

MWMO Agency Assessment Report

UST Social Work Class

2016

MWMO Agency Assessment

The purpose of the agency assessment is to gain a better understanding of how MWMO addresses social change within their community. Three employees from MWMO were interviewed. Using Appendix C, we scored two interviews of employees' understanding of MWMO's vision and mission statements. Following are the results of this assessment.

Interview with MWMO Executive Director

Part one of the assessment was designed to determine the interviewee's knowledge of the organization's mission and vision statements, as well as their theory of change. The executive director has a clear understanding of the mission and vision statements of MWMO and feels both statements guide the work of MWMO. From this interview, we gave MWMO a score of nine out of a possible nine points for part one of the Appendix C assessment.

Part two of the assessment discusses the organizational structure of MWMO and how it contributes to social change and community engagement. The structure of MWMO involves the executive director consulting with staff and constituents. Leadership is not reflective of the community in which MWMO serves, but MWMO recognizes this is an issue. MWMO provides educational opportunities for local community members as well as offers grants for community projects that relate back to water quality, quantity, and conservation in some way. These are the main ways in which MWMO interacts with the community.

Snyder reports MWMO is becoming more intentional about targeting specific communities to reach out and partner with. MWMO has engaged with local neighborhoods in the past, mostly through attending existing community events by setting up an agency booth. Tabling at local community events provides a way for MWMO to advertise their name and mission. However, their goal is to find ways to move beyond tabling and get communities more

directly involved in water quality and quantity. MWMO seeks feedback from local communities through surveys and following up with events in which MWMO has participated. MWMO has been active in local events and communities, however, the connections with local communities seem to be short term rather than concrete, mutual bonds. Based on this section of the assessment, we have scored MWMO at seven points out of a possible 12 for part two, making the total for the assessment 16 out of a possible 21 points based on the responses of the executive director.

Interview with MWMO Community Outreach

The second interview conducted was with two employees of MWMO, the youth and community outreach specialist and the stewardship and community outreach specialist. The first part of the assessment revealed that these two employees found the mission statement of MWMO is very vague. Additionally, they agreed that the mission statement was not a guiding force in the organization's outreach. They were not familiar with MWMO's vision statement. They feel there is a general vision that drives all of the organization's staff, but again, this vision does not necessarily guide community outreach.

Part two of the assessment discusses the leadership of MWMO, how it reflects the community it serves, community participation, and social change. The ultimate decision-making power belongs to the board of directors who meet every-other month. The leadership in MWMO does not reflect the diversity of the community that the organization serves. The interviewees note they are aware of this issue. The organization has conducted diversity training in the past but are not aware of any plans to increase the diversity of the board. They mention that because the board members are elected by the public, they do not have control over this leadership

position. Additionally, they say that the organization is striving to create connections with diverse communities in the Watershed.

The interviewees report MWMO is very interested in receiving feedback from community members. The organization frequently asks for constituent feedback through the use of surveys and evaluations. The community is also free to attend board meetings, however, few attend. They feel MWMO is involved in social change in a couple of different ways. One way that they are involved in the community is by educating constituents on issues of water in the Watershed. They note that because they are a public organization and not a non-profit, they cannot tell people how to vote or advocate, but they can provide education. The primary form of education which they provide is tabling at community events. According to the responses received, we gave them a score of six out of nine on part one and six out of 12 on part two. This gives them a total score of 12 out of 21.

Interview with Community Partnership: Project Sweetie Pie

In addition to interviews with MWMO staff, an interview was conducted with one of the organization's community partners, Project Sweetie Pie (PSP). The purpose of this interview was to assess the community's knowledge and awareness of MWMO as well as to understand the community perception of MWMO. The interviewee was Michael Chaney who is the founder of PSP and a community activist in North Minneapolis. According to Chaney, the relationship between PSP and MWMO involves members of MWMO coming to and tabling at PSP's events. There has been no long-term collaboration between MWMO and PSP in terms of working together in the community for a common interest. Chaney feels that there needs to be a greater involvement in order to build lasting rapport within the community. From Chaney's perspective,

one way to strengthen rapport with the community would be to be more transparent with how MWMO's work is important to the greater community.

