raise our visibility, or contribute to the development of our members?
- Can we provide adequate resources, including--people, time, technological, or support resources? Can this partner?
- Do we have the capacity to maintain our partnership with this group? To meet the deliverables deadlines?
- Will the partnership produce social capital for our affiliate or connected community?
- Do this group's goals and values align with our goals and values?
- Will our members view this partnership as being beneficial?
- Is this partner the right one? Does this partner's reputation reflect well on us?
- What potential conflicts of interest might there be?
- What unintended negative consequences might there be from this partnership, e.g. damage to relationships with allied organizations, misrepresentation or misuse of our name, risk of being "captured" by special interests?
- How is this relationship mutually beneficial? Will the partners realize equal value or benefit from the partnership? If not, have we clearly outlined these differences and do they justify entering into the partnership?
- Are the roles, obligations, and accountability clearly defined? What benefits or considerations will the partners provide to each other?
- Is our role more than providing our brand, member contact information, or acting as a marketing channel?
- How will we evaluate the partnership?
- Is there anything in the partnership proposal that is inconsistent with existing policy or prior board decisions? Would this partnership be consistent with the ASCD affiliation agreement, as well as ASCD policies and protocols?
- If this partnership involves investment of financial resources, are the parameters, responsibilities and expectations reasonably specified?
- What is our return on investment—including membership and financial return? Is it reasonable over the specified term?
- What risks—financial or legal—need to be considered?
- Is there anything in this partnership or with this partner that would jeopardize our tax-exempt status (for US organizations) or our government recognition or certification?

(Lewallen, "Partnerships: Why and How" 2011.)

3 Continuity

In the life cycle of any organization, leaders transition to new opportunities and your group must sustain itself through the process. Each leader brings his or her own strengths and skill set to the job, and with leadership transition your organization will shift and adapt in order to survive and find new ways to be effective in serving your membership. As The Next Institute's life cycle model indicates, with change comes opportunity. And when opportunity is maximized your organization can grow and transform itself in new and meaningful ways.
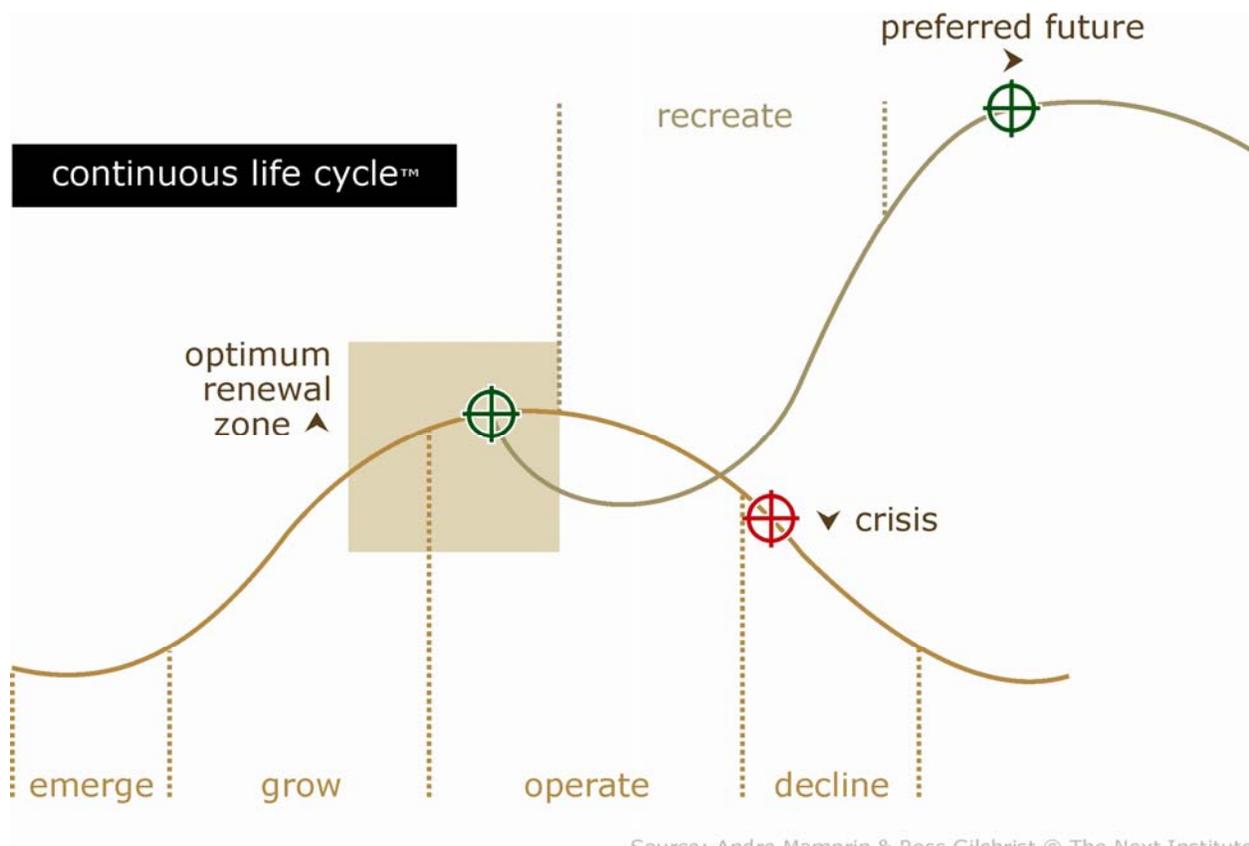
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We have all seen high-flying organizations suddenly sputter and decline when a transition in leadership is not planned for with successful continuity of programs, products and services in mind.

