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## 30 QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT BOARD IMPROVEMENT

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High-impact health care foundation boards utilize routine board evaluation to highlight strengths and uncover opportunities for performance improvement at the individual member and collective board level. Most boards use an annual self-assessment tool delivered in a paper or online format to support this process. Such tools are readily available from a variety of professional associations, consulting firms and other resources. Using an external tool offers a variety of benefits:

- Appropriate question design
- Access to comparison information from similar organizations to provide context about the organization's relative performance
- Expertise in processing, analyzing and prioritizing results to inform future plans

While a range of external tools and expertise are available, some boards do not feel they have the resources to secure them. However, perceived lack of access to a formal tool should not impede clarifying and prioritizing opportunities for organizational and board improvement. Evaluation supports excellence. Therefore, the following guide is intended to support discussion about advancement opportunities for foundation

boards that wish to pursue a "do-it-yourself" route to optimizing organizational and board performance.

### Mission & Vision

- Do all members of the board share a clear and common understanding of the organizational mission and vision, not only to use it as a guide for decision-making but also to enable articulating it to others?

### Leadership

- Does the board effectively use its collective expertise, knowledge, skills and insights to guide the organization and advance the mission?
- Do board members receive timely, consistent access to appropriate education, information, resources and tools to support active, effective engagement?
- Does the board expect, receive and monitor information on organizational performance including financial, donor engagement and activity measures?
- Does the board effectively discharge its financial oversight duty through routine review of statements, use of an independent audit, etc.?
- Does the board appropriately drive accountability within the organization?
- Does the board transparently share performance, outcomes and impact to support donor stewardship?

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- Does the board continuously engage in strategic thinking and planning to hone the organization's direction and support organizational relevancy, advancement and growth?
- Do board members invest time, energy and commitment at a level consistent with effective fulfillment of their roles and responsibilities?
- Does the board understand the distinction between the governance and management roles?
- Does the board appropriately use committees and task forces to support board work?

## Philanthropy

- Do board members know and understand their primary duty in leading the philanthropic arm of the health care organization is to advance philanthropy to strengthen and sustain the health care mission?
- Does the board have the courage to critically evaluate all the ways the organization raises money and to abandon those methods that are not optimally effective—even if there is an emotional attachment to them?
- Are all foundation board members actively participating in fund development activities that are aligned with their strengths and preferences?
- Do current board leaders utilize their personal and professional networks to advocate for and foster charitable support for the organization's mission?
- Do board members make charitable gifts reflective of their roles as a board member and commensurate with ability?
- How well does the foundation executive support and foster engagement of the board in development activities?

## Culture

- Does the way the board works reflect strong ethical values, honest declaration of potential conflicts and commitment to put the organization's interests first?
- Does the board have a culture of mutual respect, honest communication, trust and constructive debate to support sound and shared decision-making?

- Do individual board members feel empowered to speak up, share concerns and ask tough questions to ensure the rightness of our direction and decisions?
- Does the board work collectively as a unified body to fulfill its role?

## Partnership

- Does the organization have a positive, productive and mutually respectful partnership with the foundation president/ chief philanthropy officer?
- Does the foundation board collaborate with the health care CEO and appropriate members of the health care governing board to identify appropriate charitable funding priorities?

## Meetings

- Are the frequency and length of board meetings appropriate to support board discussion, deliberation and decision-making?
- Do board members receive meeting information of sufficient depth and enough in advance to support their needs?
- Are meeting agendas aligned with goals and strategic priorities?
- Does the board build adequate time for reflection and discussion into meeting agendas?

## Board Composition

- Does board size and composition support optimal effectiveness?
- Does the board energize itself through planned turnover and thoughtful recruitment?
- Does the board proactively pursue members with a diversity of competencies, skills, experiences, perspectives and networks?

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