

Cultivating Local Hospital Support

After volunteers, support from local hospitals is the most valuable resource a clinic can develop. While partnering with the local hospital may seem obvious, the changing landscape of healthcare and the impact of healthcare reform make things difficult for local hospitals who are being asked to do more and more for their communities. To help develop a successful relationship consider these steps:

1) Find a Champion

Before contacting the hospital to ask for their support, determine who will champion your cause. A prominent physician volunteer, physician organization (i.e. Medical Society), or interested hospital Board member are the best places to start. Let them take the lead in making the contacts and laying the groundwork for the initial request.

2) Find the Decision Maker

Depending on the organization of the hospital, the CEO may or may not make the final decision in making resources available to the clinic. Determine who is, and use the connections of your champion to approach them. Keep in mind people use many different data points in making their decisions.

People who tend to lead more heavily with their heart may be touched by the mission and passion of your project. Those who tend to lead more with their head are often looking for a solid business case for supporting the clinic.

3) Do Your Homework

No matter what style of decision making the hospital executive uses, having solid information, facts, and numbers will be important in discussing your needs.

Answer these important questions before approaching the hospital:

- What type of philanthropy is the hospital doing? Does your ask fit into their goals?
- Make sure you read their latest Community Needs Assessment and talk about what you learned about their priorities and proposed solutions.
- Why should the hospital support the clinic?
- How should the hospital support the clinic?
- How many patient visits do you average or plan to have?
- What is your average cost of seeing a patient?
- If you are asking for a specific type of service (e.g. labs), know what type of labs you will be offering and how many per month.
- How do you provide for medication and at what cost?
- How many potential ER visits to the hospital will you divert to your clinic? Do some research within your community to determine the average cost of an ER visit. Use this number to come up with some hard estimates of cost savings to the hospital.
- How do you plan on doing follow-up/ continuity of care with your patients?
- Do other safety net providers in the area have an agreement with the local hospital or health system?

4) Make the Ask

Foundation leaders say making the ask is the most difficult step for individuals and organizations seeking funding or resources. Prepare ahead of time how you will make your request. It's a good idea to write your comments down and rehearse your request out loud. Always consider leading with an open request for support.

5) Start Small

Rather than asking for a large contribution, focus on how the hospital can help you in small ways. Making a list with several options for support can be an important tool in your initial meeting. Items on the list can range from donating goods and services such as lab supplies, lab work, or x-rays for no cost; medications or other supplies, equipment, or a financial donation, or in-kind support of staff. Being flexible in your initial meeting will be helpful. Hospitals will want to know there is a good return on investment, and your clinic data will be invaluable in this effort. Asking hospitals to contribute the cost of computer hardware or EMR systems is a

concrete way to demonstrate your commitment to quality and impact. Start with these simple requests and work on making the relationship a successful one. The statistics you keep will be instrumental when you return for the next request for help.

6) Think Long Term

Hospitals may initially limit support to your clinic, so create ways to accommodate them. Options for support that are not directly tied to financial issues or time-dependent can be good ways to start a long-term relationship with a hospital.

7) Think Big

There are examples across the country of hospitals providing major, ongoing financial support for local clinics, upwards of several hundred thousand dollars. These situations developed through relationships and documented successes. Don't be afraid to think big and keep sharing the dream of what can be if everyone shares the same goal!

8) Don't Take Rejection Personally

Early efforts to obtain hospital support may face resistance or be rejected. Hospitals are constantly being approached with requests of support, but they have limited resources. If your request is denied, don't go negative. Going public or even sharing negatively the hospital's refusal to help with your volunteers will only damage your cause in the long term. Instead, take it as a learning opportunity.

Reflection questions:

- Why did they say no?
- What do I need to do to address their concerns?
- Who else needs to be involved in telling our story?

Positivity and persistence will strengthen your position as a potential partner.