

COVID-19: The Role of the Board

Your role as a board member is mission critical in this transformative time: You are charged with helping your organization work its way through this unprecedented pandemic – and onto the other side. No organization will be unchanged from this experience.

How you respond matters. Together, boards and CEOs are entrusted with setting strategic vision and direction, then providing clear, consistent communication about that path. You are each essential allies and voices in determining what comes next and steering your organization to its future state. Many depend on you.



Overarching Questions to Keep in Mind

Whatever stage you are in with the pandemic, proactively consider the following:

- » How is your health system fulfilling its not-for-profit mission during the pandemic?
 - » How will your health system evaluate your performance in response to the pandemic?
 - » How will your health system prepare for the next wave, or future epidemics?
 - » How does the financial impact of the pandemic affect your health system's strategic initiatives?
 - » What steps does your health system need to take to safeguard its reputation in your market?
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Your Role

Board members must be active through the entire chronology – as the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, as it is mitigated and as operations ultimately resume in their transformed manner. Your roles:

A PARTNER

- » Ensure the board and leadership are synched. Communicate consistently to stay informed and aligned on how your health system is responding and how you can reinforce messaging.
- » Be prepared to share information about the pandemic's effects on your health system, community and what people should expect to see next.
- » Use this period as an opportunity to build a close relationship between the board and leadership and define how you want to work together into the future.

A VOICE

- » As a respected leader, express gratitude for clinicians on the front lines of your health system's response.
- » Break through the noise as a source of truth for your local peers – from government and business leaders to community partners. Use your deep network; people are listening.
- » Amplify messaging of your health system's essential not-for-profit mission.

A STRATEGIST

- » Look beyond the moment and anticipate intermediate and longer term issues your board will be grappling with on the other side of the pandemic. Proactively communicate a realistic, honest vision and strategy to move forward.
- » Leverage the board's networks as you delve in the future and serve as a powerful advocate for the system. Proactively engage with partners whom you know will be critical to your ability to serve your mission.



What To Share

As you are communicating, here's what your stakeholders need to hear from you:

AUTHORITY Be equipped to speak authoritatively to partners on how the health system is handling the COVID-19 crisis, resumption of operations and vision for the future delivery of healthcare in your market. Ensure this communication aligns with leadership.

GRATITUDE Express gratitude and appreciation to providers on the front lines. Encourage your community to support your doctors, nurses and health system staff during this challenging time.

CONFIDENCE Be realistic and acknowledge uncertainty. Project confidence that the organization will do its utmost to deliver on its mission and ably serve the community into the future.

VISION Articulate that you are envisioning opportunities for the post-crisis health system, including what's been learned from the crisis and how the organization will operate differently moving forward.



Note

For organizations that have not been deeply impacted by COVID-19, know that these are some foundational best practices as the board becomes highly involved.

- » **Clarify your board's policy** for how members communicate with media and the community and for who speaks on behalf of the board or the system.
- » **Create a structure** for keeping the board informed throughout the duration of the crisis, whether through daily email updates or a weekly video call.
- » **Activate board members** as powerful advocates for the health system in your communities.