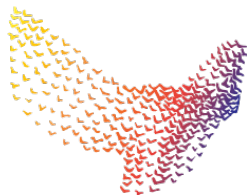


Evaluation of Gamma Phi Beta's Governance

- Executive Summary -



SORT SOL GROUP
Leading Change, Together.

Report to Gamma Phi Beta:
Prepared by Sort Sol Group
December 2023

Gamma Phi Beta

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Foreword On Behalf of the 2022-24 International Council

Dear Sisters,

In spring 2023, International Council (IC) initiated a governance review project with SortSol Group. This high-level review intends to evolve the Sorority's governance structures to better align with nonprofit best practices, improve the orderly transition of leadership to maintain a healthy board and expand the way it conducts business to advance with the times and serve the organization well as it grows.

The enclosed executive summary provides a snapshot of the findings and recommendations from this review with input from a design team of volunteers and staff consisting of Kelly Boerner (Lander), Stephanie Carriere (Arizona), Victoria Lopez-Herrera (Alumna Initiate), Carri Houser, Tanya Jordan (Purdue), Leigh Ann Price (Texas Tech) and Megan Smiley Wick (Washington State).

Alongside this report, we want to offer additional insights into the ongoing initiatives and forthcoming actions that Gamma Phi Beta will undertake in response to these recommendations.

Our commitment to the improvement of Gamma Phi Beta is steadfast, and we are dedicated to addressing these recommendations. This implementation process will unfold over time, encompassing the necessary change management efforts within the organization. While some recommendations can be swiftly applied, others will be integrated into our upcoming strategic plan and slated for discussion this summer.

Specifically, recommendations six and seven focus on belonging, equity, diversity, and inclusion (BEDI) as shared responsibilities across Gamma Phi Beta boards. The emphasis is on enhancing board engagement, particularly among members with overt and covert privilege, fostering connections and social accountability. The report also underscores the importance of intentional leadership development, recruiting and onboarding processes to combat tokenism. Since 2016, Gamma Phi Beta has devoted its skilled staff and resources to fostering a pathway for members to attain leadership positions within the organization. This effort is facilitated through the Leadership Development Committee (LDC), which has introduced programs like The Clara Project and Board Basics. The report names the next steps in advancing this work and ensuring alignment with the priorities of BEDI. Currently, Gamma Phi Beta is in the process of engaging the LDC to incorporate these recommendations into their work. Further work across all boards will be needed to develop sustained behavioral and system-level change.



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From now until August 1, we will operationalize these recommendations by utilizing a Terms of Service working group that will help us explore the possible implementation and intended and unintended consequences of extending elected terms of service for IC and the Nominating Committee. The Terms of Service working group's recommendations will be shared with the 2024-26 IC for consideration. Internally, we will continue our work in creating a new strategic plan that aligns with One Gamma Phi Beta (the Sorority, the Foundation and the Facilities Management Company) and continues to advance our organization forward.

Thank you for your participation and interest in this work. As we continue to learn and grow, we appreciate your patience and support in this journey toward strengthening the future of Gamma Phi Beta. Together, we will embrace positive change and ensure the continued growth and success of our beloved Sorority.

In IIKE,

2022-24 International Council



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About Sort Sol Group

Corporate, education, government, philanthropic, and social purpose sectors working together to create positive, meaningful, and sustainable change for the benefit of community and particularly for those at disadvantage as a result of complex, long-term systemic issues. Easy to state, difficult to do.

At Sort Sol Group, we focus on strengthening client impact in practice areas such as business modeling, collaboration, equity, governance, leadership, and strategy development. Bringing a networked consulting model combined with community learning and development, we co-create knowledge with community leaders to be a collective force for social change.

Leading change, *together*.



Introduction & Background

In 2016, the International Council (“IC”) of Gamma Phi Beta Sorority (“GPB” or “the Sorority”) began operating under a strategic policy governance model. The model was chosen because policy governance is considered one of the more explicit models of governance and has a strong emphasis on written and publicly available policies. The need for the new model, as expressed in IC documents, was spurred by challenges in attracting and retaining the strongest volunteer pool.

