



*Leading Through* **COVID-19**

## ENGAGING YOUR BOARD DURING A CRISIS

As the impacts of COVID-19 continue to accelerate, it's essential to continue to engage board members as advocates and allies to connect the health organization's mission to the community.

**1 Hold Board Meetings.** It would be easy to simply cancel board meetings under the expectations of social distancing, but that would be a mistake. Your board wants to be relevant, engaged and needed during this time; so, take the time to maintain their engagement. Board packets can be distributed through email as PDF packets. Then, board meetings can occur on an electronic video conferencing platform. Several offerings on the market allow a large number of participants to be on camera

simultaneously and have integrated features to allow voting by each participant, so harness the power of technology to keep your leaders informed and engaged.

**2 Position the Board to be Advocates and Connectors.** Board leaders may be stuck at home, but they still have a broad network they can access through email, social media and phone. Therefore, make sure they are prepared with talking points and stories to share the hospital's response and commitment. Let them know about information on COVID-19 the hospital may be distributing or curating to enable them to push it further into the community. Ask for their assistance in sharing the word about events that are postponed and to ask attendees to consider

redirecting their ticket cost to be an outright charitable gift. Even in this time, the board's credibility and influence as community leaders can be a valuable asset in connecting to the community.

**“ Even in this time, the board's credibility and influence as community leaders can be a valuable asset in connecting to the community. ”**

**3 Position to Fulfill Exceptional Needs.** As this situation creates new and unanticipated financial pressures for the health care organization, the foundation may be able to help. Discuss creation of a new emergency fund to seek community support for needs stemming from the crisis. Discuss whether there are funds over which the board has discretion that could be distributed to assist the hospital with obtaining supplies or building infrastructure to address COVID-19. Discuss whether the purposes or processes for employee emergency funds need to be temporarily adjusted to help hospital staff during this time.

**4 Prepare for Continuity.** Discuss how the organization will continue its work as operations are disrupted for an unforeseeable amount of time. Questions to consider:

- What critical programs and processes must be addressed?
- What must be obtained or done to keep the organization moving?
- How will the organization access data and other assets from offsite?
- How will the organization support a team of remote workers?
- What will need to be done immediately as normalcy starts to resume?
- How will the organization adjust when revenues will likely be down?

**5 Engage Your Board in Advancing Stewardship.** Reach out to current key donors to thank them for past support and to let them know how their generosity prepared the health organization to respond in this moment. Outreach to key donors is also a way to let them know the organization values them and is thinking about their well-being.

**6 Activate Your Board to Foster Philanthropy.** Your mission doesn't stop during this crisis. In fact, the needs of health organizations will be heightened during COVID-19. There is great value in inviting others to be part of your organization's solutions and response. Discuss the individuals, businesses and foundations that might be moved or motivated to assist the hospital in responding to this crisis. Articulate the special case for timely support during this situation. Identify board members who can contact key prospects or donors. While we all need to be respectful and compassionate about the current ambiguity facing everyone, many people would rather be helpers than watchers—so invite them to join the hospital in responding.

**7 Discuss Strategic Plans.** A key board role is shaping organizational strategy to ensure mission fulfillment. As organizations grapple with current uncertainty and plan for emerging from this crisis, it's valid to revisit your strategy. Questions to consider include:

- What assumptions guided our planning that may no longer be true?
- How will changed economic and market factors impact our strategy?
- Are there programs and plans we now must pause or abandon?
- Are there opportunities resulting from this crisis that we must leverage?

As health philanthropy organizations navigate their leadership response to COVID-19, there is great value to engaging your board as full and active participants in safeguarding and strengthening the mission.

---

About the Author: Betsy Chapin Taylor, FAHP, is CEO of Accordant. She can be reached at [Betsy@AccordantHealth.com](mailto:Betsy@AccordantHealth.com).