



IN THE BUSINESS OF NONPROFITS

Case Study **The Friends of Valley Forge Park**

A Logical Progression to Sustainability

MAP meets you where you are and helps you build realistically."

-Diane Ward, Board Member, Friends of Valley Forge Park

Several years ago, the board of The Friends of Valley Forge Park, an organization dedicated to engaging public support for the Park, enhancing its public use and enjoyment and sharing in the stewardship of its natural and historical resources, made the conscious decision to become a "more vibrant" organization. That energy, coupled with the enthusiastic support a new park superintendent, set a goal of establishing a stronger partnership with the Park. And that made building membership a priority.

With no paid staff, a small group of board members and other volunteers grew membership from about 75 to 1500.

To keep its momentum going, the organization joined The Nonprofit Center and took advantage of the free member benefit of a "Best Practices in Board Governance" leadership development session. From that point on, said volunteer and board member Diane Ward, "board engagement really took hold."

The training resulted in a "to do list," as Diane called it, of systems and procedures we had to have in place if we were going to be able to fulfill our mission, "advocating and raising funds for the park, developing and offering programs that educate the public and enhance their experience and have a strong volunteer corps supporting park programs and projects," she said.

The Friends recently completed a Management Assessment Process (MAP) with The Nonprofit Center. "MAP was an endorsement of how far we'd come from those early days," Diane said, "but without that first piece (the board of directors training), we wouldn't have been prepared for the organizational assessment."

The MAP process identified the organization's weaknesses, but allowed the group to rate their importance so that it had clear priorities. "The report the consultants provided identified key areas of consideration like clarifying the need for a formal fundraising plan. One of the characteristics of MAP that is beneficial to a small volunteer group like this is that it "meets you where you are and helps you build realistically," Diane added.

Todd Von Deak, one of the two Nonprofit Center consultants who conducted the MAP was quick to add, that "MAP is applicable to any size organization because it presents the chance to really 'think smartly.'"

Diane admitted that one of MAPs greatest advantages is that it is a free MemberPlus benefit from The Nonprofit Center so "that immediately eliminates any argument about cost," Diane said with a smile.

The next step for Friends of Valley Forge in its growth trajectory is developing a strategic plan which was endorsed through the outcomes of MAP. Diane attributes much of this success to the progression of the board training, followed by the MAP, and soon to come strategic planning process."

Todd agrees that MAP is an important first step in the critical strategic planning process, saying that organizations can either start the strategic planning process "cold turkey," or first go through MAP, which "forces a critical thinking process that makes strategic planning far more beneficial."

His partner in the MAP process, Tony Scott, agreed, adding, "Strategic planning starts with an assessment and a good thorough understanding of your organization. Once you've completed MAP, you have all that valuable information in hand." Todd adds that so often, a strategic plan is based on "whims and hunches" and with MAP, you have the facts you need to be effective.

"MAP gets a board {and staff} talking, thinking, dreaming."

-Todd Von Deak, Nonprofit Center Consultant