



THE ROLE OF THE CEO IN HEALTH CARE PHILANTHROPY

Foundation board members spearhead efforts to advance philanthropy for the supported health care organization. However, their charge is not to shoulder this responsibility alone. Instead, this mission is carried out in partnership with other organizational allies including the health care organization

CEO. The CEO not only enunciates the organizational vision to engage and inspire donors but also marshals various forms of internal and cultural support. Foundation board members can strengthen their philanthropy efforts by understanding the growing role of the CEO in order to develop a productive and proactive working relationship.

Progressive CEOs recognize philanthropy as a core strategy and business strength to provide operational and capital dollars for organizational advancement. Having a high-performing philanthropy program has also become another valued sign

of financial fitness; ratings agencies list the existence of a successful philanthropy program as an attribute of a sound health care organization. However, realizing philanthropy's true potential relies upon the CEO not only recognizing the financial benefits but also in taking on a proactive role in areas where he is uniquely positioned to convey his vision for the future, to give donors confidence, to provide critical internal support, to drive a culture for philanthropy and to rally the meaningful engagement of key organizational advocates including physicians.

While much attention is focused on the CEO's external roles in advancing philanthropy, the CEO's donor-facing role is the proverbial "tip of the iceberg." The CEO's greatest potential value in advancing philanthropy is found within the walls of the health care organization. The symbolic and tactical importance of the CEO in prioritizing philanthropy within

the organization cannot be overstated. No other organizational leader has the stature and relationships to single-handedly deploy the organization to advance philanthropy—or not. The CEO uses her verbal

support, physical presence and active modeling to signal that philanthropy is important, to elevate it on the agenda, to set expectations, to unleash resources and to build momentum with advocates.

Here are seven ways your hospital CEO can enhance philanthropy at your organization:

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The Role of the CEO in Health Care Philanthropy

Demand a lot from philanthropy. No longer an effort focused on special events, the foundation has the capacity to be a dependable, substantive business line with a high return-on-investment. The CEO should create the expectation for a high-performing foundation and should measure philanthropy metrics on the organization's dashboard.

Build a philanthropy culture throughout the organization. CEOs should advocate for philanthropy as a strategic, mission-aligned endeavor; connect giving to daily life by showing its relevance to everyone's work; and share stories to illustrate how philanthropy touches and saves lives. Through the efforts of the CEO, his executives and their managers, a commitment to philanthropy can cascade through the organization to not only add purpose to the work but also to ensure everyone is informed and prepared to express the value and opportunity of philanthropy.

Facilitate physician engagement. Grateful patients are most likely to make a gift of significance to benefit the health care organization, and many say physicians are the focus of their gratitude. Yet, the moment when a patient or family member expresses gratitude is often dismissed or goes unnoticed. CEOs can assist with inviting physician participation and with facilitating access to physicians for the philanthropy team. Philanthropy professionals then enable education about how to accept expressions of gratitude in a way that affirms and enriches the patient experience and how to introduce those who would be interested in sharing their stories or getting involved to the foundation team. With lots of priorities for physicians these days, CEO endorsement can be pivotal to meaningful physician participation.

Share strategic information with the VP of Philanthropy. Armed with details about hospital strategy and future direction, the philanthropy executive can better share the case for support and drive alignment that maximizes the impact of charitable giving. If the philanthropy executive is going to be positioned as a surrogate for the CEO in some donor relationships, she needs to have the information and credibility to represent the organization well. Many CEOs heal the potential information gap by positioning the foundation executive on the senior leadership team.

Ensure tight alignment between strategic priorities of the healthcare organization and the funding priorities of the fund

development organization. Many organizations squander the impact of philanthropy by allowing charitable dollars to benefit low value activities and initiatives. This most often occurs when items that rank highest during a capital or budget planning process are funded, while "marginal" items are given to the foundation. However, it is important to harness the power of philanthropy by ensuring it is directed toward high-value initiatives that are tightly aligned with the organization's highest strategic aspirations.

Make adequate investments in the development program. Most foundations are financially supported by their health care organization. Sometimes, the CEO needs to ensure others in the organization recognize the fund development enterprise is a revenue center rather than a cost center and to advocate for investment in fund development staff and programming consistent with the level of financial opportunity that exists.

CEO engagement in both practical and symbolic roles is critical to optimize fund development efforts. While many internal roles in advancing philanthropy can be moved forward in a lesser capacity by others, the influence and expectation-setting of the CEO is unmatched in building the internal platform for performance.

For Board Discussion ≡

Given the importance of CEO participation in advancing philanthropy, is this role currently recognized in his job description and evaluation criteria?

How can our organization leverage the CEO's influence and strengths in advancing the internal culture and relationships that support vibrant philanthropy?

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