

Important Memo from the Strategic Planning Committee:

Since the May Board of Governors' meeting, life in Pony Club has been busy, with clinics and ratings, rallies and two Championships. Now, however, it is time to get back to the business of strategic planning for USPC. The USPC leadership is interested in making USPC a better and stronger organization for its members and volunteers, an organization that teaches the care of horses and ponies to young developing riders by employing the most updated methods of equine care and safety while exploring future opportunities for its members and volunteers.

There has been a lot of discussion over the last year regarding possible changes for USPC. That discussion has at times been abstract and at other times very specific, and there has been some inevitable confusion among members and volunteers about the directions in which the Board of Governors is considering taking USPC.

The reality is that, although the BOG has made no decisions thus far, it has recognized the need to make decisions. Indeed, at the end of last year, the BOG started a discussion in the hope of identifying possible directions for change and obtaining input from USPC's volunteers and members about those directions. That process continues.

The process has had many aspects. They include the thousands of hours of time invested by the "Bridge Groups." These were small groups of people from both inside and outside of USPC, each of which devoted itself to brainstorming regarding a specific topic related to USPC's future development. The Bridge Groups made their reports to the BOG at its May 2009 meeting, and they identified numerous areas in which USPC should consider making changes.

They also include the well-publicized requests for comments in the "Why Change" series of communications. All of the responses to those requests were organized and made available to the BOG. Many other comments have been provided to the BOG by members and volunteers, including the survey published by the Northwest Region, many comments posted on the Digests and still more comments submitted directly to BOG members.

Last, but hardly least, they include the numerous "grass roots" initiatives for changes in USPC, some of which are already well-developed.

As a result of all of this work, USPC finds itself at multiple crossroads. It is the job of the BOG to determine whether there should be any changes to USPC and, if so, what those changes should be and on what schedule. It is the job of the Strategic Planning Committee to assist the BOG in analyzing the possible changes and their ramifications.

The first purpose of this memo is to continue to assure USPC's members and volunteers that there has been no agreement at the BOG regarding whether there should be any changes in the organization and, if changes are to be made, on what schedule. Indeed, because the membership of the BOG fairly reflects the diversity of opinions within the organization, we all expect a continuation of the spirited debate that has already occurred.

The second purpose of this memo is to describe very briefly some of the possibilities for change and thereby open the door for further discussion of those possibilities.

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The Fundamental Question of Whether to Change at All

The BOG will first have to address this fundamental question of whether to change at all.

Many in the organization have expressed the opinion that there is no need for any significant change because USPC has over the course of more than fifty years delivered its program effectively to tens of thousands of members and, as a result, has positively affected their lives. This opinion is based upon the concept that USPC should not effectively dilute its program by trying to be all things to all people. It should continue to evolve slowly while maintaining its focus on a club and region based organization that utilizes a rating system that emphasizes horse management and riding on the flat, in the open and over fences, as well as the rally competition model.

The counterpoint to this opinion is essentially that on-going changes in society and demographics are likely to make such an organization less relevant and that a dwindling membership will ultimately be unable to support the infrastructure required to deliver the program across the country. This opinion in support of change emphasizes that USPC has developed a ratings system, educational program and competition model that are uniquely valuable and that could be adapted and made available to a much broader audience. The broader audience that could benefit from exposure to all or part of the USPC program could include equestrians in other disciplines as well as people who have no regular access to horses.

These differing views have been reflected in the many conversations that have occurred regarding possible changes to the mission statement of USPC. Is USPC an organization that focuses on the personal development of youth through participation in equestrian oriented activities, or is it an organization that focuses on youth participation in the English riding disciplines and the personal development that results from that participation?

Technology

Perhaps the area of possible change as to which there is the broadest initial agreement is that USPC invest in its technology to reduce the costs and hardship imposed upon volunteers and members as a result of the burden of paperwork, including everything from membership renewals, to rally entries to rating applications. But there are also proposals to use enhanced technology to deliver USPC's educational programs directly to existing members as well as possible future members who do not fit into any of the current membership categories. Technology can also be used to create social networking opportunities for our members and volunteers.

