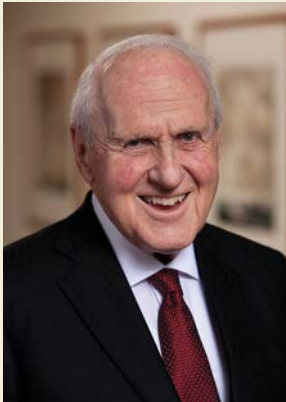


Serving the Oregon of today
and the
Oregon of the future
requires new ways to engage
diverse communities
across the state.

Reflections from retiring Trustee Ralph Bolliger



In fall 2015, longtime Trustee Ralph Bolliger announced his retirement, effective spring 2016. He recently shared some reflections on his 36 years of service with the Foundation.

You've been on the Board for 36 years. What changes have you seen?

When I started in 1980, there were three trustees and we had about \$30 million. Now we have six trustees and over \$200 million. In Oregon, The Collins Foundation was the only foundation that had significant assets. There were just a few smaller foundations.

Our Board meetings would start at 10:00 a.m. We'd consider around 20 grant requests. Sometimes the Treasurer and I would look at each other back then and say, we'd better stretch this out so we can be here long enough to have lunch! Now we have about 40 full proposals that we review, with up to 30 more summarized.

We strive to manage over \$200 million and use our best judgment to ensure that the grants we make will effectively improve the lives of Oregonians.

The grant requests were, almost literally, on the back of an envelope. "We need a new roof for the senior center. It will cost \$10,000. Please send it." Now the grant requests are much more sophisticated and complete. Also, when I started, the staff did not make site visits. Eventually that changed. Reading a grant request and then going out and taking a look can make a 180-degree difference.

How have the needs of the community changed?

After computers came in, during the 1980s and '90s we received many requests for computers to handle donor lists, bookkeeping, and human resources. Later it seemed everybody needed a van to transport students, patients, etc. Now the work is more complex, and there are significantly more hungry and homeless people, even in the smaller towns.

In the last ten years we have seen a significant increase in the number of requests for food, shelter, and medical care, with many groups doing creative activities to help meet those needs. Sexual and domestic violence requests have surged.

Do you have any words of advice for people new to nonprofit service?

Nowadays people see a problem, get their friends together, and want to set up a 501(c)(3) and solve the problem. I would suggest that you find an organization that is addressing the same or similar issues and take all your friends and go work with them, rather than setting up a new organization.

Make sure you're aware of what's going on in your community. Put together a larger board than you think you might need. Your board members will have friends and that makes fundraising easier. Board members should be prepared to work and get involved in the work of the organization.

What have you enjoyed most about your trustee service?

I've looked forward to coming to Board meetings to hear the perspectives of the other trustees. The people are smart, and there's a culture of cordiality and civility. A diversity of opinion is always respected. I would say that starts at the top. Maribeth Collins set the stage early on. She is gracious, polite, and courteous.

In my 36 years, we've had three chief executives and they've all been absolutely outstanding in terms of knowledge of their community, foundations, and what we can and can't do. You just know things will be done right.

Too, I appreciate that we've been able to help some of the smaller organizations because we're aware of other resources beyond The Collins Foundation. Our staff members meet people day after day. They can see if a model isn't working or if an organization needs help with board development. And we've been able to show others how to set up a foundation and run it.

Do you have a favorite memory?

One highlight was the Miller Large Arts Initiative we participated in that helped the Oregon Symphony, Portland Opera, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Portland Center Stage, and Portland Art Museum. Especially during the recession, these organizations were struggling financially. We worked together with the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, and others to help bring some stability to these groups. We hired a professional to review and advise us on their operations and budgets—it wasn't

just about fundraising. I think it was a big help, and we continue to be engaged in some aspects of it.

What has Trustee service taught you?

I've learned that there are thousands of people in the state of Oregon who are working in, and giving money to, every kind of organization that you can think of: senior centers and arts organizations; CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) programs; youth development and alternative education organizations; volunteer fire and ambulance departments. I don't think most people have any idea how many of these organizations are doing good things, with people donating their time and treasure to make these community endeavors work.