

CREATING DISTINCTIVE VALUE BEYOND MEMBERSHIP:

THREE LESSONS FROM THE 2017 FSAE FOUNDATION THINK TANK



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In a brief article promoting the FSAE Foundation Think Tank published in the July/August 2017 issue of *Source Magazine*, I encouraged readers like you to “close your eyes and try to imagine what’s next for your association, as well as the field and stakeholders it serves.” Although that may seem like an unusual request to make at the beginning of a magazine article, I’m going to do something similar in this piece.

Close your eyes and try to imagine you’re a native-born Floridian who is moving back to the state to care for your aging parents after thirty years living and working elsewhere. Or try to imagine you’re a 65-year old man who has been working for the same company for your entire career who now must consider the next phase of your life. Or try to imagine you’re only the second person in your family to graduate college and you’re more interested in serving your local community than making money. Or try to imagine you’re the daughter of a police officer and a teacher who is a political activist and a thriving gig economy worker.

I challenged this year’s FSAE Foundation Think Tank participants to imagine how they would create value experiments for the benefit of these four personas and I gave them a very important constraint that they had to follow: ***their value creation experiments could not include an offer of membership or assume either explicitly or implicitly that these stakeholders eventually will become members.*** Observing this constraint required our small teams to approach their work in a different way. Here are three key lessons from the Think Tank experience that you can apply to your association’s work:

1. BUILD AN EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR STAKEHOLDERS’ PROBLEMS, NEEDS & OUTCOMES

Each of the personas provided to Think Tank teams was trying to solve a short-term (less than 12 months) **problem**, while working to meet an intermediate-term (24-48 months) **need** and striving to achieve a longer-term (60 months and beyond) **outcome**. For association value creators, **building a deep and empathic understanding of stakeholders’ problems, needs and outcomes (PNOs), and how they connect to each other to create a value pathway, is a critical first step in the value creation process.**

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2017 THINK TANK PARTICIPANTS



WHAT IS THINK TANK? The FSAE Foundation hosts a bi-annual Think Tank to contribute to the association management knowledge base. The meeting gathers a small group of association decision makers to contemplate an issue, concern, topic, or idea concerning the operation of associations and/or the association management profession. The group, with the assistance of our informed facilitator, draws conclusions and drafts a report to contribute to the association community.

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2. DEVELOP SIMPLE AND LOW-COST EXPERIMENTS FOCUSED ON LEARNING

Association value creators can use their empathic understanding of stakeholder PNOs to **develop simple and low-cost experiments that help them learn more about what’s most important to those they want to serve.** It is important to remember that these experiments are not finished products, programs or initiatives. They should not be that complicated since it is unlikely they will be delivered in their initial form. The purpose of conducting experiments is to learn as much as possible as quickly as possible.

3. CO-CREATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR EXISTING NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS

Once they launch an initial experiment, association value creators should collaborate more closely with their stakeholders to refine their concepts. This work will benefit from the participation of other contributors who are a part of the primary stakeholders’ existing networks.

Capitalizing on those relationships can help create stronger value concepts, make it easier to connect with hidden assets, such as intellectual capital and financial resources, which can be helpful going forward and open access to new markets.

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In the closing paragraph of my summer article, I wrote, “serious value creators...will recognize the future for what it is: a huge opportunity to think differently, to nurture a strong reputation as a genuine innovator and, most importantly, to make an enduring impact on the lives of the stakeholders they serve.” During the 2017 FSAE Foundation Think Tank, it was my great pleasure to work with a group of talented association professionals who took this message to heart, worked to expand their zones of comfort to embrace a different approach to value creation and demonstrated great imagination in thinking about how to create distinctive value beyond membership. ◆