What’s Next?: 5 Steps to mobilize the Collaborative Advantage

It has been a divisive series of weeks and months with this year’s election. No matter what is your side of the political spectrum our environment is constantly changing. This year’s election is another example of the importance of staying engaged with our local, state, and federal government officials. As philanthropy and the civic sector, it is our role to make sure that the lives of citizens improve and communities thrive.

Now that the election is over it is our responsibility to focus on continuing our great work, communicate our impact, and advance the work and investments that are critical for our citizens and state to be a thriving place. We showcase and mobilize the collaborative advantage working with those across the private, philanthropic, public, and social profit sectors. We work with everyone to ensure that we can build effective and strong partnerships that improve the quality of life for our neighbors and create better and stronger communities in our state.

Whether you are a board member, CEO, staff, or advisor it is critical to open doors of dialogue and awareness of our working with government, business, and other sectors. We must now take the important steps to educate our new government officials and continue our partnerships with long-time officials. I suggest you take the time to focus on five areas as we prepare for the transition of power and as we bring everyone together building strong bridges to advance West Virginia. The Five Ways to be engaged include:

(1) **Exemplify Your Values:** At the core of your organization’s mission and service, you have key values and ethics that you exemplify and practice every day. Recommit and share your values and ethics with your staff, board, and the broader community to showcase the impact your organization or foundation has every day. Prepare a blog or brief statement on this to share these values with others online, in-person, and/or in the media. Your organization is a beautiful example of partnerships, impact, and the value of our American experience so live and be the inspiration.

(2) **Share your Story:** Each foundation and organization makes an impact in different ways. So prepare your story that 45-second elevator pitch and/or the longer version to communicate your impact. Have in mind a person or a place to tell what you have done or are doing. Prepare a series of short stories showcasing your work and include the community and economic impact with it. It is best to tell your own story and provide talking points with staff and board members for them to share with different audiences. Talk about the value of partnerships and working with government officials. Be sure to share your story!

(3) **Promote your ROI:** Every foundation and civic organization contributes considerable value to our communities whether it is increasing student success, reducing drug addiction, increasing economic production, and much more. Take time with your board, staff, and partners to identify what is your Return on Investment (ROI) whether it is more college graduates, number of people served, reducing hunger and poverty, increasing healthy lifestyles, and so on. If you take some time to determine your ROI, this data and information is great to share with long-time and newly elected leaders. If you need assistance in identifying this information, contact Philanthropy WV and WVNPA to help you in this work. We have some great resources for you.

(4) **Connect:** As government transitions from city hall to the state capitol, you have both long-time leaders continuing and new ones arriving. Use this opportunity to keep long-standing relationships by updating them on your story, return on investment, and thanking them for past support. As new leaders plan to take office, reach out to arrange a briefing or visit with your newly elected officials on your organization’s work and community impact. Join our Public Policy & Advocacy Committee to advocate on key issues for the sector. Starting new relationships and continuing long-time ones will naturally give your organization an advantage during good and bad times. You want to be at the table for discussions and decision making versus on the menu.

(5) **Be the Collaborative Advantage:** We know that in our great state we have limited resources during these challenging economic times, but working together we create the collaborative advantage. When civic profit organizations, philanthropy, businesses/private sector, and government work and invest together, we see the greatest successes. Use this time to discuss how we co-create stronger communities and that to move forward during these challenging times lets look at the intersection of opportunities to leverage each other’s work. When see and share the reality is that we are all partners in strengthening and advancing our state, we can make WV a competitive place benefiting us all. A prime example of such collaborative advantage is our work together across sectors earlier this year to renew the WV Neighborhood Investment Program. We saw some of the greatest partnerships to ensure a common issue advances for the benefit of many communities.

Now is our time to be the bright light that advances our state and partners with multiple sectors to ensure West Virginia reaches its greatest potential based in our values of leadership, diversity, service, and putting West Virginia first.