

## **Agenda Item Number 9.b.**

### **“360 Degree” Executive Director Performance Review, Follow-up**

**Presenter:** Greg James, Board Chair

**Action Recommended:** Acceptance of Proposed Goals

**Background:**

*The following goals for the next biennium were prepared by George Kloeppe and presented to the Executive Committee on September 10, 2009. It is the Executive Committee’s recommendation that the proposed goals be accepted.*

In June, the Executive Committee and Board of Directors received the summary report on the data from this year’s “360 Degree” Performance Review from True North Consulting. This memo is intended as the final step in the Biennial Review process. I will offer my perspective on the data and also possible goals that may serve as reference points for future Reviews. I am grateful for the participation of Board members, LCOG staff and member agency staff for their provision of input to this past spring’s Performance Review. I firmly believe that all of us have room to change and grow, and objective data about how I am perceived represents a valuable tool for the changing-growing process. Thank you.

**Two Years Ago**

One of the aspects of the “360 Degree” Review process—now having completed three cycles—is that it provides both a contemporary snapshot of my performance and a longer-term characterization of change. Since a “self-evaluation” was not a part of this year’s Review, let me note for reference the goals that emerged from the Review of two years ago. In 2007, three “areas of emphasis” were agreed to by the Executive Committee. They were:

- The degree to which I have enhanced or intensified my communication (about the organization and regional cooperation) with member governments, the staff and the broader community.
- The degree to which I have increased and enhanced my accessibility and visibility to the staff and member governments.
- The degree to which I have proactively portrayed the vision and benefits of regional cooperation, collaboration, and planning to the membership, staff and broader community.

Obviously, an assessment of progress toward the goals of enhanced communication, accessibility and vision must be very subjective. But two years ago, I affirmed that I would apply effort in each area. Further, I suggested to the 2007 Executive Committee that I intended to work toward improvement in ten goal areas in the three main facets of the Executive Director’s job. Because it pertains to this year’s follow-up report, I recite those ten goals here as well:

- In the area of managing the organization, I offered suggested tasks in four areas:
  - Emphasize facilities management
  - Provide leadership to the transportation and planning work groups
  - Support SDS management in dealing with workload issues
  - Provide training and support needed by mid-level staff
- In the area of “setting the tone,” I offered three items:
  - Increase presence/involvement with staff—visibility and accessibility
  - Increase “risk-taking” in provision of guidance to the Board and Executive Committee
  - Preach the ethic and tangible benefits of cooperation
- And in the area of communication, I offered three goals:
  - Pursue opportunities to “tell LCOG’s story”
  - Serve as neutral convener
  - Increase communication with staff

## **This Year's Review**

A long exposition here about my efforts in these areas is probably not purposeful, but I would simply say that I have remained mindful of them and in various contexts over the past two years I have applied energy to their achievement. At this stage, it is probably not so much the input of energy and effort over the past two years that is relevant, but rather the output and the outcomes, as perceived by the people who responded to this year's "360 Degree" Review solicitation.

Because the communication element of my job description was key in each of the areas of emphasis in 2007 (and also in 2005), I was pleased that the 2009 data reflected improvement and increased communication. But being able and willing to tell the agency's story and to convey to staff and others a vision for the accomplishment of the organization's Mission remains so fundamental that it must be retained as an area of continuing focus.

I was also gratified by the number of respondents giving positive ratings to my leadership skills. The Executive Committee and Board have reason to expect leadership from the Director. And it is an expectation that I place on myself, as well. Clearly, there were respondents, both internal and external to the organization, that were not satisfied with the leadership applied. I need to hear that. But I am struck by the wide variety of styles and types of leadership and wonder about individuals' expectations. I believe that my style is what has been called "catalytic leadership." I try to support and empower others to do all they can, without abdicating my own responsibility. Mine is very much a shared leadership approach. Some of the comments offered this year reflect a desire for me to take a "strong stand," be less sensitive to "political pressure," and to follow through on a strategic course. Some respondents wanted a more directive tactic down to the program level. While that input is appreciated, every CEO will, of necessity, find his/her own balance between engagement in every operational detail, on the one hand, and an extreme *laissez faire* approach on the other—the velvet glove or the iron fist. Balance and sensitivity are critical traits in a council of governments environment. And to me, true leadership must incorporate some understanding of politics, economics, ethics, psychology, and a gut sense for what needs to be done. Though "leadership" scores from two years ago rose in this Review, there were scores on the lower end of the scale, as well. So, in the end, improvements can and should be made.

