

Chapter 6

The Role of Corporate and Foundation Relations Officers (CFRs) Revisited: Key Actors in Academy–Business Inter–Organizational Partnerships

ABSTRACT

The Role of Corporate and Foundation Relations Officers (CFRs) Revisited: Key Actors in Academy-Business Inter-Organizational Partnerships provides some prior research and role development. A history of resource development is discussed and culminates with 21st Century one-stop-shop coordination to interface with the for-profit sector. This chapter covers CFR responsibilities, approaches to relationship building, career paths and office structures, corporate engagement programs, and metrics. The rise and potential fall of corporate engagement centers is also explored. Issues of risk management, trust, power, ethics, and cooperation are considered.

Academic institutions' corporate and foundation relations development officers are specialists in creating win-win relationships to mutually benefit two or more organizations simultaneously. —Morgan R. Clevenger and Cynthia J. MacGregor (2016)

One manager of partnerships at a Fortune 500 Company went so far as to say that competence in the corporate relations function at a [college or] university can be a difference-maker. To this research manager, faculty research quality within a given tier of ranked [colleges or] universities in the field of interest was roughly interchangeable, and the skills and responsiveness of the corporate relations office was a point of differentiation in choosing an academic partner. —Robert Garber et al. (2019)

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Because most professionals in this role do not possess positional authority or the requisite oversight to compel others to join grant-seeking or partnership efforts, they must instead lead change and coalitions from their place in the middle of the institutional hierarchy. —Ryan J. Sauder and Michelle E. Wamsley (2020)

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of corporate and foundation relations (CFR) work has changed significantly in the past decade. CFR best practices and associated indicators of success have also evolved. Corporate & Foundation Relations officers (CFRs)—as key higher education actors—serve as coordinators and translators, finding areas of alignment between company or foundation priorities and college or university areas of excellence. A corporate relations officer plays an essential role in translating between the languages and cultures of business and industry to academia and serving as an advocate for corporate partners on a college or university campus (Garber et al., 2019).

The role of CFRs is evolving to meet college or university and company needs. CFRs are responsible for corporate partnership outreach, creation, growth, and maintenance. Building consensus on a campus among competing priorities and personalities requires a unique skill set. CFRs often ‘lead from the middle’ (see Eddy et al., 2016; Farrell, 2014) to influence without authority, and succeed with high levels of followership. This important focus on skills related to relationship building and management should not be overlooked. McCoy (2018) found that this was the essential skillset—and should be measured. Galan-Muros and Davey (2019) identified lowering barriers and enhancing drivers to engagement as key elements of academy-business partnerships.

Businesses may engage on higher education campuses through a CFR Office and, at some colleges and universities, through a central front door to campus at a Corporate Engagement Center. Additionally, companies support university research and students through structured programs, including Corporate Affiliate Programs, Research Parks, and Research Consortia.

This chapter reviews the role of CFR Officers, the unique skillset required to succeed, and corporate engagement through various structures programs. *The Partnership Continuum* as well as metrics are explored. CFRs may influence without title authority, so thus ‘lead from the middle.’ As such, consideration of success factors and followership are discussed. Various examples on these concepts from across the United States are provided.

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