



CHANGE MANAGEMENT FOR A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT: RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION

Lead, Transform, Inspire.

Founded in 1916, the Rhode Island Foundation (RIF) is one of the nation's oldest and largest community foundations. The founders wrote, "There is a growing belief that the charitable problems of each generation can better be, and should be, solved by the best minds of each



AT A GLANCE (2010)

Founded: 1916

Mission: A proactive community and philanthropic leader dedicated to meeting the needs of the people of Rhode Island.

Employees: 43

Challenge: Create a higher-performing, outcomes-oriented culture in support of a new strategic plan being led by a new CEO.

Talent Initiative Outcomes: Strategic Human Capital Management Plan; biannual talent reviews; succession-driven development plans; stronger team aligned on recruiting criteria and performance expectations

generation." True to this mandate, Rhode Island leaders have consistently assumed responsibility for ensuring that the state's charitable institutions remain vital—and that the Foundation continues to address Rhode Island's most pressing issues and needs of diverse communities.

For many years the Foundation benefitted from its long-standing reputation, a well-established endowment, and constant growth in its assets. But when faced with economic downturn in 2008, changes in both the internal and external environments hit RIF unexpectedly hard. Cuts in the Foundation's funding exacerbated the challenges of supporting grantees whose constituents desperately needed services. There was suddenly much greater pressure to be strategic and impact-oriented, because there were fewer resources and greater need.

Where the issues were daunting, some sensed opportunity. A newly hired CEO aspired to create a new vision, redefine success, and move away from what some characterized as a comfortable, reactive culture. Under his leadership, the RIF board approved a new strategic plan that directed resources into prioritized mission areas, shifted the organization towards more proactive fund raising, emphasized leadership and advocacy, and increased the Foundation's effort to measure the impact of its grant making and related activities.

Through the planning process, however, it became clear that in order to achieve its strategic goals the Foundation would have to realistically assess its human capital capacity. What's more, cultural shifts would be required to ensure that the change would be productive and enduring.

Defining a Future Together

Working closely together, RIF's leaders and AchieveMission consultants identified the functions and capabilities the Foundation would need, and the areas in need of strengthening. That process alone proved invaluable: the staff had the opportunity to weigh in and they had the sense of being a part of defining the organization's future. Their input was essential to the creation of the Foundation's new Strategic Human Capital Management Plan.

With the Plan developed, the integrated Rhode Island Foundation-AchieveMission shifted into implementation. First up was a new Talent Review process, with leadership evaluating each employee's performance and potential for advancement. The team also identified successor talent pipelines for key roles, and began to create development plans to support their succession plans. These conversations culminated in a shared understanding of what "high-performing" meant for RIF, and the awareness that greater emphasis on fit and potential would be needed for future hiring and team building.

"We're not just saying expectations are higher, we're demonstrating it."

Jessica David, SVP

As a Result ...

The Rhode Island Foundation traces a direct line from those early accomplishments to increased mission impact. For example, fundraising—the lifeblood of any community foundation—has doubled "You have great people, you do better things and then all of the sudden that bar changes," says Jessica David, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Community Investments. "We're not just saying expectations are higher, we're demonstrating it."

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Invest in human capital. "If you need to change your culture and increase your impact, there is no better lever than investing in your human capital."

Be prepared to work hard. "Talent Initiative is not an easy process because change is not easy."

Fully engage the leadership team. "This kind of work must be driven by a high-level leader at the organization who has the authority and responsibility of running with it."

The organization must be committed to change. "Human capital is about trying to create a new culture and move that culture through change management."

Don't hesitate to act. "You can't just look at it academically, and not do anything. Organizations should not be afraid of making difficult choices when they know human capital problems exist."

Learn More

For more information about Talent Initiative and related services from AchieveMission visit www.AchieveMission.org or call 415.323.0300.

