



TCG

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON: GOVERNANCE

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RESOURCES FOR TRUSTEES

BY JAAN WHITEHEAD

When trustees gather together — at informal events or national conferences — one of the main themes of their conversations is how isolated many of them feel. They think their problems are unique and that there is something wrong with them that they cannot solve their problems easily. When these trustees start sharing stories, they find that they all face many of the same problems, feel much of the same frustration and are hungry to hear how other theatres are dealing with what they thought were their problems. They gather new ideas, get a better sense of how they are doing and feel connected to other trustees and other theatres. This is particularly true of new trustees who are trying to climb the learning curve as quickly as possible.

This fall, TCG sponsored a forum in New York on *Effective Governance for Changing Times* that was attended by more than 130 trustees, artistic directors and managing directors from around the country. I will give a brief summary of that forum at the end of this *Centerpiece*, but it was an invigorating opportunity for this kind of sharing to take place and an important resource for the trustees able to attend. With the forum, the *Centerpieces* on Governance, the creation of the National Council for the American Theatre (a group of trustees who advise and support TCG), and work-in-progress on additional trustee services, TCG is attempting to build the bridges to the resources that trustees need in our rapidly changing world.

Another major resource for trustees and for their theatres is the rapidly growing literature on nonprofits and their boards. Nonprofits are now big business in this country, and how effectively they are governed has become a major issue. A growing number of organizations and individuals are producing books, magazines, videos, and websites on nonprofit governance. Because the volume of this material is growing so rapidly and because the quality of it varies, we decided to ask Elizabeth Mills and R. Christopher Baker, two graduate students in Victoria Nolan's theatre management class at the Yale School of Drama, to find the material, assess it, and develop a way of sharing it with you in a *Centerpiece*. It was a significant challenge. After wrestling with the material for weeks, Liz and Christopher decided that the best way to share the material was to take you with them on their journey through the web as they surfed for resources on governance. This made sense since listing all the material would take pages and there was no way for them or for TCG to evaluate the quality of that much information. Instead, they decided to give us a roadmap we can follow to find what is relevant for each of us while at the same time introducing us to the websites of the most important institutional sources of board information such as the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, TCG, and the Foundation Center. We appreciate their help and are pleased to present their piece, "Finding Governance Resources: A Roadmap to the Web."

Governance *Centerpiece* curator: Jaan Whitehead, Trustee, Living Stage
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FINDING GOVERNANCE RESOURCES A ROADMAP TO THE WEB

BY ELIZABETH MILLS AND R. CHRISTOPHER BAKER

In the 1990s, one of the greatest technological leaps has been the dissemination of information through computers, especially the world wide web. As we addressed our challenge of researching and compiling a guide to resources for theatre boards of directors, it quickly became clear that the web would be the place that this information would be located and exchanged in the future. So, instead of compiling an annotated list of resources, we decided to write a "travelogue" of our exploration for information on world wide web. In this travelogue we outline the main directions that one would take in exploring information related to serving on boards and managing nonprofit organizations. Some of the items found may advocate contradictory points of view; some items may be relevant while others not; the merits of each are for the user to judge since each institution works in its own way and has its own needs. What we hoped to do was to start you out on the quest and lay out a few markers on the trail.

For those with a passing familiarity with the world wide web, the first impulse may be to use a search engine and look up a common phrase like "board of directors." Unfortunately, doing so returns several hundred thousand pages of information covering everything from the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Quilters Association to Exxon's last annual report, more than anyone could possibly sort through to find a helpful piece of information.

