

Fundraising Tips *

How to Plan Your Fundraising Strategy: Keep Your Organization Financially on Track with a Year-Round Plan

Every organization that conducts fundraising needs a fundraising plan to guide their work. Below are the essentials and some insights on each.

- **Getting Started.** Get input from many places—the staff, board, and volunteers. Everyone needs to take part for this to work.
- **Setting Goals.** You can set goals in different ways. One technique is to look at your income and your expenses and then set the goal in relation to those figures. Another way is to look at your income and see if there are sources of income that repeat or, more importantly, don't repeat from year to year and then figure out how much you need to raise.
- **Consider Your Assets.** This surely includes money but also much more—people skills, in-kind sources of assistance, volunteers, potential partner agencies and programs that you can work with by having them build you into their work. Take an inventory of these assets to get a full picture of what's available.
- **Integrate Fundraising With Other Activities.** For example, if you are convening an annual meeting, consider a fundraising event like a silent auction.
- **Focus on a Few Key Strategies.** Don't try to do everything. Focus your fundraising work. Break it down into smaller parts that you can accomplish.
- **Increasing Your Revenues.** Think about ways you can increase fundraising, such as asking certain donors to increase their contributions or approach new foundations and companies.
- **Identify Your Prospects.** Make a list of potential donors. Also consider putting a target amount you'd like to raise from each. Add other information and track your contacts with them as a way to help you manage your outreach and monitor how well you are doing.
- **Make a Fundraising Calendar.** You need to create some order and sense of your fundraising work so that it's manageable. For example, schedule certain big fundraising activities on a quarterly basis.

* Summarized from various articles in: The Grassroots Fundraising Journal.

- **Approval and Implementation.** Once you've crafted your plan, share it with the board and get their approval. Getting their sign-off is part of the important work of getting the board to take part in helping implement the work.
- **Revise Your Plan.** Over time, you may need to tweak the plan or make bigger changes. This is okay as long as you try to stay true to the overall plan and its purpose: to guide your fundraising work during the year.
- **Recruit Volunteers to Help.** Board and staff members are definitely key volunteers, but you should also look more broadly to others to help you implement the fundraising plan—from helping out at events to making contacts with potential donors to providing in-kind support like donating food and supplies.

Summary of: How to Plan Your Fundraising Strategy: Keep Your Organization Financially on Track with a Year-Round Plan. By Pat Munoz and Liz Raisbeck. Grassroots Fundraising Journal, <http://www.grassrootsfundraising.org>, 888-458-8588, 3781 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611

The 10 Most Important Things You Can Know About Fundraising.

These 10 items may not be on the top of every fundraiser's list, but they outline some of the essentials.

1. **If You Want Money, You Have to Ask For It.** Potential donors don't know you need money unless you tell them you need it, explain why you need it, and ask them for it.
2. **Thank Before You Bank.** Send out thank you letters. A way to discipline yourself is to not deposit the donation until the thank you letter is sent.
3. **Donors are Not ATMs.** Don't just go to donors each time you need a contribution because they may feel like your ATM, or Automatic Teller Machine. Avoid this by not treating them like an ATM. Send thank you notes. Share your newsletter with them. Make the occasional pitch for a special donation. Invite them to an event. They will feel better about you and may even pass your name and materials on to others—who might become donors as well.
4. **Most Money Comes From People, and Most of Those People Are Not Rich.** Nonprofit funds come from three sources: earned income (e.g., product sales), government funding, and the private sector. The latter includes such sources as foundations but is overwhelmingly money from individuals. And there is little variation in giving patterns by race, gender, and income level. Bottom line: you don't just need to know wealthy donors to do effective fundraising.
5. **People Have the Right to Say No.** Not every prospect is going to give you money. Some people are tapped out, are distracted by personal events, don't understand what it is you do, or simply don't want to give to you. When you make the request and get a "no," leave the door open by saying things like: I hope I can touch base with you in the future or something to that effect. And then move on to the next prospect.
6. **To Be Good at Fundraising, Cultivate Three Traits.** First, believe in your cause and be able to maintain that belief during the downs and through the mundane work. Second, have high hopes but low expectations for what you are able to raise. Third, have faith that people are basically good. Collectively, these traits can help you be a true believer in your cause, which can come across to donors and make you a better spokesperson for raising agency funds.
7. **Fundraising Should Not Be Confused With Fund Chasing, Fund Squeezing, or Fund Hoarding.** Don't go after grants if they aren't part of your mission (fund chasing). Don't treat tight budgeting to deal with a financial crisis as a form of fundraising (Fund Squeezing). And don't raise funds and then just put them into savings, although you should plan for use of funds and include in that a fund for savings/rainy day needs.
8. **Fundraising is an Exchange—People Pay You to Do Work They Cannot Do Alone.** Fundraising is not begging, for the latter is asking for money that you do not deserve. If you are doing good work, then you deserve the money to do it. You have to convince donors that they can, in effect, give you money to do work for them that they cannot do alone.