The purpose of this recent evaluation of GPB’s transition to a strategic policy governance model of leadership was primarily to inform ongoing decisions about governance structures, processes, and sorority sister engagement. Given concerns expressed by some alumnae about the efficacy of the model and how it is being operationalized throughout the organization, this evaluation also gave volunteers an opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences.

Methodology

GPB engaged Sort Sol Group (“SSG”) in May 2023 to lead the evaluation. SSG developed its approach around three overarching evaluation questions provided by GPB:

- How can the Sorority further evolve its governance structures to align with nonprofit best practices?
- How can the Sorority improve the orderly transition of board leadership to maintain a healthy board?
- How can the Sorority transition the way it conducts business to advance with the times and serve the organization well as it grows?

To answer these questions, SSG leveraged several techniques to obtain information and reach impacted stakeholders. SSG utilized the following sources of information:

- **Document Review:** GPB provided SSG all documents to help inform all stages of the project, from tool development to final report writing. These documents were especially useful, as the evaluation team possessed no prior knowledge of the governance transition.
- **Virtual Interviews and Focus Groups:** SSG developed an interview script designed to measure key GPB informants’ perceptions of factors related to the transition to strategic policy governance. Twelve questions were divided into seven themes: functioning of GPB (in general, and for specific groups); equity and inclusion; operational versus strategic focus; engagement; accountability; transparency; efficiency, continuity, and explicitness.

- **Volunteer Survey:** SSG, with the support of Evaluation+, designed a volunteer survey around factors related to GPB's transition to strategic policy governance and volunteer satisfaction. Specifically, questions measured the following factors: motivation, relevancy, impact, governance knowledge, experience, support, leadership and effectiveness, organizational strengths, improvement areas, board member qualities, and IC recruitment.
- **Board Self-Assessment:** SSG deployed the BoardSource Board Self-Assessment ("BSA") to the IC, Foundation Board of Trustees ("Foundation"), and Facilities Management Company ("FMC") Board of Managers. The BSA is organized into four broad categories, which provide a framework for exploring the relationship between who serves on the board, the culture it cultivates, the way it fulfills its work responsibilities, and how these efforts come together to position GPB to achieve its mission.

Participants

Nine key informants participated in virtual interviews. They represented targeted key leaders with participation from the Chief Administration Officer, Chief Executive Officer ("CEO"), current and past IC Presidents, Governance and Personnel Committee Chair, IC Vice President, and Nominating Committee Chair. All of the key informants were involved with the transition at various levels. The overwhelming majority of these individuals were in support of the transition to strategic policy governance, with a small minority expressing concern over its implementation.

One hundred thirty-four key informants were contacted to participate in a targeted virtual focus group. They represented key leader groups with participation from board committees, executive staff, FMC Board of Managers, Foundation Trustees, past IC Presidents, and volunteer team leaders. While a majority of these individuals were in support of the transition to strategic policy governance, many more expressed concern over its implementation than the individually interviewed informants.

With partnership from Evaluation+, a volunteer survey was sent to approximately 300 volunteers, with 246 responding (82% response rate). Among respondents, there was relatively high knowledge about the GPB governance structure and overall support for its effectiveness.

Thirty-one key informants from the IC, Foundation, FMC, and the CEO were invited to participate in the BSA, with 22 completions (71% response rate). Aggregate results indicated GPB's greatest strength in financial oversight and greatest opportunity in board composition.

Key Findings

Stakeholders shared their insights and feedback about GPB's governance structures, Sorority board transition process, and current and anticipated needs (and opportunities) as related to how the organization conducts its business internally and in the broader Sorority community and landscape.