Chaney believes the lack of diversity within MWMO is a root cause of the disconnection between these two organizations. MWMO does not reflect the community they are in, which makes it difficult to connect with their community and for the community to connect with them. Chaney describes diversity as a "point of transformation and reform," suggesting if MWMO staff was more diverse, it would be better able to connect with the community. Chaney also feels members of MWMO need to be more hands-on in their involvement with PSP and MWMO could benefit from a more "grass roots effort" when connecting to the community of North Minneapolis. For example, they could come to work in the community gardens on a regular basis, not just have a table at PSP's events.

Interpretation of Assessment

The Mississippi Watershed Management Organization scored a total average score of 14 out of 21 points on the agency assessment. This score suggests MWMO has some good strategies for addressing social change; however more can be done to ensure those strategies are effective in engaging with the community they serve. Additionally, other strategies could be implemented that may lend themselves to forming and maintaining more sustainable community partnerships. The scores from the two interviews differ. This may cause a misunderstood idea of the purpose of MWMO within the community it serves. In part two of the assessment, the lowest scoring portion involved the diversity of the staff of MWMO. This assertion is supported by the interview with Chaney. He believes the lack of diversity on MWMO staff is the number one barrier to the organization connecting well with the community.

Insight

In order to maximize the organization's impact on the community and build rapport, all levels of MWMO must have a working understanding of the mission and vision. The interview with the community leader reaffirms the mission and vision statements of MWMO are not easily translated to community members, making it difficult for communities to engage with MWMO and vice versa. This assessment provides an opportunity for MWMO to have a better, more specific understanding of where they stand in the community of North Minneapolis as well as gain a sense of how they are viewed by the community. These findings can be used as a guide when engaging with communities in the future.

Transformation Stages

The transformation process is continuous, repeating over and over in nearly every agency. This makes it difficult to determine exactly which specific stage an organization is in. There are several aspects of each stage present within MWMO. The stage that appears most similar to where MWMO sits is the vision stage in the transformation process. There are, however, many attributes of the learning, awareness, strategy, action, and reflection/evaluation stages.

Learning

The staff at MWMO are constantly learning. They engage with, constituents, other organizations and each other to better understand what the issues are that need to be addressed and how to work through them. They spend time during staff meetings and board of commissioner meetings to engage in continuous learning. MWMO staff informed us that community members were welcome to come to the board meetings every other month and share what they know and how they see the world around them.

Awareness

The three staff we met with at MWMO had a similar understanding of the power structure that exists within the organization. They were aware of who is able to make specific decisions. The outreach team informed us that they are able to make day-to-day decisions, but all projects and larger matters need to be presented and approved by the board and CEO. Staff identified constituent involvement and power as their ability to share input with MWMO as well as serving with the outreach teams. The outreach specialists we interviewed, expressed great interest in constituent opinions and involvement. However, our discussion with Michael Chaney, a community leader, and the difficulty in connecting with other partners of MWMO made it appear that constituents do not understand what kind of power they hold within MWMO.

Vision

MWMO is currently in the vision stage more than any of the others in the transformation process. Together, the board of commissioners along with employees of MWMO has created an idea of the world they wish to live in. Although not all of the employees know the exact statement, they have a similar understanding that their vision is to protect the water and land within the watershed in the long-term. This vision guides small day-to-day decisions as well as preparation for long-term projects.

Many roles have been identified for constituents to participate in the vision that MWMO holds. The outreach team strives to engage people of all ages in various programs that help advance the long-term goals they have laid out. Community organizations are encouraged to apply for grants from MWMO to complete projects that further the protection of the ecosystem. Members of the community MWMO serves are welcomed at board meetings and tabling events to not only learn what the organization does but also provide their input.

Strategy

Potential partnerships have begun to be identified by MWMO. Project Sweetie Pie was identified, but it appears that, after speaking with Chaney, the partnership has yet to be fully cultivated. A couple other community organizations were identified as partners, but no follow-up was provided. MWMO has several ideas of how to reach out to organizations and individuals within the community such as setting up tables and activities at various events in the area. In these, MWMO envisions specific results they wish to achieve. Whenever a project is proposed to the board, an end goal must be apparent or it goes unapproved.

