



CREATING AN EFFECTIVE FOUNDATION BOARD MEETING

Many leaders join a health care foundation board to contribute to the greater good and to make a difference in the community. They come inspired by the ability to connect with the mission in a deep and personal way. But, often, by the third board meeting, they ask themselves, “Is every meeting going to be filled with these long, tedious reports? Where is the opportunity for discussion? Why did I ever say ‘yes’ to such a long-term commitment?”

As a leader, you can help position your organization to recapture the original enthusiasm and to strengthen the personal connection with members. Start by taking a hard look at the content and structure of meetings. Is the agenda



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exclusively set by staff or does the board “own” the agenda? Building better board engagement by structuring the board meeting in a way that connects to the mission and elicits feedback will go a long way to improving the board experience.

Consider the following:

Define your needs. Before the next board meeting, evaluate some simple questions:

- What do we need from fellow board members to move forward?
- What information do we need to hear from the health care system to elevate our work?
- What steps do we need to take to drive philanthropy forward?

Hardwire efficiency. Analyze past agendas and determine which items can be moved to a consent agenda. With a consent agenda, routine items can be voted on quickly in order to preserve board time for meaningful discussion. Email minutes, financial summaries and committee reports in advance, asking members to review prior

to the meeting. Then, ask for approval on these items in one vote during the meeting. Any member can ask that a consent agenda item be moved back into the regular agenda for discussion prior to a vote if needed.

Connect to mission. It's critical to never forget the ultimate purpose of board work, so mission must always be front and center. Transformative stories keep leaders connected and inspired as effective advocates for philanthropy in the community. Just as donors need real stories to be moved to make a gift, board members must be personally moved to enlist support from others. Stories are effective.

Stay on time. Allocate time to each agenda item based on the priority of the subject and the time needed for adequate information-sharing and discussion. This prevents early agenda items from taking up too much time while items that are late in the agenda are rushed or skipped. Have someone monitor the time. Consider delaying ongoing conversation until the next meeting when additional research or steps can help move discussion forward.

Advance philanthropic strategy. Use thought leadership to focus on one bold, strategic idea that would advance philanthropy. Make sure there is adequate time for discussion at each meeting. An example of this could be talking about the next campaign or major gift initiative. Keep it high level and strategic, assigning responsibility for next steps and deadlines.

Integrate board education. Board education must be relevant, timely and consistent. Effective board education often falls in one of three areas:

- Information about the health care or philanthropy fields
- Insights about the organization
- Information on the effective fulfillment of board member roles

For example, a philanthropy officer might share industry information on the transformative power of grateful patient giving. The hospital CEO might share information on the current hospital strategy. A

consultant might share information on the roles of high performing board members. Keep it short, but meaningful.

Hear from the CEO. The CEO is the link between the health care organization and the foundation. Board members want to hear his vision for the future and the latest hospital and system achievements. They want access to the CEO and an honest, interactive conversation. They want to hear answers to questions like, "How do the challenges of health care today influence our hospital?" and "What keeps you up at night?" Lastly, having the CEO speak at each foundation board meeting affirms the importance of philanthropy to the organization. His presence sends a powerful message.

Ask for feedback. Provide opportunities for board members to express their candid thoughts. Asking for and receiving feedback is a powerful communication strategy to open dialogue and to refine board work. Members are often more honest when asked for one-on-one input in person or via personal phone call or email.

High-functioning boards constantly explore ways to improve. Holding meaningful, productive meetings is a great way to keep your board members engaged and enthusiastic.

FOR BOARD DISCUSSION

- How can we better allocate time to the discussion of valuable, strategic issues?
- What agenda items can be packaged for group approval?
- What areas of education would strengthen and sustain our ability to be effective in our roles?
- How can we increase the impact of our board meetings and ultimately our mission work?

About the Author: [Lori J. Counts, CFRE](#), is a Principal Consultant and a Certified Executive Coach with [Accordant](#). You can reach her at Lori@AccordantHealth.com.