



25 QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT FOUNDATION STRATEGIC PLANNING

A thorough and comprehensive strategic planning process attends to a broad range of considerations that will affect plan success. The following questions can help boards and other strategic planning stakeholders develop a robust plan and maximize its impact.

- 1 Strategic planning is rooted in the organizational mission, vision and values. Are those fundamentals in place, reflective of our calling to serve and understood by the board in order to guide our plans?
- 2 The health care fund development field utilizes benchmarks and metrics from several key professional associations to set financial and programmatic performance expectations. How does our foundation currently perform relative to these benchmarks—and what implications does that have for what must be done next?
- 3 The foundation has a variety of competitors for the mindshare and contributions of prospective donor partners. Realistically, how does the perception of the foundation stack up today relative to other nonprofit organizations—and what implications does that have for what must be done now?
- 4 If our organization were objective and candid in considering its current level of success, how does the existing fund

development program perform overall and on a strategy-by-strategy basis to illuminate opportunities or a need for change?

- 5 If the foundation achieved its vision of potential and were at its very best five years from now, what would it look like, do, be or have—and how does that ideal, blue-sky vision impact what must be done now?
- 6 What obstacles or constraints stand in our way right now, and how can we address them or adapt to mitigate their impact?
- 7 Great health care foundations work hand-in-hand with their supported health care organization to maximize the impact of donor dollars on the supported institution. What is the current status of alignment and partnership between the foundation and health care entity and how could partnership be enhanced to better achieve our shared vision?
- 8 Excellent plans are created by informed participants who understand and appreciate the health care fund development sector for which and the environment in which they plan. How will our foundation board become knowledgeable about key issues and challenges in health care fund development?
- 9 While special events were once a staple of health care fund development, organizations are increasingly getting away from events in order to pursue more meaningful and effective ways to raise money. The question of whether to incorporate special events into the fund development program rises to a strategic level in determining how the focus and resources of the organization must be deployed to pursue the best strategic opportunities in an often resource-constrained environment. How will our board ensure our commitment to events is appropriate given our ambitions? What else must the organization discontinue or adjust to clear the way for new, enhanced or expanded efforts in other areas?

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10 Many organizations galvanize their core constituency and accelerate their financial results through campaigns. Does our organization have a compelling or urgent case for support that could merit consideration of a campaign?

11 Many fund development organizations today are increasing their use of technology, data management and data analytics to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their work. What technology and data infrastructure does our organization have now and what must it have in order to survive and thrive in this data-driven era?

12 Health care foundations are increasingly moving toward relationship-based fund development efforts that offer more meaningful engagement to donors and a higher financial return on investment. What does our organization do and what must it do to enhance relationship-driven "major gifts" and "planned giving" programs?

13 Health care fund development organizations are increasingly prioritizing cultivating partnerships with donors that have experienced the health care organization's mission in action rather than with the community at large. These donors often have a deeper understanding of the mission's impact and therefore a greater motivation to give. What is our organization doing to proactively engage these types of donors in philanthropy?

14 Most donor investors want their money used to achieve impact in the near term. How will our organization ensure dollars are raised and deployed to benefit consequential initiatives at the supported health care organization over an appropriate time horizon?

15 Donors expect accountability for the money they contribute. What does our foundation do now and what must it do to ensure effective stewardship of donor dollars and consistent and effective communication about the use and impact of these funds?

16 Successful foundations effectively engage allies in their work. For example, board members are ideally positioned to credibly connect with their peers in the community, health executives are optimally positioned to enunciate the case for support and physicians can have significant influence over a donor's decision to give. How is our foundation ethically and appropriately partnering with key allies who can effectively enhance our work?

17 Advancing philanthropy relies on on-going and effective communication with key stakeholders. Does our organization effectively share key messages with key constituencies through appropriate channels on a consistent basis?

18 Successful foundation boards typically spend less time on governance and more time on fund development activities. How can our foundation effectively leverage the unique and valuable resource that exists in foundation board members to identify, cultivate, actualize and steward partnerships with donor partners?

19 Leadership is critical in any endeavor. Does our foundation have the right leadership capabilities, competencies and level of commitment on the foundation board and on the foundation management team to achieve the vision of success and, if not, how must the organization support, enhance or change that leadership?

20 Plans must be known and owned in order to get implemented. How will our plan be shared with key stakeholders and allies whose endorsement or engagement will be essential for success?

21 What tools, education, support or resources will be essential to achieve the plan?

22 How can the strategic planning document be used to educate, engage, energize and motivate the foundation board, foundation management, foundation staff and key organizational allies and stakeholders?

23 Great plans must be implemented and executed. How will our board monitor and evaluate progress against the plan to support the organization's success?

24 Both the health care and fund development sectors are in a time of constant change—which calls for organizations to be agile and flexible in advancing their plans. How will our board prepare to respond to changing circumstances over the life of the plan?

25 When will the organization plan to review or refresh the current strategic plan?

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