

Lifting the Low-Income Voice

Staff Conversations about Democratic Selection Procedures in the Pandemic

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Democratic Selection Procedures

- “Not fewer than 1/3 of the members are persons chosen in accordance with democratic selection procedures adequate to assure that these members are representative of low-income individuals and families in the neighborhood served”, 42 U.S.C. § 9910(a)(2)(B)(i)
- CSBG Information Memorandum #82, *Tripartite Boards*

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Updates to Existing Case Studies

Raising the Low-Income Voice

Case Studies in Democratic Selection Procedures

United Planning Organization (UPO)

Neighborhood-based recruiting, strong tradition of campaigning, independent election certification

UPO Overview

Location: Washington, DC
Staff Size: 400 employees
Annual Revenue: \$30,000,000
Service Area: Washington, DC and surrounding area
Chief Executive: Andrea Thomas
Board Size: 21 seats
Major Programs: Child, Youth, and Family Services (including Early Head Start & Head Start), Job Training and Placement, Housing Assistance, Substance Abuse Treatment, Community Leadership Academy, Shelter Hotline, Community Reinvestment Division
Appendix: Democratic selection procedure, community election kit (board applications), press release, election notice, 207 election timeline, election poll workers guide, bylaws postcard

As former UPO President and CEO Dana Jones once said, "If you want to make change in communities, you've got to make it when people can be part of the change." Since taking on the role of President and CEO at UPO in 2018, Andrea Thomas has done just that. She has reexamined the democratic selection procedures implemented by her predecessor and expanded them to engage an even broader cross-section of the community. UPO's robust outreach efforts and partnerships have paid off as demonstrated

by the record-breaking turnout in its 2020 elections, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The UPO board has 21 members and operates on three-year terms. Board members may serve two consecutive terms, after which they must take a break in service of at least one year and then may return for one additional three-year term. This results in a maximum tenure of nine total years. Board terms are staggered, which have avoid long periods of turnover.

ELECTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

When her voters asked in the low-income sector of UPO's board opened up in late spring 2020, President and CEO Andrea Thomas was confident that her agency's strong record of election turnout would help to sustain participation, despite pandemic-related restrictions on in-person gatherings. In addition to sending out notices through the Advisory Neighborhood Commission and other community organizations, she sent out social media posts and solicited nominations through the neighborhood-based email newsletter she had created. They received multiple nominations for each open seat and decided to host a virtual forum on Facebook Live to help the community get to know the candidates.

Current members of UPO's board also fired about election, were challenged on UPO's Facebook channel, about what board service entails and what it meant to be there personally. They emphasized that when serving on the board, board members should not just be thinking about the interests of their ESEA or Ward. They must put the interests of the UPO as an organization at the top of their mind.

Just as she engaged in multiple strategies for recruitment during the pandemic, LPO decided to take a data-driven approach to its election process. Voters could show up to a UPO service site and vote in person, or apply to receive a ballot by mail.

They could download Mobile Canvas, a fundraising app for nonprofits that can be used to create surveys and petitions. Participants could enter their personal information, including proof of residency within the ESEA, into the app on their phone, which sent a message to UPO. Once that eligibility was confirmed by a volunteer election poll worker, the voter could vote for the candidate of their choice in full. Instead, as they had done in the past, UPO engaged the League of Women Voters to open and tally the votes that were cast in-person, adding them to the virtual results.

Once the winners of the elections were announced, Andrea and her team held another governance challenge unique to the pandemic: welcoming and training new board members without missing them in person. UPO decided to conduct its new board member orientation virtually in two parts, each taking place over four and a half hours on a Saturday. The orientation included a social training, introductions to UPO's different divisions and programs from division directors, a primer on the Organizational Standards, and presentations from the HR and Finance departments. Andrea says that the board members were engaged and asked thoughtful questions during the year.

ENGAGING AND RETAINING BOARD MEMBERS

Rather than seeing the rules governing low-income sector representation as an obstacle, LPO views the low-income sector election as an important factor in its recruiting and retaining board members. It reminds them to focus throughout a four-hour virtual session on the importance of their role in the community served by the agency. As a social reform agency, the board was strategizing around the operation of a citizen-run program. LPO will be conducting quarterly "huddles" on governance topics at board meetings throughout the year.

1st RECOMMENDATION LETTER (2 are required)

(You see which signed letters with the requested information instead of using this form.)

APPLICANT'S INFORMATION: FIRST NAME, LAST NAME, ADDRESS (P.O. Box Not Accepted), CITY, STATE, ZIP, WARD, EA, TELEPHONE NUMBER, E-MAIL ADDRESS.

