

2011 STATE BUDGET

The Task Force was asked to respond to this question concerning the 2011 State Budget: "Was the outcome a victory or defeat for County interests?" The unanimous response by the Task Force membership was that the outcome was a defeat for County interests and the WCHA. The defeat cannot be measured just in a legislative outcome favoring or adversely effecting Counties, but also in the disunity created within the WCHA; the perceived loss of WCHA credibility by transportation stakeholders; and the failures within our organization to respond decisively to a challenging legislative initiative.

FAILURES

Motion 352 and the 2011 State Budget process has exposed weaknesses within the WCHA that must be addressed. The failures that occurred during budget process cannot be blamed solely on individuals within our organization, but are a corporate, systematic failure of the Association itself. A breakdown of the WCHA's ability to engage in the political process occurred, due to organizational weaknesses that can be readily recognized. In order to recommend changes that must be made, the Task Force first identified perceived failures at each level.

Executive Committee

Among the failures identified at the Executive Committee level are the following:

- The Executive Committee fractured, expressing contradictory WCHA positions
- The Executive Committee did not prepare the membership for the position taken
- The Executive Committee assumed the membership was supportive rather than engaging the membership to measure support or opposition. A disconnect between leadership and membership occurred.
- The Executive Committee allowed the short legislative time line to trump communication with BOD and membership
- The Executive Committee underestimated the membership's opposition to non-fiscal impacts of the Legislation
- The Executive Committee did not complete an assessment of the impacts of the legislation to individual Counties

Board of Directors

Among the failures identified at the Board of Directors level are the following:

- The Board of Directors (BOD) failed to lead by failing to get involved in the process and assert their legislative authority under the WCHA By-Laws and Constitution.
- The BOD failed to communicate to the membership.
- The BOD failed to communicate membership input to the Executive Committee

Association Membership

Among the failures identified at the membership level are the following:

- In general, the membership did not engage the WCHA governing body with respect to the legislation. There was a lack of understanding on how to communicate concerns and to whom.
- The membership did not pay attention to information provided by WCHA. Misinformation was often accepted as fact
- The membership often ignored the WCHA and lobbied on their own behalf giving Legislators contradictory and confusing positions
- The membership exhibited lack of understanding of the political climate generating the legislation and a naivete on how the political process can be affected
- The membership often resists change and defines the status quo as the default position when it is not

Executive Director

Among the failures identified at the Executive Director level were the following:

- The Executive Director failed to communicate in a simple, straightforward method the pros and cons of the legislative initiatives
- The Executive Director was perceived by the membership as being an "advocate or supporter" of the proposed legislation rather than a resource or facilitator for the WCHA position
- The Executive Director allowed the WCA to use his review of several pieces of legislation as the premise for supporting Motion 352

Wisconsin Counties Association

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) represents all facets of County Government. In the capacity the WCA initially took a position in support of the legislative initiatives and then modified it when a statement that the WCHA does not join the WCA in their endorsement of Motion 352 was released by the WCHA President.

Among the failures identified at the WCA level were the following:

- The WCA took the lead in responding to the legislation without a comprehensive review by the WCHA
- The WCA made an assumption that the funding increases outweighed the adverse non-fiscal impacts. There appeared to be a slant towards funding increases overriding any technical or operational impacts.

ADDRESSING FAILURES

The Task Force has provided an extensive list of recommendations for change that the WCHA should consider (see General Recommendations). Recognizing and addressing the failures that occurred should lead to a strengthening of our Association and prepare us for future challenges.

The Task Force recognizes four broad areas where change is needed:

- * Communication
- * Education
- * Structure
- * Process

One of the biggest failures cited over and over again by the Task Force members is a breakdown in communication. Communication problems exist at all levels and between all levels. The nature of communication goes beyond the simple dissemination of information, and includes conveying the direction of the Association, not merely where the Association has been, but also where it's going.

Education is also often cited as a major issue to be addressed. Leadership has a responsibility to provide information that will allow the membership to understand and be able to formulate positions on matters that may be quite complex. Leading includes providing information to the members that will allow them to have an understanding similar to that of the leadership. As an organization, we select our peers to serve as our leaders, an equality of knowledge strengthens and empowers us as an Association.

The WCHA has a structure for governance. Yet it is clear that this structure has led to failures. Are the components of that structure wrong or are they not being used appropriately? It is clear that the Association does not need radical changes to its organizational structure, but each component of the structure needs to change, so that it strengthens and serves the Association. If any component of structure fails or if multiple components of a structure partially fail, there can be a catastrophic failure. The components of the WCHA governing structure needs to be recalibrated and repaired in order for that structure to function correctly.

Of all the failures that have occurred, process is one that is the most visible. One of the failures that occurred was that there really was no process to be engaged. In other cases the process was limited by time constraints or breakdowns in organizational mechanics. The WCHA needs to establish a process for addressing issues, of any kind, that is accepted throughout the organization. A component that needs to be included in any process is planning. Keys to any plan are a platform, goals, policies and positions, which can be a guide for process and anticipates challenges for our organization.

