

Qualistar Colorado

Case Study: Strategic Planning and Consulting

BACKGROUND

In 2004, Qualistar Colorado, formerly Qualistar Early Learning, was formed through the merger of two organizations: Educare Colorado and the Colorado Office of Resource and Referral Agencies. The merger was designed to advance school readiness by measuring and improving quality early childhood education and to be a resource connecting parents to quality programs. By 2009, Qualistar's preschool rating system was in every Colorado county and they managed Colorado's network of resource and referral agencies.

HOW DO WE REDESIGN OUR BUSINESS MODEL TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY RELEVANCE?

Five years after the original merger, Qualistar Colorado was at a crossroads. Organizational leadership needed to face realities about their internal operations and culture. Staff was isolated and stuck in the past; the Board was disengaged and missing clues of decline. Externally, Qualistar was known almost exclusively for their rating system. As result, their impact was limited and out of sync with their broader mission and goals. Most of all, significant funding challenges, particularly the sunset of their initial venture funds and a lack of diversity in revenue streams, forced Qualistar's future sustainability into question.

Qualistar Colorado came to Corona Insights because they knew they needed to change the way they did business. But first they had to figure out *what* and *how* to change.



“ Our work with Corona jumpstarted us to think differently and provided a roadmap for the future... It was clear from the start Karla was on our team and was going to push the whole organization to think strategically. As a result, we've built that thinking into everything we do. ”
— Gladys Wilson, President & CEO of Qualistar Colorado

CORONA'S SOLUTION

Corona led a thorough strategic planning process, hearing from several internal and external stakeholders, as well as developing a deep understanding for the organization's current business model. This initial research revealed several troubling realities about Qualistar's financial model and cost of services, perceptions in the community and a lack of internal alignment. The early childhood education landscape was also drastically shifting, as parents and providers were adopting new approaches and needing different supports.

Qualistar adopted Corona Insights' *Synergistic Business Model™* framework as a means to integrate and synergize the components of their business model. Our proprietary model helps organizations identify, align and optimize the components of the nonprofit business model.



synergistic
Business Model™

CORONA'S SOLUTION—CONTINUED

With the *Synergistic Business Model™*, Corona helped Qualistar uncover the hidden synergies in their troubled business model. The “New Q,” as it was affectionately dubbed, took advantage of what they already did well. The “New Q” also integrated emerging opportunities in the early childhood education arena, such as an increased emphasis on technology, reliable data and parent resources. Qualistar’s refocused strategy aligned two of their core tenets – the importance of data and leading a movement for quality early childhood education.

Corona applied their full toolkit to create a strategic roadmap that would put Qualistar on the path to sustainability and enhanced community relevance. Using a two-person facilitation team during a series of focused work sessions, Qualistar created a future roadmap with a refreshed vision, set of values, full program model and detailed strategic initiatives.

“Every new decision we make is now tested against our strategic roadmap. Due to our work with Corona, we’ve refreshed our Board, busted internal silos, analyzed new product lines and enhanced fundraising efforts. Most of all, we sent a message to the community that we heard them.

— Gladys Wilson, President & CEO of Qualistar Colorado

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“Strategy work takes time – there is no quick fix. Even when you embed strategic thinking into your culture, it still helps to have someone keeping you honest and accountable.

— Gladys Wilson, President & CEO of Qualistar Colorado

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THE OUTCOME

Corona Insights provided the data-driven insights and original approaches to answer Qualistar’s most critical questions. The strategic roadmap defines a new business model for the organization, based on Corona’s *Synergistic Business Model™*, and provides a litmus test for all future strategic decisions.

The process also increased the strategic thinking capacity of the organization, setting new expectations for board members, staff and partners. Internally, they are on the same page and are evolving into a more collaborative culture.

In addition, the strategy work sent a clear message to Qualistar’s funders and stakeholders that they made a serious investment in future operations and what they need to be an impactful, sustainable organization. Qualistar let the community know that they listened and are prepared to serve into the long-term.

Plan implementation requires a commitment of time and energy. Qualistar recognizes the need to stay accountable to their roadmap and results. A continued relationship with Corona will ensure ongoing attention to their strategic priorities.