

BoardBrief

Knowledge Resources for Governing Effectiveness

Elevating Community Partnerships to Make a Lasting Impact on Health and Well-Being

In a value-based health care system, success is defined not only by financial viability but by the organization's ability to fulfill its promised mission to improve the health of its community. Part of the challenge is that health is determined by many disparate factors, such as housing and housing location, employment, income, food, education, access to transportation, family support and more. These are factors outside the control of a single organization, but they impact an individual's access to care.

Individual health care organizations cannot independently do everything that is needed to fulfill their mission commitment to the community. The majority of health care organizations are committed to improving the health and well-being of the communities they serve. While a strong majority agreed that population health aligns with their mission, far fewer indicated that they have the financial resources for population health initiatives or programs to address social determinants of health. Furthermore, thinking and operating independently fails to leverage and maximize the opportunities that come with joint efforts and shared resources. These realities are prompting health care organizations to develop partnerships with a wide range of other agencies and hospitals in their communities.

The Principles of Successful Collaboration

The AHA's Center for Healthcare Governance conducted a 2015 Blue Ribbon Panel Study of select Foster G. McGaw Prize Winners, recognized for their exceptional commitment to improving the health and well-being of the communities they serve. The study's purpose was to examine how these winning organizations work with their community partners to develop community service initiatives and how the partnerships are being governed. Nine common principles of successful collaborative partnerships were identified in the study report *Learnings on Governance from Partnerships that Improve Community Health*.

1. **Partnerships Must be Community-Driven.** Collaborative partnerships for community health are comprised of diverse organizations and individuals passionately striving to address problems common to all. Partnerships and their governance structures require flexibility and will vary to meet the needs, resources and characteristics of each community.
2. **All Stakeholders Must be Meaningfully Engaged.** Plans cannot be made based on what some "think" the community needs. All community stakeholders must be identified and represented in determining, planning and executing governing priorities. This engagement ensures well-informed, data-driven decisions regarding the purpose, vision, strategies and implementation of the partnership's work, and also ensures interest, investment and trust in the partnership and its work.
3. **More Can be Achieved Together Than Alone.** Stakeholders must be committed to working together in partnership, leveraging each partner's resources and complementary talents to create a synergy among partners that enables greater accomplishment than can be achieved by working alone.
4. **Partner Equity Ensures Sustainability.** Regardless of size, financial or in-kind contribution to the partnership, stakeholders are considered equal. The success of a partnership may be dependent on backbone or anchor institutions assuming the role of conveners, facilitators or

integrators, and relinquishing leadership or control of the agenda.

5. **Community Health and Well-Being Improvement is a Shared Core Purpose.** Members of the governance structure are stewards of the community's resources, its health and well-being, and of the trust placed in them by the community. As such, members of the governance structure must be committed to working together in partnership for the benefit of the community. The shared purpose, vision and common priorities for the health and well-being of the community are adhered to as the crucial focal point of community partnerships, meeting agendas, discussions, deliberations and decisions.
6. **Creative Approaches are Needed to Tackle All-Encompassing Problems.** Improving community health is an all-encompassing concern that includes multiple socio-economic issues and requires: long-term perspectives and commitments; data-driven decisions; seeking out best practices; willingness to take well-calculated risks; and willingness to embrace bold, innovative approaches.
7. **A "Systems Approach" Ensures Continuity.** A systems-oriented approach creates solid foundations for building and aligning integrated delivery systems for community health improvement and maintenance.
8. **Goals and Progress Reporting Ensure Accountability.** Change requires an intense focus on results. Clear measures or indicators of progress provide direction and create inspiration and motivation. Consistent monitoring of balanced scorecards or dashboards and communicating

progress to the broader community, are essential to demonstrating accountability, earning community trust and building hope for the future.

9. **Governance Must be Structured to Ensure Sustainability.** Sustainability of the governance structure and collaborative partnerships are critical to the health of the community and is dependent on a clear purpose or intention, the commitment of partners, a plan of action, adequate funding, effective implementation and demonstrated progress.

To download the complete *2016 Blue Ribbon Panel Report: Learnings on Governance from Partnerships that Improve Community Health*, go to www.americangovernance.com/resources/reports/brp/2016.

The Collaborative Benefits of Entrepreneurial Governance

As health care continues to evolve, boards of trustees will need to govern with an "entrepreneurial culture." Entrepreneurial governance is nimble, flexible and innovative. It is able to clearly define health care needs and match those needs with the most valuable resources.

Entrepreneurial governance determines multiple avenues through which to achieve the mission and objectives of its diverse partners. It capitalizes on developing and nurturing organic relationships in which partners who know and respect one another share a common view of needs and opportunities, and are committed to common objectives and to achieving extraordinary health improvement outcomes for those they serve. Entrepreneurial governance calls for broadening the

Community Collaboration and Partnerships: Questions for Boards

By virtue of their size, resources, mission, and commitment to community health, hospitals and health systems often find themselves as leaders in community partnerships. As your board evaluates and prioritizes the needs of your community, the depth of your organization's resources and its commitment to fulfilling its mission, consider the following questions for discussion:

- What community partnerships do we lead or participate in now? Do we know what efforts others in the community are pursuing? Could joining forces create a more successful outcome for the community?
- Is there an opportunity for greater collaboration, including shared governance, to grow the impact of community partnerships?
- Do we have a strategy for community partnerships based on community needs?
- What partnership opportunities should or could we pursue to improve the health of our community that we aren't currently?
- What role should the hospital or health system play in a partnership (the "backbone," facilitator, primary funder, or an equal partner without a prominent role, etc.)?
- How can our hospital or health system best use its resources to address community health, and what can we contribute to a partnership that others in the community cannot?

range of skills, knowledge and experience of its partners to encompass the expertise needed to address the many social determinants of health.

No One Model Fits All

There is no single model of partnership or governance that will meet each community's unique needs. As boards evaluate and prioritize the community's health needs and the depth of the organization's resources, trustees must ask how the power and potential of leveraging community partnerships can help to fulfill the organization's mission and commitment to improving the community's health.

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Illinois Office

1515 W. 22nd Street, Ste 900

Oak Brook, IL 60523

630-613-7580

blorsbach@governwell.net

Oregon Office

31090 SW Boones Bend Rd

Wilsonville, OR 97070

630-613-7580

larry@governwell.net

governwell.net