

In a world of more possibilities than can be pursued, every organization needs to have some mechanism for deciding which activities are going to be most beneficial to the organization and to low-income people.

One approach is for the board to have an Issue Forum, orientation or discussion as an agenda item at board meetings. The issue could be a community issue, or something at the County, regional, state or even national level. It could be a public policy issue, a desire to become more familiar with the operation of another agency, a problem to be addressed, or a possible partnership or other opportunity to be pursued. The issue forum could be 10 to 30 minutes long, depending on the complexity of controversy around the topic. This could take place at each meeting, every other meeting, quarterly, or as desired.

Most forums would consist of a presentation of information, then a discussion. The board would be (a) learning about the issues, and (b) reaching a conclusion about whether they wanted CAVC to take a position on the issue – or not – and if so how to communicate it, and/or (c) whether the Board wanted CAVC to take action – to engage in advocacy -- on the issue and if so how to do it.

The issues should be identified by a board member, with members either taking turns to identify a topic of their choice or presenting a topic to a committee or the entire board for approval. The key thing here is that one or more board members must be interested in the topic and willing to help make the forum happen.

Once an issue is identified, then the board member could do the presentation, and/or invite another organization to do the presentation, and/or create a panel discussion, or use some other approach. The “lead” board member would then facilitate the discussion. Staff could be asked to assist in the preparation of the forum, either by inviting speakers on behalf of the board, or otherwise assisting.

The board will not choose to act on every issue. The board may have six or eight forums a year, and choose to take further action on only one or two or three issues year. That would be a good workload. Hopefully the position adopted by the board could be summarized in one page – OK, two pages ☺ -- that describe the issue and the recommended course of action.

The board may decide: to lead the charge themselves, to endorse the effort of some other organization(s), to join or create a coalition, or to take some other form of action. The most effective results would come about when one or more – even most – board members communicate the agreed-upon position to others, such as other organizations, elected officials, or the media. The low-impact approach is “to have the Executive Director write a letter” communicating the CAVC position.

One example of the type of advocacy that might result occurred during the public comment period at the May 31, 2012 CAVC board meeting when Don Henniger, Child Development Resources, brought possible state budget cuts in child-care to our attention, and asked for support and that informational materials be made available to others. Imagine if 6 or 8 of the CAVC board members each visited two or three organizations to present a CAVC position on some issue. The word would spread! Even as an agenda item at a board meeting, an issue forum could attract attention or additional attendance. As time passes, the issue forums might become free-standing events apart from board meetings.