



BC VETERINARY TECHNOLOGISTS ASSOCIATION: A JOURNEY OF REMARKABLE GROWTH

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Executive Summary

In the dynamic realm of non-profit organizations, the BC Veterinary Technologists Association (BCVTA) has undertaken a journey of impressive growth. Over the last five years, Finley & Associates (Finley) has been honoured to support the Association with its strategic planning, governance, and capacity building at the Board of Directors (Board) and Executive Director level. This Association consistently exceeds expectations despite its size, and we take great pride in its remarkable progress! Let's dive into the strategies and key actions that have set this organization up for long-term success.

Introduction

Founded in 1980, the BCVTA has a rich history and dedication to the advancement of veterinary technology. The BCVTA supports its 1475 members in a variety of ways including professional growth and development opportunities; resources, tools & support services; and advocacy work.

Key Learnings for Associations

Embrace Change

BCVTA's journey highlights the importance of embracing change and fostering a culture of willingness to grow.

Annual Strategic Planning

Dedicated strategic planning is essential for charting the course of organizational growth and ensuring alignment with mission and values.

Seek Out External Expertise

Leveraging external expertise can enhance organizational capacity, drive innovation, and introduce new thinking.

Commitment to Success

BCVTA's commitment to success and continuous improvement, with a focus on dedicated strategic planning and effective governance, has been instrumental in its evolution.

Key Milestones

Investment in Board Governance Training

2019 - the BCVTA began taking steps to improve its governance practices. Through the introduction by former Board President Heather Shannon, BCVTA engaged Finley to enhance the Board's governance literacy. The workshop, "Governance Trends for High-Performing Boards" played a key role in setting the stage for important governance changes within BCVTA.

Introduction of Annual Strategic Planning Retreat

2021 - The Board enlisted Finley to lead the development of its 2021-24 Strategic Plan, recognizing the benefit in having an external facilitator guide the creation of the organization's future direction. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 1.5-day Retreat seamlessly blended social interaction with focused learning activities in an entirely online format.

Since 2021, the Board has held two more Annual Retreats facilitated by the Finley Team. Each Retreat builds upon the great work completed the year before, allowing the opportunity to refresh parts of the plan as required.



2023 Board Retreat participants worked hard and also made sure to have some fun!

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Key Learning:

No matter the size of your organization, effective board governance training is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it clarifies the roles, responsibilities, and legal obligations of board members, ensuring alignment with the organization's mission and values. Secondly, it equips members with the tools to navigate regulatory complexities and manage risks effectively. Additionally, it fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement, enhancing board effectiveness and cohesion.

Investing in board governance training has been essential for BCVTA's long-term sustainability and success. By empowering board members with the knowledge and skills to fulfill their duties effectively, BCVTA can navigate challenges with confidence, ensuring its continued impact in the veterinary technology sector.

Key Learning:

Strategic planning provides a vital framework for the BCVTA, facilitating decision-making and resource allocation. Through a collaborative process, the Board refreshed the organization's Vision and Mission, identified three strategic priorities, articulated strategic goals, outlined key performance indicators and identified high-level implementation plans.

Impressively, the organization continues to undertake Annual Strategic Planning to ensure that the BCVTA's Strategic Plan continues to evolve dynamically. This discipline provides a fantastic foundation for strategic decision-making, ensuring the organization is agile, responsive, and resilient in pursuing its Vision and Mission.

The Retreat Agendas also continue to challenge the organization; for example, last year Dr. Stacey Thomas (Deputy Registrar of the College of Veterinarians of BC) and Dr. Jane Pritchard (President of the College of Veterinarians of BC) were invited as guests to the Retreat to share their unique perspectives and learn.

Key Milestones

Expansion of Board Recruitment Efforts

2022 - the Board took a decisive step away from solely recruiting Directors from personal networks. While still encouraging participation from their own circles, the Board sought individuals genuinely interested in volunteering their time. This shift aimed to cultivate a healthy and sustainable Board, mitigating the risk of a 'mass exodus' experienced due to members solely aiding others, as seen in 2022.

New Executive Director with External Industry Experience

2022 - Moreover, the appointment of a new Executive Director (ED) – Amber Gregg - brought fresh perspective and experience in managing non-profit organizations, complementing her role as a Registered Veterinary Technologist (RVT). While RVTs possess the necessary skills, the ED's prior experience brought a unique dimension to tasks such as working with the Board, financial management, membership support, and communications.

Furthermore, the ED role's contractual nature allowed them to devote undivided energy to BCVTA matters, including attending provincial and national meetings, implementing structured office hours, and exploring new opportunities and initiatives..

Introduction of Board Evaluation

2023 - The BCVTA initiated its first externally facilitated Board Evaluation, aiming to gain deeper insights into its Governance performance. Through this evaluation, several areas of strength and improvement were identified. The process led to the creation of the organization's first ever Board Development Plan, that complements the Strategic Plan.

Key Learning:

To prevent the development of an echo chamber, it is important to continually refresh and intentionally recruit Board Directors from outside of the Board's immediate networks. For some organizations, this can mean looking outside of its industry.

Key Learning:

An Executive Director with business experience and the thirst to learn is a phenomenal asset to any organization. Our Finley Team has really appreciated Amber's desire to be pushed and think in new ways, opening up new possibilities and learning for the entire organization.



Key Learning:

It requires considerable courage for a volunteer Board (or any Board!) to delve into such a thorough assessment, and Finley commends the BCVTA for its openness to learning and for challenging itself.

Next Steps for the BCVTA

Introduction of Needs-based Member Segmentation

2024 - Bi-annually, the BCVTA administers a Wage Survey to its Members. In 2024, with the help of the Finley Team, the BCVTA has expanded the Survey to include a variety of questions to better understand the needs of its Membership. We look forward to analyzing the Survey results to better understand how the BCVTA can and should be more effectively supporting its Members.

Key Learning:

Most organizations do not take the time to learn about the needs of their Members, or only do a superficial job. Needs-based Segmentation is a tool that is essential for Associations to utilize.

Conclusion

In conclusion, BCVTA's journey of remarkable growth, underscored by a focus on dedicated strategic planning and effective governance, is a testament to the organization's resilience, innovation, and commitment to success. By embracing change and prioritizing continuous improvement in these areas, BCVTA has experienced transformative growth and become a dynamic and impactful organization. As BCVTA continues its journey of growth, it serves as an inspiration for associations worldwide, demonstrating the power of strategic thinking, adaptability, and visionary leadership in driving organizational success.



Rebecca Finley-Schidlowsky is a Senior Associate with the Management Consulting firm - [Finley & Associates Ltd.](#) Rebecca specializes in governance, strategic planning, and leadership development. She has a fresh and energetic facilitation style that focuses on co-creating strategy through high stakeholder engagement and capacity building.

Rebecca has worked with dozens of Boards and senior management teams in the private, high-net-worth family enterprise, not-for-profit and public sectors across Canada. Her sector experience includes family business, agri-business, real estate, social enterprise, performing arts, post-secondary and social services.

Rebecca has had the pleasure of working alongside the BCVTA for the past five years and looks forward to seeing the organization continue to grow.

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Milestones for BCVTA

Over the past five years, the BCVTA has seen phenomenal growth.

It is important to recognize that investing in key areas (like Governance and Strategic Thinking) takes time and also depends on the willingness and culture of the organization to incorporate.