Action

The outreach team at MWMO has executed several programs targeting groups throughout the community. They have actively engaged in promoting water quality by working with both youth and adults in projects that improve the whole community. MWMO has and continues to provide grants to local organizations to fund projects that improve the ecosystem within the watershed. As far as advocacy goes, MWMO is very active in educating individuals about issues that involve water so they are able to engage in policy work. Because MWMO is a public organization, they are limited in what they can advocate for and how to get others involved in policy.

Reflection/Evaluation

In our meetings with MWMO staff, we were informed that they use many different forms of evaluations. Because of their connection with the government, evaluations are required in order to show that tax dollars are being used appropriately. This involves reviewing the effectiveness of implemented programs as well as staff performance. MWMO also welcomes feedback from constituents in order to determine how they're being impacted by MWMO. The

staff is continuously working to understand what has worked in the past and why other ideas have not worked in order to adapt their strategies to better fit the communities they are serving.

Strategies for Social Change

In order for MWMO to move forward in the transformation process, they must begin to utilize strategies necessary for strengthening their ability to create social change. The following strategies will help them move forward from the vision phase into the strategy and action phase: involving constituents, creating alliances with other community organizations and building leadership within their agency.

Constituent Involvement

In the interviews done with the agency members and the community members, involving constituents was something that both found necessary and underutilized. Having community members involved in all areas of the agency allows for better connection with the individuals the agency is trying to reach. Involving community members also create a better understanding of the population affected by the agency's actions. MWMO would directly benefit from having community members involved because they would gain a better understanding of the needs of the community, allowing them to tailor their services around the members of the watershed. MWMO would also stay true to their mission, promoting "civic ownership and responsibility through measure that achieve diverse and functional ecosystems" (MWMO website).

Alliances with community organizations

Alliances are necessary for creating tangible social change in communities. A single agency only has the capacity to do so much. Creating alliances allow agencies to utilize other resources not readily available to them and provides avenues for them to do things otherwise impossible (Building Movement Project, 2006). Alliances create opportunities for new ideas, but

also provide tangible resources such as manpower, a physical space to work, and secondhand relationships with other groups (Building Movement Project, 2006). If MWMO was able to create lasting alliances with organizations whose goals are similar to their own and who work within in the communities that MWMO serves, they would have better support to fulfill their mission and vision. This would also allow for better community involvement as addressed in the paragraph above. They would be able to utilize the connections that their allies have already made and continue to build their own, fulfilling their vision of "reflecting changing community values" (MWMO website).

Building leadership within the agency

Effective leadership allows for an agency to create successful social change. If leadership is not effective, social change may not be possible. Something highlighted in our interviews with the staff at MWMO was the lack of communication between individuals at the agency, and how this affected the work being done. While the executive board has the overall say in decision-making, it's important for all employees to feel heard and have their decisions valued. This leads to better work done by all individuals.

Logic Model

Attached is a logic model outlining the steps to achieve a better understanding of diversity and community needs at MWMO. It is charted through three steps: involvement, action steps, and short term goals.

Involvement

Involvement is the resources and personnel needed to make the change happen. In order to create a better understanding of diversity, there must be involvement from both the

community members and surrounding neighborhoods that MWMO works with as well as the MWMO staff and board members. Both are crucial to creating this change.

Action Steps

Action Steps outlines the way that the resources are used. The resources from MWMO will be used to provide education and leadership training to members of the community. MWMO will use their time to participate in diversity training, something already put in place by the agency. They will also use their time to attend required community partnership activities. Something mentioned by the head of Project Sweetie Pie, Michael Chaney, during previous interviews was the need for individuals working for MWMO to participate in community activities.

Short Term Goals

The Short Term goals will create measurable results for MWMO regarding the community and its relationships. By participating in the action steps, MWMO would achieve higher levels of community involvement, a more diverse agency and foster longer lasting and more productive relationships between community members and their agency. These outputs will lead to an overall better understanding of the surrounding community's needs, how diverse the community is and its effects on services, as well as the overall client population served.