SSG consultants facilitated a GPB-sponsored retreat in Chicago in August 2023. At the retreat, SSG summarized the methods, findings, and considerations that emerged from feedback gathered to initiate GPB's governance evaluation process, which served as a catalyst to explore next steps in the governance transition. Key findings were drawn into four areas:

1. Improved Board Governance and 150 Years of Success
2. Belonging, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion ("BEDI") – Growth and Dynamic Tensions
3. Board Structure, Meetings, and Composition
4. Board Work – Strategic Direction; Using Data to Inform Action, Strategy, and Guidance

Conclusions

In general, data obtained throughout the evaluation suggest GPB's transition to strategic policy governance fits GPB's needs and has led to mostly favorable outcomes. In fact, most of the data collected suggest that members feel positively toward this current state of governance. However, it appears that there are other issues beyond the model itself that brought about resistance and negativity to the model. In fact, some of the strongest critics stated that they agreed with the model but not the process through which the transition occurred.

Conclusions are presented below, followed by recommendations:

Mostly positive support for strategic policy governance. Members feel that the board has been improving its functioning but still needs to work on creating more (and better) communication on governance structures and procedures that members understand.

Shift towards a strategic orientation and away from operations. Data support the notion that the members have perceived an increase in strategic focus within GPB since strategic policy governance was implemented. (This was also attributed to the shift to a shared services model.)

Shift related to continuity in strategy development (and execution) is lower in relation to other governance factors. While the shift away from operational to strategic policy governance is supported, data from members (both surveyed and interviewed) suggest that this objective of the governance transition has not been achieved as strongly as some of the others examined.

Mixed results for opportunities for member involvement. While the espoused goal of decreasing barriers to serve by increasing access to service has been successfully met, data from members (both surveyed and interviewed) suggest that a lack of communication on role clarity and responsibilities amongst and between professional staff and committees has disengaged some volunteers.

Continuity of board leadership. Continuity in governance is critical to avoid the opportunity for sudden gaps in expertise or knowledge. The current IC nomination and election processes

are a significant structural flaw, as they allow for the possibility of transitioning the entire board at one time, which is in direct conflict with the best practice of staggering board terms.

Opportunity to improve organizational culture. Data gathered suggest that GPB has not espoused an organizational culture to promulgate the Sorority as the leader across the Panhellenic community and to define an interwoven approach in addressing strategic and operational objectives.

Opportunities to advance BEDI within the boards. Data gathered suggest that BEDI at the board level is met with low engagement around and low accountability to advancing BEDI individually and as a larger leadership body, which can result in an overburdening of current board members from diverse/marginalized communities for doing the work to ensure that GPB achieves its BEDI ideals.

Recommendations

1a) Terms of Service - International Council

Board terms help in maintaining the efficiency, effectiveness, and integrity of the organization. BoardSource recommends term limits for a variety of reasons. They:

- Provide opportunities for the board and organization to work with talented community members who can devote only a few years to board service;
- Make it easier to diversify a board, which brings new ideas and new perspectives to the board and its decision-making process;
- Enable boards to avoid stagnation, tiredness, boredom, and loss of commitment that can sometimes set in when board members serve long terms;
- Enable boards to avoid the perpetual concentration of power within a small group of people and the intimidation of new members by this dominant group;
- When staggered, provide a built-in balance of continuity and turnover;
- Allow for rotation of committee assignments;
- Raise awareness of and provide opportunities to change and improve group dynamics;
- Provide a respectful and efficient mechanism for the exit of passive, ineffective, or troublesome board members;
- Enlarge the circle of committed supporters as members rotate off the board; and
- Enable the board to easily adjust its membership to reflect the organization's changing needs.

BoardSource research yields that the average time to become fully engaged in one's governance role is 30 months. Setting longer terms allows Vice Presidents more time to settle into their governance role, which results in stronger engagement. BoardSource data evidence the most common term at three years (and limited to two terms). Staggering terms ensures continuity in governance and avoids the opportunity for sudden gaps in expertise or knowledge. It also alleviates staff stress often created through board churn. GPB's current terms allow for the possibility of transitioning the full board at one time.

Recommendation: Expand the term for Vice Presidents to four years (one-half staggered every two years), limit the term of service to one term, and limit total IC service to a maximum of eight years.

Implementation: Develop bylaw amendment and communication planning to gain successful ratification.