Instead, the best bet is to use a "portal" site. A portal is simply a website that has been structured around providing access to a specific topic. Apart from information contained within the site itself, it often has links to other pages of similar content. We started with the National Center for Nonprofit Boards' (NCNB) website at www.ncnb.org for our search. NCNB's mission is to help nonprofit boards operate more efficiently, and their website contains ample information. There is a description of NCNB and the services it provides, a listing of upcoming workshops they sponsor, an online bookstore containing many titles on board governance and an informative Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. In addition to their archive of the most-asked questions, NCNB offers a Question-of-the-Week, where users can email in their questions and have them answered by the center's experts. For more complete answers, you can order *The Nonprofit*

Board Answer Book, a guide that tries to cover all of the situations that a board member is likely to encounter. Another of NCNB's best sellers is *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*, a guide for developing responsibilities and fulfilling duties. Along with books and pamphlets, NCNB offers a number of videos on topics from new member orientation to advanced strategic planning.

If you exhaust the information at NCNB and still want more, check out the links page. Over 50 organizations, centers, foundations and publications are listed, guaranteeing many hours of exploration. From this menu, we chose to visit The Foundation Center (<http://fdncenter.org/>). The Foundation Center (TFC) is a clearinghouse of information on foundations, corporate giving, and other subjects relating to grantmaking. Apart from offering information in their library facilities in New York, Washington, Atlanta, San Francisco and Cleveland, they have an online reference section that features reference materials, links and even tutorial lessons on grant seeking. The website includes foundation finding resources as well as an online database of over 17,000 articles relating to aspects of non-profit management and fundraising. Looking under Literature of the Nonprofit Sector, the searchable database, we find a list of the most frequently referenced periodicals. Some titles included: *Advancing*

Philanthropy, Board & Administrator, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *Corporate Philanthropy Report*, *The Grantsmanship Center Magazine* and *Nonprofit World*. TFC offers its own publications, including *The Board Member's Book* and *Best Practices of Effective Nonprofit Organizations*. Their most significant publication is *The Foundation Directory*, a comprehensive national listing of all funders including their application processes, requirements, deadlines and a profile of their average recipients. TFC's links section, located in its online library, is remarkably comprehensive and well organized. From the pages of listings, we selected "Nonprofit Resources, General." A sub-menu popped up, and from that we chose *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* (www.philanthropy.com/).

The Chronicle of Philanthropy (CP) is a print and online bi-weekly newspaper that provides news and information to fundraisers, grantmakers and other individuals involved in philanthropy. CP is one of the few resources that we have found so far that has a section devoted entirely to arts organization listings. It also has a technology section where new website or other electronic resources are listed. In addition, the website catalogues electronic discussion mailing lists where members can discuss topics of interest through email exchanges. From their website, we discover Arts Wire

(www.artswire.org), an organization operated by the New York Foundation for the Arts. Arts Wire (AW) is a communications network for the arts community, founded to encourage artists to express themselves and exchange information in the digital world. AW features current news articles of interest to arts organizations and a weekly e-zine that addresses topics in technology. AW also offers classes on integrating technology and the Internet into the arts. Though AW has a massive database of registered sites sorted by both category and discipline, the majority of these are for individual artists or groups. While useful if you're looking for a particular organization, there is little information on boards, so we returned to the links page at NCNB.

Next stop on our odyssey is the Internet Nonprofit Center (www.nonprofit-info.org). INC offers a number of powerful tools on its home page, including a nonprofit organization locator, a Form 990 project that shows how to fill out a 990 form and will eventually include an online collection of 990 filings for reference. The website contains the largest FAQ section that we have yet encountered, with entries sorted by category. The resources section of the FAQ includes bibliographies listing several thousand books, many compiled through user input or research into some facet of nonprofit organizations. Also in the resources FAQs, we found the most complete catalogue of email lists, including instructions on subscribing. We even found a reference to soc.org.nonprofit, a Usenet discussion group on nonprofits. For the uninitiated, Usenet predates the world wide web, and is similar to email bulletin boards where the messages are posted for all users of the board to see. The website also offers an online library with a collection of writings. One of these that particularly impressed us was Cliff Landesman's "Nonprofits and the world wide web" and "How to Read a Nonprofit Financial Statement."

