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## HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE FOUNDATION BOARD MEETING

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Many leaders join the 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, usually 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?"

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

**Frame your ambition.** Before the next board meeting, ask yourself 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?
- What do we want to achieve to drive philanthropy forward?

**Hardwire efficiency.** Analyze past agendas and determine what types of 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. Mail minutes, financial and committee reports in advance; then,

consider their approval in one vote on the agenda. 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 can 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.

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**Stay on time.** Consider a timed board agenda, so time is allocated to each agenda item based on the priority of the subject and the time needed for 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.

**Advance philanthropic strategy.** At every board meeting, use thought leadership and focus on one bold, big picture, strategic idea that would advance philanthropy. Make sure there is adequate time for discussion. An example of this could be talking about the next campaign or major gift initiative. Keep it high level and strategic.

**Integrate board education.** Integrate board education that is relevant and timely. Effective board education often falls in one of three areas:

- context about the health care or philanthropy fields
- insights about the organization served, or
- information on the effective fulfillment of the board member role.

For example, the VP of philanthropy might share industry information on the transformative power of grateful patient giving, the hospital CEO might share information on the current hospital strategy or a consultant might share information on the roles of high performing board members.

**Hear from the CEO.** The CEO is the link between the health system and the foundation. Board members want to hear his vision for the future and the latest system achievements. They want access to the CEO and an honest, interactive conversation. 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 the 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.

The best way to have a high-functioning board meeting is to constantly explore ways to improve. Never accept the status quo. Constantly challenge each other. Your fellow board members will thank you!

## For Board Discussion ≡

Does our board allocate adequate time to the discussion of valuable, strategic issues?

Does education strengthen and sustain our ability to be effective in our roles?

How else could we increase the impact of our board meetings?

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