1b) Terms of Service - International President

Board chairs play a critical role in board leadership and development, devoting significant time to the organization and exerting considerable influence over the board. Effective board leaders combine organizational skills with advanced facilitation and engagement techniques, developing strong relationships with both the chief executive and their fellow board members. Board leadership offers a measure of continuity and depth of institutional knowledge through longer tenure.

Recommendation: Expand the term for International President to four years, limit the term of service to one term, and limit total IC service to a maximum of eight years.

Implementation: Develop bylaw amendment and communication planning to gain successful ratification.

1c) Terms of Service – Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee is responsible for the strategic recruitment, evaluation, preparation, and distribution of candidate names/qualifications. The Nominating Committee holds the highest level of responsibility for the organization outside of the IC's responsibility of selecting and supporting the chief executive.

Recommendation: Expand the term for Nominating Committee members to four years (one-half staggered every two years) and limit the term of service to one term.

Implementation: Develop bylaw amendment and communication planning to gain successful ratification.

2) Strategic Alignment

One of the board's primary responsibilities is to set direction for the organization through strategy development. A strategic plan (or framework) serves as a roadmap and as a tool for assessing progress. Working side by side with staff leadership, boards play an active and substantive role in developing, approving, and supporting an organization's strategy development.

The nature of strategy development is changing, however, in response to the turbulence caused by the COVID-19 recession of 2020 and the challenge of planning in a constantly changing environment. Plans must be adaptable and reviewed regularly. At the same time, some leaders have found that planning in a dynamic environment presents an opportunity to think differently.

SSG encourages incorporating Purpose-Driven Board Leadership¹ principles to guide a strategy development process. While this centers around four principles, two of them – “equity mindset” and “authorized voice and power” – can drive the change that most organizations need to take board leadership and thinking to new heights. It is vitally important that GPB incorporate and amplify the voices of the communities it serves to remove any systemic inequities and lead to greater social impact. SSG has also seen a shift away from traditional plans based on three- to five-year time horizons. There has been a move toward strategic frameworks articulating organizational priorities, business plans that combine programmatic and operational goals with financial forecasts, as well as more robust annual plans with clear metrics and timelines.

Whether the path is more traditional or a new framework, the most important planning tool GPB has is the strategy development process, and this should reflect a shared board and staff vision of the organization’s role, values, and priorities. It should also include a clear focus on GPB’s purpose and the community it serves, to ensure that those most impacted by the plan have a voice in shaping it.

Recommendation: Unify the FMC, Foundation, and Sorority around a shared set of organizational commitment statements (i.e., single espoused purpose, mission, values, and vision) and strategic framework to authentically live “one” GPB.

Implementation: Execute a strategy development process with representation from IC, FMC, Foundation, staff, and membership to chart the future direction of GPB.

3) Culture Development

Healthy organizational culture is a bedrock upon which organizational excellence is built, impacting virtually every aspect of an organization. It facilitates the execution of strategy, enhances performance, fosters innovation, and creates a competitive advantage that is hard to replicate. Organizations that invest in cultivating a healthy culture are often those that achieve enduring success.

SSG defines culture as the reflection of an organization’s values, beliefs, and behaviors of the current leaders, and the legacy of the values and beliefs of past leaders that have been institutionalized into the organization’s structures, policies, and procedures.²

Various dimensions of organizational excellence underpin the importance of a healthy organizational culture, one that enhances cohesiveness and reduces conflict, facilitates better communication, enables effective change management, cultivates leadership development, reflects in member experience, drives sustainable success, supports diversity and inclusion, and maximizes financial performance. In essence, a healthy culture is the soil

¹ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_four_principles_of_purpose_driven_board_leadership

² [Building a Winning Organisational Culture](#) by Richard Barrett.

in which the seeds of organizational excellence are planted. It nurtures and sustains the roots of all business activities, fostering growth and yielding the fruits of success through the seamless integration of people, processes, and strategies.