Of the secondary leadership questions asked, the one dealing with support for innovation at LCOG (number 8) yielded the most confusing data for me. Hence, it seemed worthwhile to drill down a bit on this point. Excluding the "not enough

information” respondents, 77 percent of those with an opinion thought that I had supported innovation that *connects to current trends and responds to a changing world*. But 23 percent (a high percentage) came down on the “disagree” side. Of those who reported the belief that I had not supported innovation, the majority were LCOG staff members or agency staff (only one was an elected official). So, what can be learned from this? Because of the nature of my position, I must first be attentive to LCOG members and the elected officials for whom I work. In my view, this is more than just “job security,” it is addressing the task that I am being paid to perform. And by and large, policy-level respondents seemed satisfied with performance in this area. Nevertheless, LCOG must remain *current* and *responsive* to an ever-changing world. The value of our services and our reputation demands such responsiveness. While I may believe that we are *cutting edge* innovators much of the time, there are those that would like to see that envelope expanded. While it may not be politically correct to interject an age factor here, I wonder if there is a generational dynamic at play. In any event, it is important (even essential) that I receive periodic signals regarding the Board’s wishes under the heading of risk and innovation. This was one of my ten goals from 2007, and finding the right balance should be a continuing goal.

Finally, let me reiterate a comment that I offered last spring at the beginning of the Review process. I have no specific plans for retirement, but it is fair to presume (after 28 years here) that my future service as your ED will likely span a shorter period than my history in that capacity. The approach that the agency takes to the “360 Degree” Review should take that reality into account to some extent. If I was to shuffle off (retire, that is) two-and-a-half to three years from now, this year’s Review and the next (if there is one) will provide some important data for the organization’s pursuit of new leadership. While I sincerely believe that I am capable of change and growth (evidence improved scores in priority areas over the past two years), the marginal behavior-modification value of the exercise tends to diminish as we approach a changing-of-the-guard. On the other hand, soliciting the judgment of a wide variety of people about the agency and what is desired in terms of leadership could be enormously valuable to the Board and Executive Committee in the context of a recruitment. Remember: I am not gone yet; and while here, I will do my level best to meet and exceed expectations. I enjoy the work and I am particularly grateful for having the privilege of working with an outstanding staff of intelligent, sensitive and caring people. It is also a pleasure to have the professional association with the local elected officials who serve their communities in this region.

## Goals for the Biennium

- Communication must continue to head the list... Telling the agency's story and communicating a vision to staff, member agencies and the community
- The extremely difficult financial situation confronting the society and the public sector demands a priority goal... Continuing to find ways of helping local government to work smarter through cooperation; securing outside resources whenever possible to address identified local needs; and applying insightful management to maintaining agency services with diminished or constrained resources
- Training, skill-building and succession preparation deserve priority attention...continue the commitment of the past two years to "ratchet up" the training opportunities for staff; continue to expand the "inner circle" of decision makers to include additional people; strategically assign and invite mid-level colleagues to assume higher level project tasks
- Both common sense and this year's Review data indicate that genuine leadership continues to be a priority... Continue to elevate the level and frequency of (two-way) communication with, and accessibility to, the staff; maintain visibility and accessibility to the broader community; and carefully consider those operational areas that require more intensive engagement

Once again, thanks to Greg and the Committee for your work in designing and implementing this year's Performance Review. While scheduled to formally occur only on a biennial basis, the process of communication, consultation and guidance is a continuing one. I appreciate the willingness of the Committee and Board members to candidly communicate their wishes for the COG and for my work as your Executive Director. We all are able to do our respective jobs better when such open communication is the norm.