Some have said that the web should become the principal focus of USPC's branding and marketing efforts.

While we can take some basic steps now to enhance our technology, we will get the most from our investment by having a good idea of our future technology needs before we start redesigning it. Hence, it is likely that outlining the requirements for our future technology will be a priority for the BOG.

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Membership

USPC has already taken some steps to expand membership opportunities and make the benefits of our programs available to more people. These steps include extension of the age limit from 21 to 25, creation of the “riding centers” program to make membership more available to people who do not own their own horses, implementation of the specialty ratings in dressage and show jumping beginning at the C-3 level, and the approval of the Horsemasters program for adults.

There are, however, many other possibilities for delivering USPC’s programs to additional members. These possibilities include such things as making our educational programs available via the internet to members who do not have any access to horses and designing programs for those who have occasional access to a horse. There could also be members who are simply participants in a social network united by their common interest in horses.

Programs

There are many possibilities to expand USPC’s delivery of its educational programs to its existing membership as well as to adapt the existing programs for delivery to new categories of members. It should be possible to design programs directed to the traditional member, the member with limited access to a horse, and the member without access to a horse. By way of example, one suggestion has been to develop a set of educational modules available to members online, who could achieve recognition of their progress by means of badges. Another suggestion has been to establish a horse management only rating track.

There has been a significant “grass roots” movement to open up our organization to other disciplines, such as the western disciplines. This could be done in a variety of ways, including developing standards and accepting new clubs that focus on those disciplines as well as permitting existing clubs to expand into those disciplines.

There has also been discussion of adapting our educational programs, our rating system and our rally competition model for use by other equine organizations regardless of discipline. We have 50 years of experience in developing programs for youth equestrians, and other organizations might find that experience to be of value. At the same time, we will need to make sure that the USPC programs reflect best equine practices across the board.

Structure

There has been much discussion that the club model is both a strength and a weakness of the organization. While the club experience is a very important aspect of USPC, some hold the view that clubs deliver the program in an uneven fashion. There are many possibilities for maintaining the club structure while creating new avenues of membership, such as the riding centers and virtual membership. There are also possibilities for creating regional and national memberships depending upon the nature of the program being delivered and the maturity of the member.

Many hold the view that USPC has become an organization unduly burdened by rules and procedures and that it would benefit from a revamping that focuses on development of a “values based” organization with fewer rules. Hence, one of the challenges facing the BOG is how to become a values-based organization while still meeting the demands from many other members

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for greater and greater structure (in the form of such things as rules, standards, criteria and checklists).

It may be that some proposed changes might be best implemented through separate organizations, either affiliated with USPC or not.

Finances

Much of the discussion surrounding the finances of USPC revolves around improving the budgeting and forecasting process. Existing programs will have to be held accountable for operating within their budgets and proposed new programs will have to be self-sustaining. Some have suggested that USPC rigorously evaluate its cost of delivering its programs to all classifications of members and require those members to pay their share of the cost. That might permit fundraising to be used principally for scholarships and growth of the endowment.

There is also discussion regarding the possibilities for obtaining grants presented by some of the other changes in focus proposed for the organization.

Volunteers

Much conversation has revolved around how USPC can better recruit, train, mentor and evaluate its volunteers. There are many suggestions for accomplishing this by means of the internet, including such things as the development of training modules for different types of volunteers so that there is a consistency that may now be lacking.

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We Welcome Your Feedback

We are looking forward to continuing to explore strategic planning so that USPC can grow and prosper. We urge everyone to read this document carefully; and all feedback is welcome. While any method of commenting is fine, comments sent to communications@ponyclub.org will be sure not to be overlooked. Please share your thoughts and concerns with the Board of Governors members. Your comments addressed to communications@ponyclub.org with the SUBJECT LINE Strategic Planning will be forwarded to Board of Governors members.