

1. Introduction

A. Background

Policy Development (PD) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Shutesbury, Massachusetts (Amherst mailing address). PD combines public policy analysis and organizational development to create social change. Clients and sponsors are international (World Bank, UN Association, USAID), domestic (Princeton Social Capital, GlaxoSmithKline Community Partnerships, Rockefeller Brothers Fund), and sometimes very local (Solidago Foundation in support of StopSprawlMart.org, Baystate Health Systems, and now the Amherst Survival Center). Policy Development is also involved in nonprofit sector reform, and in this context, PD is represented on Independent Sector's national nonprofit sector Ethics and Accountability Committee. PD consists of about six consultants (depending on project cycle) located in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania.

As allegations of misconduct and mismanagement at ASC began to surface in the Spring of 2006 and the controversy became very heated and public, a consensus emerged by September among many interested parties that an independent and external consultant should be brought in to evaluate ASC and make recommendations. The idea of hiring a consultant was given weight by Town of Amherst Human Rights Director Eunice Torres' report (dated 7/24/06, see Appendix A), and a brief (one-day) pro bono assessment conducted by New Hampshire-based organizational consultants William Marcello and John Manning (dated 9/7/06, see Appendix B).

Not having had any previous relationship with ASC or any of the interested parties, but yet having had plenty of experience with similar organizations and issues, PD was invited to submit a proposal. The proposal emphasized the need for a comprehensive assessment (programs, administration, and finances); with a PR/communications component; and a strong emphasis on participation, inclusion, and transparency.

PD also committed to doing more than writing a long report, concluding with some recommendations, and saying good-bye. PD wanted to help implement changes. Some of those changes had to begin immediately, and some would begin after the assessment and recommendations were made. The Board accepted the proposal, and on November 1, 2006, PD and ASC began a three-month contract.

A lot of change has already taken place. Perhaps the most important change—the retirement of ASC's Executive Director after 29 years—happened in August, 2006, before PD became involved with ASC. Other important changes that had to happen before this report was issued include:

- Five new Board members added (to date)

- Executive Director search was initiated
- Interim grantwriter consultant hired (second PD consultant)
- Five Board committees formed
- Bi-weekly facilitated Open Forums initiated
- Behavior, disciplinary action, and appeals procedures revised
- ASC Ombudsman recruited
- Increased media outreach

Less tangible, there was an intense need to rebuild basic trust, good will, and hope among various interested parties. In fact, for the first month or so, a significant portion of consultant time was spent thawing relations and addressing suspicions.

Having eventually garnered some trust, and having inspired a modicum of hope, there is now some suspense associated with the release of this report. Some will object and detect bias of one form or another. But it is our hope that many previously opposed parties will be able to come together to support what are, in the end, basic tenets of organizational effectiveness.

There has always been broad agreement that we cannot give up on the population that ASC serves. This assessment and these recommendations are a blue print for rebuilding ASC together. ASC has already taken some steps, and the initial results are very encouraging.

B. Methodology

The original work plan was as follows:

	<i>Due date</i>
Communications recommendations	Nov. 15
Documents review	Nov. 30
First round of stakeholders meetings	Nov. 30
Programmatic assessment	Dec. 31
Administrative assessment	Dec. 31
Fiscal Assessment	Dec. 31
Second round of stakeholder meetings	Dec. 31
Recommendations	Jan. 15
Exit interviews / evaluation	Jan. 31

The initiative kicked off with a press conference at ASC attended by the staff, Board, consumers, several representatives of the Town of Amherst, and the local media. We succeeded in getting some initial support, and broadcasting the message widely that we were rolling our sleeves up for a comprehensive and participatory organizational transformation process.

The month of November, and into December and January to some extent, was dominated by dozens of meetings with everyone who had a perspective on ASC, And that was a lot of people. In large groups, small groups, and one-on-one meetings; at ASC and off-site; in-person, on the phone, by email and fax; the consultant met with:

- ASC Board members
- ASC staff
- ASC consumers
- Representatives of peer organizations
- Local activists
- Religious leaders
- Amherst Select Board members
- Amherst Town Manager
- Amherst Community Services Director
- Amherst Human Rights Director
- Local media

Eventually, the “listening phase” had to be tapered in order to make time for other activities. The document review was an exhaustive review of over 300 official ASC documents (the list of documents reviewed appears in Appendix H, and pieces of the review itself are also incorporated into the “Administration” section below). This was an educational process which revealed a lot of basic organizational information that even many staff and Board members were unaware of. But a document review is hardly sufficient for assessing the real impact of an organization.

And so this comprehensive programmatic, administrative, and financial assessment and recommendations brings together the listening phase; the document review; direct observation of ASC in action; and of course the experience and perspective that PD has to offer.

Approximately two-to-four additional weeks (after the release of this report) have been allotted for PD to support the implementation process.

C. Terminology

There has been some debate about the best term for those who use the services that ASC has to offer. Consumers, patrons, customers, clients, guests, visitors, program participants, and others have been discussed. While this debate should be resolved soon, it is not yet. There is no officially sanctioned term. But for the purposes of this report, the term “consumer” will be used.

There is also the question of what kind of organization ASC is. “Survival center” is not a widely known term (beyond the Pioneer Valley). And “soup kitchen” does not do justice to the breadth of services ASC offers.

“Clothing distribution” and the current job title “clothing coordinator” is also a misnomer, because toys, books, housewares, and furniture are also distributed within this program area. “Free Store,” and “Free Store Coordinator” have been used, but again the term is unfamiliar to most people.

D. Acknowledgements

This assessment was conducted with the essential input of ASC consumers, volunteers, staff, Board members, representatives of the Town of Amherst, and many others who care deeply about ASC and the population it serves. Many contributed substantial amounts of your time, helping to make sure that the consultant was exposed to every perspective, reading and responding to long emails and reports, meeting with the consultant, arranging for others to do so, and unearthing the organization’s substantial archives and institutional history. Particular thanks to: Bob Ackerman, John DiBartolo, Jan Eidelson, Jacques El-Chayeb, Eduardo Garcia, Kristen Golden, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Richard Habhab, Royster Hedgepeth, Greg Kline, Dennis Meehan, Jon Nelms, Heidi Nortonsmith, Roy Rosenblatt, Larry Shaffer, Steve Smarz, Eunice Torres, and Ruth Wade.