As previously mentioned, some GPB participants were resistant to or had negative perceptions of strategic policy governance due to issues beyond the model itself. Some of the strongest critics interviewed stated that they agreed with the model but not the process through which the transition occurred. This is a signal that GPB is not aligned with its espoused values and culture. Unlocking and aligning individual and organizational potential would reduce cultural entropy.

Recommendation: In concert with a strategic realignment, facilitate a participatory process with focused attention to address the actual and perceived organizational culture underpinnings in the panhellenic profession and its landscape, the membership, and the Sorority as a whole.

Implementation: Conduct a cultural values assessment³ to identify and analyze gaps and implement a plan to address them.

4) Change Leadership

Although it is sometimes called the soft side of change, managing the people side of a change is often the most challenging and critical component of organizational transformation. Too often, a lack of attention to change management leads to the failure of transformation efforts.⁴

Change leadership refers to the process, techniques, and abilities required for leading and managing the human aspect of change within an organization or group. It is a proactive approach that focuses on driving transformational changes, such as shifts in strategy, culture, processes, or technology. Change leadership involves envisioning the future state, motivating people to move towards that future, and managing the transition effectively.

As previously described, some GPB participants were resistant to or had negative perceptions of strategic policy governance due to issues beyond the model itself. Some of the strongest critics interviewed stated that they agreed with the model but not the process through which the transition occurred. This is a signal that GPB could lead through change more effectively.

Recommendation: Dedicate resources to establish fluency and execution in best practices of change management.

³ SSG recommends the culture transformation tools developed by the [Barrett Values Centre](#).

⁴ Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail, Compelling Lessons from the Mistakes Companies Have Made Trying to Implement Change, John P. Kotter, Harvard Business Review, May–June 1995.

Implementation: Appropriate funding and resources to change management⁵, dedicate resources with change management experience, and establish a change team or community.

5) Strategic Communication

Strategic communications are crucial during a change process. They help manage transition in a way that aligns with the goals of the change, minimize resistance, and maintain or improve stakeholder engagement.

Effective strategic communications can build awareness, understanding, trust, and acceptance; set expectations; increase engagement; clarify roles; boost morale; align culture; and support strategy execution. In summary, strategic communications during a change process bridge the gap between the current state and the desired future state by guiding, motivating, and supporting stakeholders throughout the transition. This is crucial for the change to take hold and for the benefits to be realized effectively.

As previously described, some GPB participants were resistant to or had negative perceptions of strategic policy governance due to issues beyond the model itself. The strongest critics stated that they agreed with the model but were still unclear on roles and responsibilities in the new governance model. This is a signal that GPB needs to communicate more often and more effectively.

Recommendation: Amplify strategic communications focused on education to help members become more involved with GPB or learn more about how the organization operates and is governed.

Implementation: Develop and execute an ongoing communications plan explicitly related to GPB's governance; create a visual depiction for GPB's website to convey the boards' structure, committees, ad hoc task forces/working groups, staff, etc. (i.e., "How We Operate") to help instill greater understanding of the board, staff, and volunteer structure, connections, and related responsibilities.

6) BEDI as a Shared Responsibility across the GPB Boards

Belonging, equity, diversity, and inclusion (BEDI) is a critical component of advancing fairness and access within nonprofit organizations internally and externally, into their communities of service and support. Nonprofit boards are the decision-making body at the highest level of organizational leadership and as such, play a critical role in prioritizing, supporting, and investing in fostering a culture of BEDI within an organization.

Having a culture of BEDI is more likely to happen if the board of directors (individually and as a full body) is accountable to incubate ideas that advance BEDI across the organization. A BEDI strategy that focuses solely on one-off trainings and/or reducing implicit bias does not typically result in sustained behavior change or systems-level change. Instead, a BEDI strategy

⁵ SSG recommends change management tools from [Prosci](#).

is most effective at changing culture when it includes both training for awareness and skills development as well as individual involvement in embedding BEDI practices within the organization and accountability for the work over time.

