

CASE STUDY
for philanthropy leaders

How Joint Fundraising Advanced a Childhood Behavioral Health Program

Children's National Hospital and MedStar Georgetown University Hospital teamed up
to form the Early Childhood Innovation Network

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Overview

The challenge

Early childhood behavioral health is a major challenge in Washington, D.C. Children lack access to behavioral health services due to a dearth of specialists, insufficient insurance coverage, and limited collaboration between community resources. Children's National Hospital and MedStar Georgetown University Hospital recognized that these prevailing challenges necessitated a holistic approach, not a siloed one.

The organizations

Children's National Hospital is a 323-bed children's hospital in Washington, D.C. Their philanthropy team has approximately 90 full-time employees and raised \$87 million in FY2019.

MedStar Georgetown University Hospital is a 609-bed hospital in Washington, D.C. Their philanthropy team has 5 full-time employees and raised \$18 in FY2019.

The approach

In 2012, Children's National and MedStar Georgetown combined forces to improve early childhood behavioral health in their region, eventually forming the Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN) in 2015. To support their shared efforts, the hospitals jointly engage private foundations, local government, and individual donors to raise the necessary operating funds.

The result

Joint fundraising has enabled the hospitals to seed and sustain ECIN since 2015. In 2019, the collaborative program raised \$6.4 million and used philanthropy to fund more than 20 multidisciplinary team members to implement innovative behavioral health interventions.

Approach

How Children’s National and MedStar Georgetown collaborated to fund the Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN)

Washington, D.C., needed childhood behavioral health services that could not be provided by a single hospital or entity. Children’s National and MedStar Georgetown strategized to combine resources, share expertise, and jointly fundraise to build a program that would address this community challenge with integrated behavioral health care and family support in a variety of settings. The four components below illustrate their cooperative fundraising process.

The four key components

01 Target a challenge that can’t be solved alone

02 Emphasize collaborative approach in case for donor support

03 Be transparent around which funder relations you’re willing to share

04 Develop guidelines for funding requests and distribution

01 Target a challenge that can't be solved alone

Joint fundraising is most likely to be successful when it targets a community health challenge that clearly requires more than one organization's capabilities to solve. Children's National and MedStar Georgetown shared an ambition to address childhood behavioral health challenges in Washington, D.C., but understood their endeavor demanded a collaborative effort with combined resources.

Significant improvement to childhood behavioral health care in a large city is a tall order that requires extensive co-evaluation, communication, and cross-collaboration to assemble the adequate resources for success. Neither organization was equipped with all the funding or expertise to develop a holistic solution on their own. Leaders at both hospitals sought each other's strengths to complement their own, and the full expression of those strengths required new funding from donors.

Two clinical leaders with a shared vision

Leading the charge for the creation of ECIN were Dr. Matthew Biel, Chief of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at MedStar Georgetown, and Dr. Lee Beers, Medical Director for Community Health and Advocacy at Children's National. While childhood behavioral health was already a focus at their respective hospitals, both leaders saw in each other an opportunity to further advance their shared personal and institutional goals.

02 Emphasize collaborative approach in case for support

Collaborative approaches establish credibility within the community and help organizations stand out to donors. Children’s National and MedStar Georgetown embraced the opportunity to demonstrate to potential funders that two separate organizations can combine their expertise and resources to address a significant community health concern. A combined case for support can highlight the many potential benefits of collaborative solutions, including:

- **Deeper impact:** Two institutions can leverage each other’s unique strengths and experience to build a more impactful solution. Put on display in a case for support, these complementary strengths showed funders that ECIN could cover a wide array of behavioral health interventions.
- **Greater financial sustainability:** Sharing program resources such as office space, equipment, and staff can lower overall operational costs and free up financial resources for new investments. A financially efficient program has a better prospect of sustainability, which is an attractive feature to most funders.
- **Brighter halo:** When collaborators bring together their respective brand identities, they often have the effect of generating media coverage and added public awareness of the importance of the cause. This exposure can serve to benefit the program through the attention of additional funders, community stakeholders, and program participants.

03 Be transparent around which funder relations you're willing to share

Children's National and MedStar Georgetown have raised funds for ECIN through a mix of foundations, local government, and individual donors. Some funders are new to both organizations – acquired through the strength of the program and relationships introduced by network partners – while others are past funders of one or the other hospital.

Early and ongoing transparency around which funder relations they were willing to share—and which ones they were not—smoothed the process of navigating donor relations for the two partners. Children's National and MedStar Georgetown allowed their existing relationship (or lack thereof) with potential ECIN donors to determine how the organizations would approach donors about investment opportunities.

The respective fundraising teams approach some ECIN donors jointly, assembling proposals and managing visits through a collaborative process. The teams continue to manage other donors independently, seeking funding for the hospital's individual contributions to ECIN success. In either case, the two fundraising teams assume positive intent and understand that funds raised together, and funds raised separately, benefit the needs of the program and the communities it serves.

04 Develop guidelines for funding requests and distribution

Having two institutions involved in one project can lead to added bureaucratic hurdles and administrative burdens. Children’s National and MedStar Georgetown set clear expectations for their partnership up front by establishing protocols around managing joint funding requests and subsequent fund distribution. Two decisions have proven particularly useful:

- **Designate a point person for coordinating joint fundraising requests.** Each grant application is directed by a grant-writing consultant, led by MedStar Georgetown in close collaboration with Children's National. The consultant serves as the quarterback for joint proposals submitted to ECIN funders. When writing each grant application, the consultant requested the input of the philanthropy staff member most knowledgeable on the applicable ECIN program. After completing an application, the consultant seeks approval from program-specific stakeholders, including the relevant hospital finance departments, any programmatically involved community allies, and ECIN’s two clinical leaders.
- **Distribute grant funds based on program responsibilities.** The two organizations split funds generated through joint requests based on their respective programmatic contributions within ECIN, at times using sub-grants to reallocate funds appropriately. Notably, this fund-distribution approach requires clear articulation of each organization’s specific contributions to a proposed initiative, including their individual budgetary requirements, be they staffing related or otherwise.

Results

Joint fundraising launches and grows innovative childhood behavioral health initiative.

The joint fundraising initiative of Children's National and MedStar Georgetown provided the necessary funding to launch and sustain the Early Childhood Innovation Network. This program features the best of what each hospital has to offer and has had a far-reaching impact on the community. What started as a conversation between two clinicians has become a successful multiyear program and a strong example of the potential for joint fundraising initiatives.

\$6M

Pilot grant across first 5 years

\$6.4M

Raised by Children's National and MedStar Georgetown for ECIN in FY2019

5


Years since ECIN's launch


20+


Behavioral health specialists and multidisciplinary team members funded by philanthropy


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