Published on Sports Management Resources

Frequently Asked Questions About Sports Management Resources

Following are the most frequently asked general questions about consulting and specific questions about SMR consulting practices. Just click on the question to see the answer. Please email us if you have additional queries.

Q1: Is hiring a consultant a public announcement of a management deficiency?

Q2: How do SMR consultants handle situations in which managers or staff members feel threatened or insulted because the organization brought in an outside party for assistance?

Q3: Why doesn't SMR quote a specific fee for a specific service?

Q4: What does it mean when SMR uses the term "best practice"?

Q1: Is hiring a consultant a public announcement of a management deficiency?

A: Sometimes, but acknowledging the absence of a specific skill set and the need to acquire it is the sign of healthy management, especially during a period of organization growth. Every organization has strengths and weaknesses. Key is identifying weaknesses and figuring out the best way to add needed skill sets to the team. It's also important to understand that consultants don't tell managers or boards what to do. A consultant is an extra pair of hands committed to making sure the organization sees all of its options, adopts wise decision-making criteria and ends up in the best position to make a good decision.

There are many reasons for hiring a consultant:

- Getting an unbiased and expert third party to check the organization's analysis and projected next steps before making expensive commitments or undertaking significant projects, similar to the carpenter measuring twice before cutting an expensive piece of wood, is a responsible action.
- Managers have significant everyday workloads and may not have time to do necessary research needed to undertake a project. Hiring an expert for a short time period is better than overloading

an current staff member who might be able to get the job done but over a longer time period and at the risk of compromising important every day responsibilities.

- Whenever the stakes are high – a situation that could damage the credibility of the organization (i.e., law suits, rules violations, etc.) - bringing in a credible and objective third party expert signals a commitment of the organization to be open and honest in self-examining its practices and making them better. Approaching crises in this way enhances the reputation of the organization.
- Whenever there is disagreement between board members or respected senior officials, a consultant can be an effective mediator that allows the organization to minimize polarity and disagreements.
- A consultant can represent a short cut to installing best practices and good policy by doing the research and homework and bringing model programs and choices to managers and board members for their consideration.
- Consultants are expert in strategic thinking and good process and, as a disinterested third party, can help a group navigate important and complex tasks like strategic planning, preparing for certification or accreditation, Title IX self-evaluations, etc.

In summary, hiring a consultant is a good investment when an organization needs to supplement staff time or expertise, ensure credibility or objectivity, obtain a skill set it doesn't have or deal with high stakes legal or reputation issues.

Q2: How do SMR consultants handle situations in which managers or staff members feel threatened or insulted because the organization brought in an outside party for assistance?

A: Feelings of vulnerability on the part of staff are normal. The SMR consultant is committed to working with the CEO or athletic director as a colleague and executive coach rather than an outside investigator. Ultimately, the consultant's duty is to "advise" rather than dictate. The management executive must have (1) confidence in the consultant's understanding of the sport business, (2) trust that the consultant will always put the manager in the position of communicating and controlling outcomes and (3) a belief that the consultant is committed to client-centered rather than consultant-centered methodologies. The relationship between the consultant and the manager must be one of honesty, transparency and sharing. The SMR consultant wants to leave the manager and staff in a stronger position, functioning at a higher level than when the consultant arrived.

Q3: Why doesn't SMR quote a specific fee for a specific service?

A: Every organization is different and SMR has no understanding of the complexity or size of the project the client wants handled until a preliminary assessment is made. For instance, the client may want a comprehensive review of the athletics department policy and procedures manual and recommendations for getting all elements into the realm of best practices. This is a very well defined project with regard to scope and deliverables. However, the number of hours devoted to such a project for an organization which currently has no such document compared to a department with a 150 page manual in place will be very different. Ultimately, the client and SMR will be comfortable with the fee and the projected scope of the project if the consultant takes the time to assess the organizational need and, in consultation with the client, makes sure there is a mutual understanding of the desired outcome and what the consultant is expected to deliver in what timeframe.

Q4: What does it mean when SMR uses the term "best practice"?

A: A 'best practice' refers to a process or program that is the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a task. It is usually time and industry tested, in that it has been used by multiple institutions over an extended period of time, with most practitioners agreeing that the methodology and outcomes produced are effective. A best practice may also be determined by empirical research. When SMR refers to a 'best practice', unless an empirical research or other source is cited, clients may assume that the recommended best practice is a tried and true methodology based on the knowledge and experience of SMR consultants expert in that field. In some cases, in response to a specific need or question, SMR consultants will research the practices of multiple institutions that have demonstrated success in a specific area and determine whether there are commonly used methodologies that can be referred to as 'best practices'. It should be noted that even commonly accepted 'industry standards' can be improved upon. Thus, a 'best practice' invites continuous analysis, reassessment and refinement.

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