



Partnering for Charity

By collaborating with other attorneys, accountants, and financial planners, professional advisors can strengthen their relationships with clients, better understand the mechanics of philanthropy, and help educate the public about the importance of charitable giving.

Accountants and financial advisors are among the best positioned to determine a client's charitable intentions and ensure that he or she has a tax-efficient, up-to-date will. Yet many advisors neglect these important questions because they lack a piece of the puzzle—the resources, knowledge, or tools—to put a comprehensive solution in place. That's why ad hoc collaboration among tax and financial advisors, attorneys, and giving specialists is vitally important when it comes to serving a client's best interests.

The Importance of Collaboration

"Very seldom does any one type of advisor have all the tools and knowledge to steer clients in their charitable giving," says attorney Bob Sterling of Weber & Sterling in Maumee, Ohio.

For example, CPAs see clients at least annually, putting them in the best position to bring up wills, estate planning, and charitable giving. Yet they may have no idea about their client's life goals or the charitable instruments that best suit their needs.

On the flip side, estate planning attorneys are well versed in crafting wills as part of a comprehensive estate plan that may include revocable and irrevocable trusts, charitable remainder trusts (CRTs) and charitable lead trusts (CLTs), private foundations, outright gifts of cash and other assets, and strategically applied insurance. Yet attorneys have a distinct disadvantage, Sterling acknowledges. "Our contact with most clients is sporadic," he says.

For this reason, financial advisors, CPAs, and others who see clients regularly need to be more proactive in discussing wills and charitable giving with clients, says Keith Burwell, president of the Toledo Community Foundation in Toledo, Ohio. "The fact is, when you pass away, you *will* be charitable," Burwell says. "The question is, do you want the federal government to be your sole beneficiary, or do you also want to provide for your family and give back to your community?"

Resources for Collaboration

Community foundations offer an array of resources for professional advisors and are an ideal venue for collaboration. They are closely connected to local needs and can offer guidance on various strategies for supporting clients' charitable goals. One way community foundations provide a venue for collaboration is by sponsoring local planned giving councils to provide public education and peer networking opportunities for advisors.

Established by the National Committee on Planned Giving (NCPG), there are 94 registered councils in 165 communities across the country. The councils are sponsored by a member organization of the NCPG—often a community foundation, as is the case with the Toledo Foundation. Local experts in all types of charitable

gifts—from CPAs and attorneys to financial planners, trust officers, and even some insurance professionals—are permitted to join the council.

“The council provides an avenue to help educate attorneys and advisors,” says Suzanne Ward, executive director of the Northwest Arkansas Community Foundation, which sponsors a local planned giving council in Springdale, Ark. “They can be exposed to a variety of alternative giving instruments.”

Indeed, advisors earn continuing education credits; develop networks with colleagues; learn the mechanics of charitable vehicles; discover giving opportunities within the community; and sometime gain referrals, although that is not a primary goal.

A Brain Trust on Charitable Giving

In effect, the local council forms a “brain trust” on charitable giving—especially planned giving—within the community. Members meet to discuss new tax laws, charitable tools and instruments, as well as challenges they face in setting up a planned bequest.

It’s no accident that community foundations form the backbone of these local councils. Besides providing back-office support, they serve as clearinghouses of information on local charities, which they frequently monitor for performance and fiscal responsibility. They also share an ethical outlook. Like the NCPG, community foundations are not affiliated with, nor do they solicit gifts for, any particular charity.

Conclusion

Community foundations and local planned giving councils are excellent venues for meeting other professional advisors to facilitate collaboration. By talking to clients about their charitable goals, professional advisors will be doing a service to their clients and their communities.

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