9. **People's Anxieties About Fundraising Stem From Their Anxieties About Money.** We are raised to have certain attitudes about money, such as being private about it or being fearful of asking for donations. The biggest attitude changes you can pursue to be better at fundraising are: think about success in terms of the number of people you ask, not the amount you raise; and get rid of your anxiety about asking by keeping in mind that you are asking for help to support a cause you believe in.

10. **There are Four Steps to Fundraising: Plan, Plan, Plan, and Work Your Plan.** It's a humorous rule, whose true message is: spend time up front mapping out a plan for how to reach your fundraising goal. This will cut down on wasted time where you spin your wheels with no focus on what to do next. A good first step in planning is to outline your goal (e.g., amount to raise, number of new members by a given time) and then work backwards to outline what you need to do to get there (e.g., number of events, amount to raise, people to reach).

Summary of: The 10 Most Important Things You Can Know About Fundraising, by Kim Klein. Grassroots Fundraising Journal. January/February 2004.

Fifty-Three Ways for Board Members to Raise \$1000

A good fundraising plan uses a mix of techniques for raising funds. Board members play a crucial role in helping raise those funds. Some good ways to guide members is to ask each of them to develop their own plan for the year and provide them with a list of ideas for how they can raise those funds. Having such plans can help avoid duplication of effort (e.g., several board members who ask the same donors for contributions; poor timing). Below are 53 ideas you might consider sharing.

1. Give it yourself.
2. List all your friends who are interested in your organization or similar organizations.
3. Give part of the \$1000.
4. Set up a challenge campaign.
5. If your organization has several grassroots fundraising strategies in place, use them all:
6. Help with your organization's phone-a-thon.
7. Acquire mailing lists for your organization.
8. Give the organization something they need that is worth \$1000,
9. Pledge \$28 a month,
10. Teach a seminar on a topic you know:
11. Give some or a lot of things to your organization's garage sale,
12. With four or five friends, have a spaghetti dinner at a temple, church or union hall or other big room with a large kitchen.
13. Have a fancy dinner at your home or a regular dinner at someone's fancy home.
14. Get three friends to help you have a progressive dinner.
15. Host a house party.
16. Get your gambling friends together.
17. Do one fundraising event every other month.
18. Solicit small businesses, churches, synagogues or service clubs for \$1000.
19. Take a part-time job in addition to your present work and give everything you earn up to \$1000.
20. Ask five to ten people to save all their change for three to five months.

21. Ask two to five friends to help you put on a bake sale, book sale, or garage sale.
22. For the fairly rich: Give your organization \$13,000 as an interest-free loan for a year.
23. Sell your organization's materials, buttons, T-shirts, bumper stickers, or whatever else they have for sale.
24. The Farming Out Method: Entice five friends to sell 100 raffle tickets at \$2 each, or invite ten friends to raise \$100 however they like.
25. Get a famous or popular person to do a special event.
26. Invite people to your birthday party and ask that in lieu of gifts they give money to your organization.
27. Conduct a volunteer canvas.
28. Lead or get someone to lead a nature walk, an architectural tour, a historic tour, a sailing trip, a rafting trip, or a horseback ride.
29. Start a pyramid dinner, or a chain dinner.
30. Collect cans for recycling.
31. Sell your frequent flyer miles to friends or donate them to the organization for a raffle.
32. If you live in a nice house or own a getaway cottage in a beautiful place or an expensive city, rent it out for a week or a weekend two or three times during the year and give the proceeds to your organization.
33. Organize a service raffle.
34. Offer to do something your friends and family have been nagging you to do anyway and attach a price to it.
35. Find out what items your group needs and try to get them donated.
36. If you or someone you know owns a small business that has regular customers who receive a catalog or announcements of sales, write them an appeal letter for the organization.
37. Similar to #36, post your appeal letter on your Web site.
38. If the organization doesn't have a Web site or doesn't keep their Web site up, ask all your techie friends to donate \$100 each and hire a Web Master.
39. Give it yourself (a repeat of idea #1 but worth repeating as it's a great idea).
40. Strategy with a long-deferred payoff (we hope): leave the group a bequest.
41. With similar hopes as above, get friends to include the group in their wills.

