

SquashSmarts' Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Assessment and Roadmap

Executive Summary

SquashSmarts' recently-formed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee sought to engage stakeholders in a process that would examine its administrative and programmatic practices and processes through the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. A successful outcome was defined as one which would allow for the voices of stakeholders to be heard, deliver a forward-looking, momentum-building plan, build trust and challenge existing ways of doing business and working together. Two hundred and eleven stakeholders contributed their perspective and experiences through focus groups (N=77), a staff survey (N=18) and stakeholder survey administered in English and Spanish (N=116). The following themes emerged.

Stakeholder Perspective

SquashSmarts' staff are experienced as caring, understanding, supportive, responsive and concerned about the holistic well-being of the students and families. The students, families and other stakeholders consider them to be very inclusive which creates a sense of belonging. Averaging responses from the surveys administered in English and the surveys administered in Spanish, 92.7 % of stakeholders agree or strongly agree that that SquashSmarts' staff create an environment in which everyone feels welcomed, respected and treated fairly; 92.3% agree or strongly agree that SquashSmarts' volunteers create an environment in which everyone feels welcomed, respected, and treated fairly; and 89.7% agree or strongly agree that SquashSmarts' leadership and board members create an environment in which everyone feels welcomed, respected and treated fairly. Recent increase in hiring of alumni was universally perceived as a very positive movement which also allows staff to be more reflective of the community.

Stakeholders reported that while the program staff is diverse, there is a **need for greater diversity within the leadership of the organization.** They acknowledged the lack of diversity within squash itself as a contributing factor and celebrated the recent addition of a parent to the Board of Directors, but felt that more was needed. Increasing transparency about leadership pathways, increasing opportunities for professional development and support of staff and a consideration of the structural barriers to inclusion at the leadership and board levels were offered as viable paths to increasing diversity among leadership.

In general, stakeholders see SquashSmarts as an organization that **is open, self-reflective and willing to learn.** Several remarked that this process itself is evidence that openness is part of the culture. Staff are seen as open to feedback, flexible and always learning. They are seen as the greatest and most indispensable asset of the program, which makes understanding their experience and perspective vital.

When asked what one thing about SquashSmarts that they would change immediately, the most frequent response among non-staff stakeholders was “Nothing”. Other responses emphasized building upon the strong foundation already laid.

“For the program to expand”

“I wish they were open more times during the week.”

“More diversity amongst the staff and board which SquashSmarts has been trying to do and making small strides.”

“More opportunities to play squash.”

Things that non-staff stakeholders hoped would never change included:

“The way they make you feel like family”

“The genuine interest and concern the staff devotes to the kids”

“The summer offerings are superb, that should never change.”

“The close connection that the coaches have with the youths school and family. I love the fact that Squash has designated staff that are accountable for assuring that the scholars are academically, emotionally, and socially excelling to the best of their abilities.”

“The place/building”

“Please never stop to be interested in kids individually, they feel special and care by SquashSmarts”

Staff Perspective

The staff experience and perspective diverged from the other stakeholders’ perspective in significant ways. While non-staff stakeholders experience the organization as a very inclusive place and a “second family”, staff surveys paint a different picture. For example: only 55.6% of staff respondents believe that employees are recognized for their work and treated fairly regardless of their dimension of diversity (i.e. race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status, etc); 38.9% do not believe that inappropriate behavior that makes employees feel excluded, offended or uncomfortable is quickly and definitively addressed; and 61.1% say that there is no process to report discriminatory behavior. In fact, only half of the staff respondents believe that there is a commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization. Staff cited several ways that SquashSmarts can increase a sense of belonging among staff.

“Be open-minded and be willing to accept view point of others. Appreciate and acknowledge one's hard work. Have a balance working place where everyone has equal power.”

“Improve policies for independent reporting of issues...Improve the employee handbook policies to look for inclusivity / any issues or blindspots.”

“A clear path for promotion opportunities should be available and made clear to all staff members.”

“A good start with the change in leadership team to include an alumni staff member; need a stronger and more transparent process to relay concerns.”

“Valuing the input of all staff members regardless of ranking/position.”

Recommendations

Based on the sharp divergence between the staff experience and the other stakeholder experiences, it is recommended that SquashSmarts’ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee focus its efforts on staff. Specifically:

1. Communications: reviewing and recommending internal communication flows for routine business operations, training and development opportunities, multi-directional communication methods (i.e. 360 performance evaluations, town halls)
2. Human Resource Policy and Procedures: reviewing and recommending policy alignment with DEI best practices, reviewing and recommending employee handbook revisions, and employee compensation policy and benchmarking
3. Accountability and Reporting: researching, recommending, and communicating to staff approaches to incident reporting
4. Personal and Team Development: researching and making recommendations for DEI baseline training, and sponsoring and/or promoting events aimed at staff appreciation, cultural celebration and team-building

The perspectives and experiences gathered from SquashSmarts’ stakeholders suggest that while the organization is doing a stellar job cultivating an inclusive environment for program participants and families, and progress continues to be made, more work is needed to replicate that sense of belonging among the staff. The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee can play a pivotal role in bridging that gap.

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