



AHA Trustee Services



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SELECTING A FOUNDATION BOARD DREAM TEAM

With hospitals and health care systems increasingly turning to philanthropy as a strategic revenue source, more and more attention is being focused on foundation board performance.

Having a committed, purposeful and effective board is critically important to the overall success of your foundation...and the ability of the board to be a transformational resource is driven – or limited – by the individuals chosen to serve. Unfortunately, most boards put little time in reviewing or refining their selection process. Too often, board members nominate friends or those they know from other boards regardless of interest in the mission or fitness for the role. Or, they depend on outdated, one-size-fits-all board nomination matrixes packed with arbitrary rather than strategic criteria. The reality is...this is how it has been done for generations. Yet, the team you build today will define your success tomorrow.

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There is too much at stake here to simply accept the status quo. Boards must proactively define the qualities of an ideal board member and select based upon those competencies, expertise, experience, behaviors and circles of influence—and within the context of the foundation's priorities, strategy, opportunities and challenges.

The foundation governance committee champions the identification and screening of proposed members. Nominees are fed into the process not only by the governance committee but also by the larger foundation board, the VP of philanthropy and, sometimes, the health care CEO. Typically, the philanthropy executive identifies those who are already engaged as active donors, while the

CEO surfaces candidates with key organizational relationships and/or an understanding of the organization's opportunities and challenges. Once the governance committee makes initial decisions

on proposed candidates, the committee brings a slate of proposed names back to the full board for consideration and acceptance, since the ultimate responsibility for new member selection lies with the board.

As you select new members for the board, your first consideration should be to identify those who bring the competencies and connectivity needed to help the organization thrive.

Selecting a Foundation Board Dream Team

There are fundamental characteristics that are a baseline for board membership. *These include:*

- **Integrity**—principled leadership secures the credibility and the “right” to lead
- **Purpose**—passion for the health care mission and value alignment with personal beliefs

If a prospective board member does not have these two essential qualities, it is unlikely he will ever become a truly inspired and inspiring board leader.

Next, mission remains foremost: the foundation exists to maximize total charitable dollars raised to advance the organization's mission, so we must be unabashed about the fact the foundation board facilitates giving. This means new members must be positioned to proactively advance philanthropy by having personal financial capacity to give and/or access to those with the ability to give. Embracing this calling also means desirable qualities of potential board members include communications skills, influence and a charitable mindset. *Leaders should consider:*

- Is he an effective storyteller and advocate who can influence and engage others?
- Will she be willing and able to connect us with those in her circles of influence?
- Does he embrace charitable giving as a meaningful and fulfilling activity?
- Would she add credibility to our work?

The board must also uncover if the capacity exists to fulfill key leadership roles:

- Does she have the vision and focus to provide strategic leadership to guide our work?
- Will he have the knowledge and diligence to provide appropriate stewardship to grow, protect, deploy and measure the impact of charitable dollars?

The board must also “pull up” to link board selection criteria to the organization's big picture. How can new members add value? Do current skill sets meet our challenges? Consider the

organizational lifecycle stage, strategic plan and aspirations to determine what competencies are needed to advance work at the highest level. Staying on top of this list and marrying it to strategy will help build a successful team.

Once we have identified our best candidates, we must also ensure we have harnessed a diversity of perspectives that is often embodied by a diversity in gender, race and other attributes.

Exceptional foundation board members are key to transformative governance. No strategy outperforms selecting the right people to build organizations that are influential, connected and effective. By transforming your board selection criteria, you can be the change agents needed to drive excellence in your foundation and to ensure your health care organization has the resources necessary to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

For Board Discussion ↴

Does our current board member selection process allow us enough time to thoughtfully identify and evaluate prospective members?

How have organization needs or opportunities changed the competencies and characteristics we should proactively seek in members?

What are we committed to do in the next 100 days to enhance our approach?

About the Author:

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