

*The non-profit sector is defined by the community involvement and ownership that comes from governance through a board of directors.*

*With changing relationships with government, the end of operating agreements, and an increasing need for non-profit housing providers to be self-sustaining, adaptable, and strategic, boards are truly the backbone of the non-profit housing sector and will lead the way in affordable housing provision in Manitoba.*

*MNPHA hosted a panel and workshop: Strong and Engaged Boards on June 14. A panel of board members with a range of experiences answered a series of questions, then attendees provided suggestions for MNPHA on how the association can support strong and engaged boards.*

### **Panel Participants**

Marilyn McLaren, Chair of South Osborne Place Cooperative

Tom Janzen, President of Westminster Housing Inc.

Dean Joyce, Board member and Chair of Future Projects Committee of Bethel Place

Donna Collins, Board member of Ten Ten Sinclair Housing Inc.

**Facilitated** by Laurie Socha, President of MNPHA and General Manager, S.A.M.(Management) Inc.

### **Discussion:**

#### **1. Board Recruitment: How can boards make sure they are providing rewarding experiences for their members?**

*Involve them! People join boards because they want to participate:*

- Circulate and get input to agenda before the meeting
- Let people start committees
- Give members different leadership responsibilities

*Celebrate successes:*

- Plan, review the plan annually, and make sure you don't miss the bigger picture
- Show people the changes that have occurred because of them
- Hold volunteer appreciation celebrations at your AGM

#### **2. Volunteering has undergone major shifts in the past decade. How do you seek new members for your boards? How do you retain existing members?**

- *Your principles and vision should outlast your board members. Focus on these, rather than keeping the same people on the board forever*
- *Identify skill needs in advance, and plan to meet the gaps you have*
- *Pay for the advice and expertise you don't have on the board*
- *Always be in 'recruiting' mode – talk to people about the board and invite them to participate*
- *Longer-term board members need to sit back and listen. Their role over time is to draw out participation from others while keeping the vision and principles, otherwise people will defer to them*
- *Mentorship is critical*

**3. Boards are expected to make strategic, high-value decisions at their meetings. How do you make the most of your meetings?**

- *Put decision points on the agendas so people are prepared. And make sure you actually make a decision!*
- *Most of the work happens in between meetings, at committees. Create committees for critical items like capital investments, policy development*
- *Committees are a great way to recruit new members – invite non-board members to participate*
- *Only hold meetings when decisions need to be made*
- *On some boards, each member has a 'file' that they report on at the meetings*

**4. Non-Profit boards tend to attract people who are committed to helping people and who care about the values of the sector – caring for low-income people, and ensuring there is housing for all. Non-profits must also be sustainable and future-oriented. How do you balance business and values?**

- *This is the crux of the non-profit housing challenge. Boards must focus on the future of the organization and keep this balance in mind in all decisions*
- *Orientation is critical. The ED/Manager should spend time orienting new members so they know the values and the business*
- *Encourage questions at meetings, teach members, and make sure they are aware of trends in the sector*

MNPHA Members provided feedback on what should be in a Board Toolkit. This toolkit will be available in Fall, 2019.

Attendees also discussed opportunities for Boards to collaborate with each other. Ideas/suggestions included:

- Match Board Chairs with each other so they can connect and share information
- Support boards with succession planning and mentorship
- Invite boards to attend each other's board meetings
- Hold workshops on board development by role e.g. just for secretaries, just for treasurers
- Share a contact list of board members with each other
- Share each others' materials (e.g. policies) on MNPHA website
- Consider a chat/question section for boards on MNPHA site or online forum
- Create a resource list of people who will share expertise/experience on common challenges
- Create a directory of professionals, people who can assist and troubleshoot
- Hold program-specific events (e.g. meetings for people with post-85 agreements)
- Create a list of funders/funding opportunities
- Hold Board Retreats for members