



PATHWAYS TO ACTION

## CITIZEN-CENTERED<sup>SM</sup> SEARCH

### *SITUATION*

An organization was faced with the retirement of a long tenured CEO. While the board was sad about the departure and appreciated the CEO's years of service and the growth of the organization over the past 20 years, it also recognized the opportunity to evolve in new directions. However, without any knowledge or experience in conducting a search for a new CEO, the board had the "who" rather than the "what" foremost in its collective mind. As a consequence, the organization had gravitated toward a local celebrity as a replacement for the previous CEO—someone well-known and well-liked by the organization and the community, but questions remained about the identified individual's ability to take on the varied responsibilities of the post.

### *ANALYSIS*

Though the board wanted the organization to change direction, its inclination was to focus on potential candidates first, rather than to deeply investigate and analyze what the organization needed in a new leader in order to realize its goals. By focusing only on individual people, they had gotten caught up in the "star power" of particular candidates, rather than the long-term vision of a successful, sustainable organization and leader. In short, the problem was that the celebrity on whom they had fixed their sights may have been well-known and well-liked, but had few if any of the skills necessary to actually do the job.

### *SOLUTION*

Our Citizen-Centered Search<sup>SM</sup> process revealed that the change the board wanted was precisely in line with what the community wanted to see in the next stage of the organization's evolution. From there, we were able to develop a practical, realistic profile of the skills and attributes needed for this position. In turn, this profile revealed to the board what we initially suspected: that the "star" candidate was not at all what the organization actually needed. This was surprising to the board, but the deep research and analysis resulting from our process were convincing. This led to a series of conversations that brought to light the key success factors for the new leader, which were crucial in order for the organization to move forward. The candidate chosen according to the comprehensive, stakeholder-informed profile we developed went on to lead the organization to new heights of effectiveness and community involvement—much to the delight of the board, staff, and community at large.