TOOL #17: PLANNING SESSION FOR INTEGRATION

There is a lot to consider when integrating previously separate nonprofit organizations, even when one is small and the other is quite large. For a detailed description of merger integration tactics, we recommend *The Nonprofit Mergers Workbook Part II: Unifying the Organization After a Merger* by La Piana Associates (see Tool #3, Bibliography).

It is important to start planning for integration as early as possible. Often this phase can be launched right after the due diligence phase is completed, once the parties know that the merger will be closing.

The Integration process is usually delegated to a Joint Integration Team made up of staff members from the original organizations. The team is usually chaired by the merged organization's Executive Director or a senior executive such as the Chief Operating Officer. The Joint Integration Team prepares, updates, and implements the integration plan and reports to the Board of Directors. A simple dashboard of metrics measuring the success of the integration can be created to give the board a quick idea, from month to month, of how the integration process is going.

Because the team is charged with ensuring the success of the integration process, evaluation is a critical component of its work. Evaluation is conducted in a variety of ways including formal, informal, and one on one, as well as by using focus groups and anonymous feedback in order to give people a variety of comfortable ways to let the leadership know how the integration is going.

Integration team members should only include individuals who are fully in support of the merger; if someone is in a key position but not in support of the merger, this individual can be an "ad hoc" member of the committee and participate only when needed based on the subject matter.

It's important to have team members representing the original nonprofits; the new organization needs the knowledge and history of people from the original organizations to develop appropriate plans and solutions to problems when they arise. Typical staff members who participate in an integration team include the following:

Executive Director or CEO
Chief Operating Officer or Director of Operations Chief Financial Officer
Director or VP of the following:

- IT
- Facilities
- Programs
- Fund Development or Fundraising
- Marketing/Communications
- Quality/Evaluation

In addition to conducting staff and operations integration, it's critical to pay attention to board integration. Don't neglect to involve the merged Board of Directors in its own integration planning and training process.

Here are topics which can be covered in a Merger Integration Plan:

a) Finance/Accounting
b) Human Resources
c) Board of Directors
d) IT
e) Facilities
f) Fund Development
g) Marketing Communications (internal, external)
h) Programs, Services
i) Outcome Evaluation
j) Culture (twenty-four months)
k) Other

The plan should detail the necessary tactics that must be implemented, starting on day one and going forward day by day for each area of the organization, gradually moving out in time until the plan is charting week by week, then month by month, and so on. In the beginning, the Integration Team will meet weekly, and then gradually meetings will start to stretch out as time goes on and integration objectives are achieved. A plan is typically twenty-four months long; the first six months will necessarily focus heavily on operations issues (integrating the salary/benefits and databases, for instance). Increasingly, more of the plan will focus on cultural integration, developing one organization and breaking down the separate silos.

The success of the merger will be measured by how well the Integration Team addresses the cultural integration; it can be tempting to terminate the team's work after all of the operations issues are completed. But cultural integration is absolutely critical to the success of the merger, and the Team needs to – must – continue to address this vital aspect of organizational life.