RECOMMENDER'S INFORMATION: FIRST NAME, LAST NAME, ORGANIZATION, ADDRESS (P.O. Box Not Accepted), CITY, STATE, ZIP, WARD, TELEPHONE NUMBER, E-MAIL ADDRESS.

1. How long have you known the applicant? _____
What is your relationship with the applicant? _____

2. Describe the applicant's community leadership abilities. _____

3. What are the applicant's greatest attributes? _____

Please a brief statement about the role the applicant played in bringing change to the community. _____

Signature of Recommender: _____ Date: _____



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NCA's Recruitment Assistant

outside the entrance to each site containing a pile of paper ballots and a jar of pens for voters to use to cast their ballot and then take home. NCA's bylaws also require that elections for the low-income sector of the board be supervised by a monitor in an impartial manner of pandemic-induced ingenuity and despite her own recent exposure to COVID-19. She monitored the elections by parking her car near the voting table and answering questions from voters through her (closed) driver's side window.

CAPITAL AREA COMMUNITY SERVICES, INC. (CACS)

Drive-thru Engagement
Lansing, Michigan (Urban)
27 board seats, 0 low-income representatives
Executive Director: Miguel Rodriguez

One would think that in the midst of a global pandemic, CAA staff would struggle to bring a personal touch to the low-income sector representative recruitment process. But that wasn't the case for the staff at CAACS Lansing/East Lansing Service Center in the fall of 2020. In fact, the process of filling two board seats in the low-income representative sector under quarantine and social distancing restrictions helped the staff to feel hopeful and connected to their clients during an especially challenging time.

CACS's service area, which is made up of four counties around the city of Lansing, is served by five different Service Centers. Each Service Center has an Advisory Council made up of staff and

community members who meet every month. The Advisory Councils support the agency by providing input on the annual Walk for Warmth project, assisting in the distribution of commodities and food, reviewing customer satisfaction surveys, and distributing and collecting client surveys for the community needs assessment. The Advisory Councils add an additional layer of community engagement beyond the tripartite board to assist the CAA in making decisions that will benefit the broadest cross-section of stakeholders. They also serve as a pipeline for tripartite board service.

In the past, CAACS has conducted recruitment for open low-income sector board seats by sending out mailings to clients and encouraging staff to discuss the position while providing services. During the pandemic, however, the agency had to adjust its service delivery to reduce the amount of physical contact between staff and clients in order to keep everyone safe. One of the adjustments it made was to run its commodity food program on a reduced schedule and operate it as a drive-thru. Under the new arrangement, commodity food distributions were the times when the largest number of clients were present at the Service Center, so the staff decided to conduct their board recruitment then. Through every commodity food distribution in the month of September, staff held up and down the line of cars outside the Service Center and handed out flyers containing information about the low-income sector election and the tripartite board. They took down the names and emails of people who were interested and sent them an application form containing details for the upcoming election. The form was also made available on CAACS's website.

In past years, CAACS's low-income sector election has taken place at a meeting in the large room where the board conducts its business. Due to public health concerns, CAACS decided to hold its election outside in the parking lot of the Service Center, where Advisory Council meetings were also being held during the pandemic. On the day of the election, individuals interested in taking part arrived, presented their ID to demonstrate they were a resident of the service area, and sat six feet apart at each candidate table. A vote was taken about why they wanted to serve on the tripartite board. Then, a vote was taken of those in attendance to determine which candidate should serve. Stability Services Director Pam Elise says that while the number of candidates standing for election was roughly the same as usual, voter turnout increased. She and the other Service Center staff were thrilled to see faces from the drive-thru line showing up to participate. Even from six feet apart, they felt closer than ever to the promise of governance by the community.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY 2020-2022

Capital Area Community Services, Inc. Building Leadership Community Responsibility Representative to Serve on Agency Board of Directors

Candidate	Ward	City	Party	Term
Andrea Thomas	10	East Lansing	Dem	2020-2022
John Smith	11	East Lansing	Rep	2020-2022
Jessica Lee	12	East Lansing	Dem	2020-2022
Michael Brown	13	East Lansing	Rep	2020-2022
David White	14	East Lansing	Dem	2020-2022
Sarah Green	15	East Lansing	Rep	2020-2022
Robert Black	16	East Lansing	Dem	2020-2022
Emily Red	17	East Lansing	Rep	2020-2022
James Blue	18	East Lansing	Dem	2020-2022
Maria Yellow	19	East Lansing	Rep	2020-2022
Christopher Purple	20	East Lansing	Dem	2020-2022
Ashley Pink	21	East Lansing	Rep	2020-2022

CAACS's Plan for Recruiting Tripartite Board Candidates



Lessons Learned

- What was your democratic selection process before the pandemic?
- How did you adapt your process in response to COVID-19?
- How did community participation and response change, if at all, when the new practices were implemented?

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