42. Ask friends who belong to service clubs, sororities, antique collecting groups, support groups, bridge clubs, etc. to discuss your organization in their group and pass the hat for donations.
43. For the church-going: ask if your organization can be a “second collection.”
44. A variation on the above is to organize a “second collection Sunday” and get as many churches as you can to take up a second collection for your organization on the same Sunday.
45. If, as a child, you collected something avidly that you now store in a basement, consider selling it.
46. Have a sidewalk sale or garage sale for your whole neighborhood or building.
47. If you have an artistic bent, offer to design greeting cards to specification for organizations or individuals for a fee.
48. Create a take-off on the “adopt-a-highway” technique by naming budget items of your group as available for adoption.
49. An idea for people who live in border towns: Get permission to place a large container in stores or even at the airports of towns near national borders.
50. Hold an “I’m Not Afraid” Auction.
51. Similar to the suggestion above is the “Details Auction.”
52. Find out which of your friends (perhaps this is true for you also) work in corporations with matching gift programs.
53. Think of a store or service related to your organization or where a lot of your members shop.

Summary of: Fifty-Three Ways for Board Members to Raise \$1000, by Kim Klein. Grassroots Fundraising Journal Reprint: The Board of Directors.

The Thank You Note

Your donors like to be acknowledged for the contributions they make to your agency. It shows you care, you are organized, and you value their help. Failure to send some type of thank you note may engender resentment and feelings of not being valued and appreciated. The likely outcome: a smaller donation from that person in the future or no donation at all. Here are some tips on thank you notes:

- **Everyone Gets One.** Send notes to all contributors, large and small. A small donation may mean a lot to that donor, and a thank you note might lead to bigger contributions in the future.
- **Be Prompt.** Send notes promptly after receiving donations—within a week at most.
- **What to Say.** The basic points to cover in a thank you letter are: thanks for your gift of \$___; the donation will be put to good use in ____; and, optional, is any other personal messages tailored to the gift or your agency's work.
- **Content/Format.** Handwritten notes are best. Options include nice note cards you buy from a card store or cards you're your agency logo/name embossed. Typed letters are okay as well; some databases will even generate the letter after you enter the donors name in your donor database. However, avoid form letters that are obviously form letters (e.g., text where the donor's name is inserted every so often in the letter). And try to personalize form letters if you use them (i.e., use of the person's name in the right format, sign the letter, add a personal note).
- **Who Should Send Them.** If you have lots of thank you letters to send, consider using board members to help do them. However, make them complete the letters at your offices; you don't want thank you letters sitting around at a board member's home for weeks on end until they finally get around to it.

Summary of: The Thank You Note, by Kim Klein. Grassroots Fundraising Journal, <http://www.grassrootsfundraising.org>, 888-458-8588, 3781 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611

Making Special Events Work for You

Putting together special events like dinners is time-consuming and is not necessarily the best way to raise funds. (Directly asking for contributions is far more effective.) But there are techniques to doing them that can increase your chances of raising a good amount of funds. There are also good spillover benefits to events—beyond the cash raised.

- **Special events can create other fundraising opportunities.** Examples include in-kind donations for the event (e.g., space, food, refreshments), sponsorships and the fees that go with them, silent auctions where items are donated; and program books that run advertisements for a fee.
- **Events can bring people closer together.** The celebratory atmosphere of an event can create new enthusiasm and awareness about your agency's work, which can lead to additional donations down the road.
- **Events are a good way to bring in new donors.** People often come to events because they are invited by friends, work colleagues, and family members. Events can also provide a forum for recognizing the good deeds of individuals or agencies; their networks, in turn, might turn out and thus be accessible to you as well.
- **Events can generate publicity.** Awareness-raising is always good for an agency's fundraising in that current donors can gain more appreciation that your work is valued. Potential donors might learn more about what you do and be more comfortable contributing.
- **Special events can help volunteers, including board members, learn more about fundraising.** Putting an event together involves many details and lots of outreach to funders. Because you are asking for donations and help for a specific event, the asking can be easier for novices.
- **Special events can be good opportunities for volunteer leadership.** There is lots of detail work with events—more than staff can handle. Volunteers are crucial and can learn a lot from helping put an event together. In turn, they can learn more about your agency's work and become even bigger supporters of your cause.

Making Special Events Work for You, by Stephanie Roth. Grassroots Fundraising Journal. May/June 2003.

Creating a Budget for Fundraising

Fundraising requires a budget—staff as well as costs like printing and phone and events if you plan on doing that sort of work. Below are some basics in putting together a fundraising budget.