Data gathered during the stakeholder engagement process suggest that GPB's BEDI work at the board level has many strengths, including its racial literacy and anti-bias trainings as well as communications around its commitments to advancing BEDI internally and externally. However, at the board level, those strengths are met with low engagement around and low accountability to advancing BEDI individually and as a larger leadership body. These challenges can result in an overburdening of current board members from diverse/marginalized communities for doing the work to ensure GPB achieves its BEDI ideals.

Recommendation: Strengthen all board members' (particularly those most proximate to whiteness and traditionally privileged groups/communities/forms of social capital) involvement in GPB's BEDI work by increasing board member engagement in solving GPB's BEDI issues; fostering connection between board members and targeted prospective board members; and increasing social accountability of BEDI work at the board level.

Implementation: Require current and future board members to participate in the development of BEDI strategies to diversify GPB's board; facilitate relationship-building between board members and prospective diverse candidates for board service (i.e., targeted recruitment programs, mentoring programs); identify/better leverage GPB groups, structures, and events to build connection between prospective diverse board candidates and current board members; and institute a BEDI plan for each board member as part of their board service, including individualized BEDI responsibilities, SMARTIE⁶ goals, success measures, and evaluation processes. (Similar actions can be taken within each GPB board and across all three boards and should be paired with a transparent reporting process to measure performance, improvement areas, and accountability.)

7) Intentionality in the Leadership Development, Recruiting, and Onboarding Processes

Intentional work towards building an inclusive and diverse board and board culture is a critical part of ensuring that current and new board members from marginalized communities are best positioned to have a positive board service experience. A challenge often confronted by nonprofit boards - and a challenge highlighted in this governance strategy process for GPB - is expanding leadership pipelines and diversifying the board while avoiding the tokenization of prospective and current board members from marginalized communities.

A nonprofit board of directors can play a key role in preventing tokenism (including "token stress" and "token fatigue") in board service by having leadership development, recruitment, and onboarding strategies and structures that are focused on bringing in the expertise, perspectives, and social capital needed to govern effectively while also having systems and

⁶ See [From SMART to SMARTIE: How to Embed Inclusion and Equity in Your Goals](#).

supports in place to alleviate the burden, fatigue, and sociocultural exploitation that often accompany board service and which negatively impact the willingness of prospective diverse board members to pursue board service.

Recommendation: Continue to strengthen GPB's current leadership pipelines, recruitment systems, and onboarding practices by eliminating structural, cultural, or other barriers to diverse board representation; fostering safety and belonging in board service and cultivating community for current and prospective board members from marginalized communities; and eliminating the inequitable overvaluation of dominant forms of social capital and knowledge and the commodification of BEDI values throughout the development, recruitment, and onboarding processes.

Implementation: Implement a data-gathering process (i.e., BEDI survey, focus groups) with potential board members from marginalized communities to gather feedback on challenges to board service; develop a plan with concrete, SMARTIE goals, benchmarks, and timeline for eliminating identified barriers; communicate that plan broadly and specifically amongst cross-cutting groups and across nontraditional venues and networks within GPB; ensure that prospective board members from marginalized communities are not lone representatives for particular marginalized voices/groups in board service leadership/mentoring/cohort-building programs and within future slating processes; develop and disseminate a GPB board-specific BEDI goal and commitment statement; communicate that statement broadly and specifically amongst cross-cutting groups and within nontraditional venues and networks within GPB; connect BEDI gatekeepers with BEDI changemakers (particularly those most proximate to whiteness/power/legacy-based influence within GPB) to have affirming and courageous conversations about the importance of mitigating bias, increasing dignity, and expanding board service opportunities to prospective board members from marginalized communities; critically analyze and revise current leadership development programs/materials and the board recruitment and onboarding processes/materials to increase the visibility and equitable valuation of nontraditional forms of social capital/currency, knowledge, and cultural competencies in board service (i.e., key characteristics for GPB); and develop and implement an equity strategy screen and feedback loop to ensure that all BEDI efforts are valid and have desired, positive impacts on marginalized communities.

This report provides an unbiased snapshot of how far GPB has come in its governance transition and the issues that remain. SSG hopes that this report can be useful at many different levels as GPB moves into the future.