

Academy of Hope Board Meeting

September 28, 2019

Minutes

Board Members: Maddy Ford; Larry Meyer; Eddie Trujillo; Julie Meyer; Barbara Jumper; Mark Kutner; Veronica Jackson; Darrell Darnell; Cindy ____, Kermit Kaleba, Rachel Zinn; Karen Leung; Catherine Smith; Paul Suijk

Staff: Joy Bentley Phillips; Leicester Johnson; Brian McNamee; Richmond Onokpite; Audrey Reese; Hazel Cherry; Graciano Peterson

Called to order 8:32

Board Actions – discussion led by Mark Kutner

1. **June Board Minutes.** Question raised seeking clarification about commitment by AoH staff during June meeting to provide six month update on data contract. Discussion of whether there were next steps on part of board, and whether board is expecting to have additional decision points with respect to contract. Chair Kutner notes that board is required to approve contracts over \$25,000 and has already voted to approve both RFP and contract. Requests regular updates. Leicester notes that there is an update in the CEO report but that staff will continue to provide information on implementation. Minutes approved unanimously with no abstentions.
2. **Vote on New Board Member.** Nomination of Tamara Wilds Lawson to serve as new board member. Nomination approved unanimously with no abstentions.
3. **Board Giving Policy.** No formal standard on board member contributions; AoH has \$8 million budget and needs to raise \$1.7million. Board contributions crucial to demonstrate support to potential funders. New policy is not legal obligation but does establish expectations for board members through FY 2021; student members of board exempt from expectation. Board approved unanimously, with no abstentions.
4. **Whistleblower, Harassment, and Substance Abuse Policy.** PCSB has established new rules regarding transparency for charters; there has been lots of concern in the community, press about charter schools, and possible Council action under consideration. Policies were approved unanimously with no abstentions.

Self-Assessment of 2019 Board Efficiency – discussion led by Karen Leung

Discussion of current board meeting frequency, decision making process. Board members generally praised AoH staff efforts to prepare materials and otherwise inform board members of key issues, but expressed frustration with number of meetings and calls, and inefficiency of meeting process. There was also some discussion of decision-making role of Executive Committee, and whether EC could be more empowered to make decisions in lieu of full board. Commitments were made to review current meeting schedule with AoH staff and propose alternatives; improve organization of online board portal to assist board members in reviewing materials prior to meetings; and scheduling more regular EC meetings with a commitment to keep full board apprised of decisions or key discussions made by EC.

- Karen opens by noting that we now have fifteen board members, larger than we've had in the past, and so want to discuss strategies to address meeting and decision-making processes. Leicester feels that current frequency of formal meetings is adequate, though notes that we also have standing monthly calls and there have been a number of committee meetings and ad hoc. Phone meetings have had low attendance, which makes them inefficient as a way to support decision-making.
- One board member notes that meeting frequency is secondary to how we're using meetings. There's a lot of information to absorb, and staff do a good job providing information, but perhaps a more organized board portal would allow board members to review information prior to meetings.
- One board member asks for clarification of role of the Executive Committee. Another board member notes that the board approved an Executive Committee policy last year that sets forth membership of Executive Committee, empowers EC to take votes in lieu of full board. Historically there had been a period where EC was taking many votes, and it was decided to shift to more decision-making with full board.
- One board member notes that meeting frequency has been pretty painful, suggests greater clarification on whether meetings are voting meetings or discussion meetings. Having information on purpose of meeting makes it easier to prioritize, prepare.
- One board member suggests that full board should trust executive committee has best interest of board at heart
- One board member praises the board package provided prior to meetings, but suggests that meetings themselves are hugely inefficient. Should be fewer meetings, and meetings should be shorter.
- One board member echoes previous point, and further suggests that board members are spending a great deal of time questioning management/staff decisions; we should trust management/staff.
- One board member notes that if members miss a meeting, they often don't have easy access to information about what happened, and so are lost
- One board member notes that we have a set of big decisions coming up this year – including foundation, renovation, and other decisions – so want to make sure there's time for discussion.
- One board member suggests that it is responsibility of board members to review materials in advance, and we should not hold off on votes because members are insufficiently prepared
- One board member suggests that there has been a historical goal to achieve board consensus, so if we shift to less discussion will need to reexamine that goal
- One board member suggests that other boards meet quarterly
- One board member notes that there was a recommendation from a consultant that suggested more frequent meetings are a best practice
- One board member proposed that executive committee make decisions on meeting schedule, focus on weekday nights
- One board member notes that students are taking classes at night so would not be able to participate in weekday night meetings
- General consensus appears to be fewer in-person meetings (though this needs to be discussed with staff); fewer phone meetings; more empowerment of executive committee.

- One board member expresses concern about giving too much authority to executive committee; a second board member seconds those concerns, notes that on other boards that sometimes leads to other board members being disconnected from the decision-making process.
- Commitment made that Executive Committee will set more regular schedule and apprise board members of any decisions or discussions taken by EC; also commitment to consider ways to improve board portal. Will look to shifting meeting calendar to less frequent meetings.

Strategic Planning Discussion – Ampersand Consulting.

Summary by consultant Ampersand Consulting on developing new strategic plan for 2020-2025. Three discussion items: Length of plan (3 vs 5 years); academic goals; narrowing priorities from the six initial recommendations laid out in Ampersand presentation. Board not being asked to make decisions but is being asked to inform recommendations.

Board members discussed issues including various strategic priorities, plan length, and whether focus is on growth or stabilization. No decisions made, but there will be a strategic plan committee that will include at least 3-4 members of the board, and board members will receive periodic updates on planning process moving forward, particularly where full board input may help resolve specific questions or concerns.

Diversity/Equity/Inclusion Discussion. Staff and Building for Mission (consultant) provided update on AoH staff on diversity/inclusion/equity efforts. Goal was to get to common staff understanding on race equity as a concept, and how racial equity issues impact AoH staff and students. Key lessons learned include better understanding of historical racism, including within DC region.