Browsing through the Organization heading in the FAQs, we found our way to the home of the Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits (www.mapnp.org). The MAP is dedicated to guiding nonprofits to better management. Aside from their class and workshop schedule and the services offered directly to organizations, they maintain the Free Management Library (www.mapnp.org/library/), a listing of general categories relating to many areas of nonprofits. Checking under Boards of Directors, we found information on topics including recruiting new board members, running an effective board meeting, writing board guidelines and even how to prepare articles of incorporation. Wandering through this listing took us down many exotic side trails, including a stop at sites that offered an electronic bookshelf of reference books and an online personality type test. This one section alone could occupy a user for days and it is merely a small portion of the information referenced in this one site, which has subject areas ranging from starting an organization to risk management.

Feeling that we had perhaps strayed quite far from our original track, we returned to the NCNB and began our search anew. Our first stop on this trip is Nonprofit Genie (www.genie.org) a well-maintained collection of "Hot Topics," "Cool Sites", and archives of the Board Café, a monthly electronic newsletter produced by NCNB and the Support Center for Nonprofit Management. Each month, Board Café tackles a different topic relating to board membership. The Hot Topic and Cool Sites pages both feature a weekly highlight as well as past highlighted topics or websites. Links to interviews with grantmakers are located in the opinion section. We found a list of recommended books for the board member on the publications page which included: *On Board: Guiding Principles for Trustees of Not-for-Profit Organizations* by Robert W. Crawford,

Understanding Nonprofit Financial Statements: A Primer for Board Members by John Paul Dalsimer, and *The Legal Obligations of Nonprofit Boards: A Guidebook for Board Members* by Jacqueline Covey Leifer and Michael B. Glomb.

From the user-added links, we journeyed to the Nonprofit Resource Center (<http://not-for-profit.org/>). The resources are divided into a dozen topics. The legal links page has links to information on federal and state tax laws, general legal information and law firms that specialize in representing nonprofits. On the grants and grantsmanship page, there are links to various philanthropic organizations, foundations and other grantors, as well as links to internet resources and articles for online fundraising. Under the support organizations and board info link, other links are grouped by the headings of board members, general support organizations and resources, and then lists of state and regional support organizations. The other topics, each with several interesting links, are financial services & software, staffing and volunteers management, fundraising, advocacy and public relations resources, management resources, publications and mailing lists, research and policy studies, other resources, and recommended books. The recommended books section is helpfully divided into categories covering legal and financial, management, fundraising, boards and even a section specifically for arts organizations.

Deciding to explore some sites that are specifically geared toward issues faced by arts organizations we visit the home page of Theatre Communications Group (www.tcg.org). TCG's website is specifically geared to serve the needs of not-for-profit professional theatres nationwide. The site includes a searchable database of TCG's over 340 member theatres; theatre performance schedules; an online bookstore with over six hundred available titles; *American Theatre* online including an

index of past AT articles; membership information; downloadable applications and guidelines to TCG's artistic programs; registration materials for conferences, forums and meetings; member theatre access to the monthly *TCG Bulletin*, *Centerpieces* and executive director *Ben Cameron's Letter to the Field*; an updated posting of arts-related political action alerts; discipline-specific bulletin boards for members, which includes a public

forum; and comprehensive information about TCG.

Other arts organization publications were found at Orchestras Canada (www.oc.org). Though this site is targeted at the orchestral professional working in Canada, some titles intrigued us for addressing universal issues. *Defining a New Arts Era: A Special Report* by Nello McDaniel and George Thorn is one such title, with its

exploration of the artistic process in all aspects of arts management. Another title for the arts professional is *How to get the board you need: The Recruitment and Nominating Process* by Margaret Genovese, with Dory Vanderhoof. This work focuses on the operation of the nominating committee and provides guidelines for members, examples of by-laws and a bibliography of board resources for building and maintaining a successful board.