But how does an organization build that kind of continuity when change is angoing and new leaders are always coming into play in ways that cannot be anticipated? By putting in place the governance structures - thepolicies, practices and mechanisms - that will ensure the continuity of your thriving organization long after you are finished serving as a leader.

There are specific tools your CS group can use to ensure continuity over time:

Craft a longterm vision everyone embraces

As changes in leadership occur, it's imperative that your successors can quickly and easily identify what your organization's mission is AND where it is headed. New leadership coming in and shifting direction can set an organization back in accomplishing its goals. Establishing that longterm vision that everyone in your group embraces ensures that no matter who your next generation of leadership is, the vision continues by building on already-ascertained success.

Establish a working planning document

This doesn't have to be a 5 year plan. Better to break up your goals into 100 day chunks that are short-term and measurable. Ten 100 day plans gives you 1000 days of measurable steps to success, approximately three years. This provides the kind of flexibility and agility you need to keep yourself accountable so you can make adjustments and keep your organization on track. Making it a working document means that everyone involved in your group's leadership is working together to make forward progress.

Clearly delineate roles of all leadership positions

Any organization can be successful when led by one energetic, charismatic leader, but what happens when he or she steps down from that leadership role? The vacuum that is created can be devestating as the successors scramble to figure out how to keep operations moving. In an organization built for continuity, it is clearly mapped out as to who is responsible for each facet of your group's work. In this way, when one member of your leadership moves on, others know and understand those responsibilities that must be handled until a successor is found. Likewise, when the successor is identified, he or she knows exactly the responsibilities of their leadership role.

Clearly define your group's lines of succession

No leader serves forever, so it is important that an organization explicitly outline the process for replacing any leadership vacancy. Especially in times of a sudden leadership exit, it is important that your group know the established steps for selecting someone to fill the opening. When established lines of succession are in place it provides a sense of continuity and security that the organization will continue to flourish. If your organization currently identifies only one leader,

Develop a working leadership pipeline

Having leadership opportunities in place to groom future leaders of your organization is critical in creating capacity for continuity. This can include invitations to young educators to participate in group initiatives, developing an emerging leaders recognition program for your organization, and offering leadership opportunities working on committees. Aspiring leaders get to hone their skills and you get to observe their potential for future leadership in the process.

As we prepare for 2013, keep in mind these three specific immediate opportunities you can capitalize on to move your CS group forward: communication, connections and continuity!