VALUES-BASED GOVERNANCE AUDIT

Fall 2008

For many national sport bodies, this is the time to debrief on the Olympic and Paralympic experience, take stock and begin planning for the next four or eight years. This is a time when there are opportunities for renewal of employees, employment relationships and volunteer opportunities. Many sports increase their investment in junior-aged athletes at this time, with a view to preparing them for success in future Games. Conditions are also ideal to work on getting your ‘policy house in order’ to be better positioned for the challenges of the next quad.

Here is an idea that we think has merit in a time of renewal such as this: a values-based governance audit. Over the last two years we have been involved in a national risk management pilot project involving eight NSOs, based on the True Sport framework and principles. Through this experience, it has become apparent to us that:

- Values play a critical role in ensuring a quality sport experience;
- Values, as an expression of what matters most, should be reflected in all the work we do as sport leaders; and
- At the heart of every risk management problem is a ‘disconnect’ between the values that an organization professes, and the conduct and attitudes that it condones.

The interconnectedness of values, good governance and risk management is now undisputed. A values-based governance audit follows these steps:

Step 1 – Confirm the values that the organization upholds.
Step 2 – Identify those policies and practices of the organization that govern relationships and interactions between and among people. These may be organized into four general types of policies:
  - Framework policies (constitution, bylaws)
  - Contracts (those executed with members, volunteers, employees, clubs, suppliers, even organizers, other entities)
  - Specific policies that influence relationships (selection criteria, code of conduct, personnel policies etc.)
  - General policies that govern operations and have a greater or lesser effect on relationships and interactions.

Step 3 – For each of these policies/practices, identify the following:
  - Purpose
  - Fulfillment of standards (legal, ethical, values, risk management)
  - Clarity (how well is the policy communicated)
  - Implementation (how well is the policy used)
  - Areas for improvement

Step 4 – Create a plan to correct the gaps and deficiencies that have been identified.
The initial idea for such an audit came from a project we undertook with Sherry Funston, Executive Director of Squash Ontario, in 2007. It began as an audit of all human resources policies but expanded quite naturally to encompass everything related to the relationships between the organization and individuals. We suggested, and they agreed, to undertake the audit in the context of the organization’s values.

In the year since completing the audit for Squash Ontario, nearly every action step in the plan has now been implemented. This includes an innovative employee evaluation system that assesses employee performance and conduct in relation to Squash Ontario’s values of excellence, fairness, integrity and respect.

For more information on how to go about applying a values-based governance audit instrument in your organization, please contact the Centre for Sport and Law.