It would be possible to continue almost indefinitely. The list of web resources is remarkable, especially given that five years ago the world wide web barely existed. Before then, collecting even half of the information that we accumulated would take weeks of research and investigation and probably cost a sizable amount of money. Everything recounted in this article was found at no cost, was available as soon as we requested it, was obtainable 24 hours a day and required no more effort than sitting down at a computer terminal and typing in the request. However, as is readily apparent, we turned up so much material that it would take considerable time just to fully absorb the sampling described here. The sheer volume of material and the rate at which it is growing dictate the need for a discriminating search and the development of judgment about what is most helpful for each board and for each theatre institution. The information is there. Happy hunting!

Elizabeth Mills and R. Christopher Baker are graduate students in the Theatre Management Program at the Yale School of Drama

REPORT ON THE TCG FALL FORUM

Effective Governance for Changing Times

BY JAAN WHITEHEAD

Over 130 trustees, artistic directors and managing directors gathered in New York on the weekend of November 5-7 to explore issues relating to trustees and the governance of our theatres. The opening session on Friday night was held at Lincoln Center. After dinner and a warm welcome by Judy Rubin, chair of TCG's National Council for the American Theatre and also chair of the board of Playwrights Horizons, we heard an inspiring talk by Tom Hall, who is just leaving as managing director of San Diego's Old Globe Theatre after 20 years. Tom reflected on his years at the Old Globe and talked thoughtfully about the tendencies for institutional concerns to infringe on artistic concerns at our theatres and the importance of retaining the art as the living center of our work.

On Saturday morning we met at the 92nd Street Y, one of the grand institutions of New York, and started the day with a provocative session with George Thorn of Arts Action Research. George and his partner Nello McDaniel have spent much of their careers working with issues of institutional change and George shared their recent thinking that the artistic process itself provides the best model for structuring and operating our institutions, including how boards fit with these institutions. After George's talk, we broke into small groups to discuss the needs of theatre artists, board motivation, effective board committees and board nomination and evaluation. I attended the session on the needs of

theatre artists where costume designer Susan Hilferty, scenic designer Hugh Landwehr, actor Lois Smith and playwright Alice Tuan discussed how they reacted to working at different theatres, stressing how important basic amenities and a warm welcome are for traveling artists. Since trustees rarely see the daily life of their visiting artists, it was a sensitive insight into how theatres can improve the working environment for these artists.

After lunch we stayed together for a candid dialogue among a trustee, an artistic director and a managing director on the dynamics of trustee/staff relations moderated by Gwen Cochran Hadden. Gwen is a master at opening up dialogue and the group talked about many of the sensitive and awkward issues affecting the way boards and staffs work together such as socioeconomic differences, misunderstanding about basic roles, problems of manipulation and information control, problems of attitudes, and problems of personality conflicts. By the end of the discussion, it felt as though some fresh air had blown away much that tends to remain repressed and unspoken in board/staff relations.

We ended Saturday with another round of breakout sessions covering class and race issues, board evaluations of artistic and managing leaders, artistic choices and boards, and issues relating to corporate versus not-for-profit viewpoints.

On Sunday, we convened at Theatre Row on West 42nd Street where a number of off-Broadway theatres are located. We started the morning with a lively and timely session on public controversy over the arts, particularly the recent attack by New York's mayor on the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Each of the participants talked not only about their own problems with censorship and barriers to public understanding of the arts but gave hard-earned advice on how to handle the press and other actors in public dramas over the arts. Following this session we had one more round of breakout sessions focusing on long-range planning, endowments and other longer-term financial strategies, leadership succession, issues about theatre facilities and buildings, advocacy, and the pressures of staying with the artistic vision in the face of change. I attended David Hawkanson's session on long-term planning that not only drew on his long experience as a managing director but had a wide range of theatres in attendance, which brought out many of the differences between small and large and new and old theatres in the planning process.

We ended the day with lunch at a nearby restaurant and with a summary of our time together by Ben Cameron, TCG's executive director. The general consensus was that it had been a very good three days in which good questions were asked, the dialogue was maintained at a high level, and new friendships and new understandings were achieved.