

YANA Roundtable

How Can We Best Engage Our Boards in Fundraising?

October 22, 2014

Objectives

The objectives of this workshop are to enable participants to:

- Clarify the respective fundraising roles and responsibilities of executive directors and board members;
- Identify best practices for effective fundraising; and
- Learn how to work together as fundraising partners.

The Power of Board Engagement

Board members serve two primary functions related to fundraising:

- Helping organizations reach new prospective donors (providing *access* to a wider audience)
- Indicating an organization's value to the community by association with the group (using a board member's prestige to *signal* that an organization is credible).

According to research conducted by the Nonprofit Research Collaborative, board engagement in these activities is key to successful fundraising efforts. Here are a few of the findings:

- 55% of organizations that engaged board members in fundraising gained an increase in fundraising results (vs. 43% of those which did not).
- 60% of organizations that engaged board members in fundraising reached their fundraising goals (vs. 53% of those which did not).

The research described the following ways (ranging from those that are relatively easy to those requiring greater commitment of time and effort) in which board members can become engaged in an organization's fundraising efforts:

- (1) Sharing access to names of potential donors
- (2) Personally making an introduction between the organization and a potential donor through email, personal contact, etc.
- (3) Asking friends/colleagues to donate to the organization
- (4) Rating (providing background information about) potential donors
- (5) Making personal visits to potential donors
- (6) Sending thank you letters or making personal phone calls to donors
- (7) Providing/securing sponsorship funding for events
- (8) Hosting events by inviting friends/colleagues to the board member's home/business
- (9) Chairing a campaign or event
- (10) Allowing use of the board member's name in communications with potential donors
- (11) Participating in a development plan

Best Practices

Listed below are some of the best practices developed as a result of this research:

- (1) *Require board member gifts:* Foundations and donors often expect to see 100% giving.
- (2) *Form and use a board development committee:* Organizations with board development committees were 11% more likely to meet their fundraising goals than those without.
- (3) *Give every board member specific fundraising tasks:* This can be as simple as asking every board member to make requests of support to friends and family.
- (4) *Use other methods based on organizational size:* Smaller organizations should utilize techniques that provide access while larger organizations should utilize techniques that promote signaling

In a blog post on Social Velocity, Nell Edgington detailed a number of ways to successfully engage all board members in fundraising efforts (some of which do not involve asking donors for money). They include:

- (1) Having board members provide testimonials to potential donors about the impact of the work of the organization (this is especially important for board members who are current or former “clients” of the organization).
- (2) Having board members provide access to social networks (this is vital and valuable even if a board member’s network does not include potential major donors).
- (3) Providing board members with fundraising training (this can include bringing in an outside expert, a board member from another organization, or having seasoned board members train less experienced ones).
- (4) Enabling board members to become comfortable talking about and asking for money by helping them to reframe it as essential for your organization to continue its good work.

Useful Resources

- (1) Special Report: Engaging Board Members in Fundraising: Nonprofit Research Collaborative, September 2012: <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412673-The-Nonprofit-Research-Collaborative-Special-Report.pdf>
- (2) Edgington, Nell: Overcoming Board Fundraising Excuses, January 2012: <http://www.socialvelocity.net/2012/01/overcoming-board-fundraising-excuses/>