- **Graphic Design and Printing Costs.** Events, mailings, and other fundraising strategies will require design and printing of materials. There are many ways you might be able to bring costs down. If not using in-house graphic design help, identify a professional that offers a nonprofit rate. Be aware that lengthier documents, with multiple colors and lots of photos, are going to cost more than simpler designs. Shop around for the best printing prices—not only in terms of vendors but also things like paper being used for the job.
- **Building Your Infrastructure.** These costs might be larger and can involve multi-year commitments, but they can pay off in the long run. Among them: a database to manage donor information and help generate appeals for funds; database technical support; a web-based donation page; fundraising training for your board; and a fundraising staff position.
- **Free Goods and Services: Are They Worth It?** Donated services, like graphic design or donated food, might be great. But there are potential pitfalls, like your work is not a priority because it's being donated (and has to compete against paid work for the donating party). One way to try to guard against such problems is to outline, in writing, the donation and expectations for both parties (e.g., delivery deadlines, what will specifically be provided).

Creating a Budget for Fundraising, by Octavia Morgan. Grassroots Fundraising Journal. May/June 2003.

Evaluating Your Individual Donor Program

Evaluation of your fundraising work is the only way you can tell, with certainty, if your efforts are working and what changes you need to make. With evaluative information, you are guessing. Evaluation entails looking at quantitative and qualitative information. Consider the following in crafting your evaluation plan:

Define Success. Measures might include raising a certain amount of money or having a certain percentage of your total budget come from donations. Examples of other measures include: the number of new donors, the number of events to hold, or getting the board involved in fundraising.

What to Evaluate. You can evaluate your fundraising on different levels. Consider the following:

- About donors and money raised (e.g., how many donors did you get, how many are repeat donors from last year, how much did you raise, what did you do to keep in touch with your donors).
- About board and staff roles in fundraising and record-keeping (e.g., are board members involved in fundraising, did you increase the number of volunteers devoted to fundraising, what kind of recordkeeping system do you use to track donations, did you celebrate successes and identify challenges with the board, staff and volunteers to help keep momentum on your work).
- About specific strategies (e.g., how much did you raise, from whom, what other ways did the activity benefit the agency).

When to Evaluate and Using the Results. Compile evaluation data annually but, in order to make that feasible, you need to do the evaluation work when you are doing the actual work (e.g., right after an event). Also, you need to take a look at the results and figure out how you can use them in crafting your fundraising plan for the coming year (e.g., events to use or not use, donors to focus on).

Evaluating Your Individual Donor Program, by Stephanie Roth. Grassroots Fundraising Journal. January/February 2004.

How Does Your Board Measure Up?

There is no magic way to go about assessing how well your board is doing. Below is a series of questions you can pose to your board to engage them in a self-assessment effort. (Note: The original document this is drawn from is a checklist chart, with scores. See the source below to see about obtaining this document.) Schedule a board meeting to go through these or similar questions and keep in mind that there is no such thing as a perfect board. Members change. Challenges change. The thing to focus on is working with your board to maximize their contributions.

- **Selection and Composition.** Is the board comprised of persons interested in the work of the agency? Is the board broadly representative and diverse? Is there a balance of experienced and new members? Is there a good mix of skills? Are rules in place to get good rotation for the board membership? Is there a plan in place to recruit and get new members in place over time to keep the board fresh?
- **Orientation and Training.** Do board members understand their roles? Do they get an orientation session when first joining the board? Do they get training and ongoing training in key topics like fundraising?
- **Structure and Organization of the Board.** Are there clear rules of operation, like bylaws, officers, committees? Is there clear understanding of the role of board members versus staff members?
- **The Board at Work.** Are regular meetings scheduled? Do they start and stop on time? Is there adequate preparation in advance of board meetings? Are members engaged in board activities and do tasks get accomplished on time? Are all board members engaged in fundraising?

How Does Your Board Measure Up?, by Stephanie Roth. *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, <http://www.grassrootsfundraising.org>, 888-458-8588, 3781 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611

Contracts with Board Members: A Working Model

Board members are likely to vary greatly in their experience with fundraising, their interest in doing it, and the time they are able to devote to the effort. Below are three strategies to help you maximize board involvement in fundraising.

- **The Pledge Form.** The form can be a simple statement that the board member develops and commits to, but a more effective form might be one that outlines multiple options for a board member to pick from—a more useful approach in adjusting to board members who come from vastly different places in terms of their readiness and ability to tackle fundraising. Thus, a form might include these sections: the board member's name; the agency's mission statement; and various fundraising pledges to select from (e.g., personal contributions, raising money, in-kind donations, assisting with major events, committee work, training, media work and contacts, helping out on the program itself, other) and—of course—a signature line.
- **A Supportive Environment.** Many techniques can be used to support board members in doing fundraising. Provide fundraising training. Devote time at meetings to discuss fundraising successes and challenges. Partner a more experienced board member with a novice to learn the fundraising ropes. Provide templates (e.g., how to make a pitch, sample letters, responses to questions commonly asked by potential donors).
- **Follow-Up.** The person assigned to do liaison with the board can do things like provide board members with copies of their pledge forms, ask how they are doing with their fundraising pledges, and offer up support to help members meet their goals.

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