



Build a Culture of Innovation

Source: *The Membership Management Report*, December, 2016

Is your organization constantly taking steps to function at a higher level of efficiency? Are you using new ideas and fast internal processes to find solutions for facing obstacles that are common in your field? If this description is reflective of your sensibilities, then you are likely taking the right steps to effectively build an internal culture of innovation.

“I think a lot of associations make mistakes on the front end thinking they can paint their walls a different color or decorate their offices with crazy furniture in an effort to appear innovative, but it takes so much more than that,” says President of Barnes Association Consultants John Barnes. “Instead, organizations should focus on laying the groundwork necessary to establish a culture of innovation, which means they must learn to properly address the roadblocks their association is facing and create breakthroughs so they can be naturally innovative.”

To strive for a culturally innovative workplace, Barnes suggests starting at the top of your organization. Some key areas of focus should include:

- Equipping CEOs/executive directors with tools and resources to spearhead change.
- Establishing governance in leadership.
- Streamlining organizational policies and procedures.
- Clarifying strategic plans.
- Establishing effective staff structure.
- Mobilizing board members to support leaders.

“Start by reviewing governance and thinking about new ways for board members to more efficiently conduct the work of their organizations, and make sure the board is focused on your strategic plan,” Barnes says. “It’s not something that will happen overnight, but by continuing your dedication to working through various parts of your association, you can help these individuals begin to implement innovative ideas.”

Once goals and concepts have been outlined, organizations should secure buy-in from organizational leaders and their board of directors. “It becomes a challenge when boards recognize the changes that need to be made but resist due to fear or political reasons. Organizations need to realize it’s impossible to be groundbreaking when the board is not committed to and supportive of the CEO,” Barnes says. “Even the greatest associations can get better if they look at the areas I mentioned earlier and commit to taking steps to achieve the culture of innovation they’ve always aspired to have.”



John Barnes, President, Barnes Association Consultants

johnbarnes@barnes-consultants.com | 703.321.6866 | barnes-consultants.com