

In fundraising, not all donors are created equal

By **CAROL WITTMAYER**

Have you ever been asked to lend your business expertise to a non-profit board—only to learn later that board members are expected to help raise money as well? If you suddenly find yourself in this role, how can you help ensure a successful campaign and the productive use of your own time and energy?

Raising resources requires an investment, and a savvy board will determine early whether the organization is willing and able to spend appropriate amounts on technology, donor research, travel and communications. A successful campaign also requires:

- the right development staff;

- committed, capable board and volunteer leadership; and

- a feasibility study confirming that a campaign is warranted and that goals are achievable.

With this structure in place, the remaining steps all involve prospects—identifying, ranking and cultivating them; soliciting gifts; and keeping donors engaged.

Not all donors are created equal. Given limited resources, the organization must devote most of its attention to the prospects most likely to donate large gifts.

A successful campaign will begin by using technology to create lists, starting with:

- past donors;
- relevant constituencies—for a university, for example, those would be alumni and parents; and

- other individuals and organizations with some connection, including associates

of board members, former board members and staff, and names drawn from files, annual reports, magazines and newsletters.

Software and electronic screening tools can help generate estimates of each prospect's ability to give. Public sources provide biographical details, stock and property holdings, seats on boards and gifts. Lists can be sorted by assets, ZIP codes, affinity groups (upcoming reunion classes, for example) or giving patterns.

A prospect's motivation to give—which will require further research—is as important as his or her ability to give. The higher a prospect ranks in both areas, the more personal attention the fundraiser should devote to him or her.

Visiting the prospect's home or workplace allows the fundraiser

to learn more about the donor's motivation and to customize giving opportunities that will match the donor's interests—making it easier for him or her to say yes.

A university president and successful fundraiser once asked a donor to endow a chair in engineering. The donor had earned an engineering degree at the university and had gone on to help build a multimillion-dollar firm. Surely, the president reasoned, the donor would be interested in supporting engineering students.

But the donor had a different motivation. So proud was he of his children's involvement in the business that he did end up funding a chair—but in family business, not in engineering.

While many board members cringe at the prospect of actually asking for the gift, thorough preparation and completion of earlier steps will ease the process. A savvy

solicitor will present a one-page proposal with bullet points highlighting up to three options—leaving the donor less opportunity to say no.

Having the right folks at the table is crucial. The institution will want to include staff and volunteers important to the donor. The donor will want to include spouse, advisers and company officers.

But the process doesn't end there; ongoing stewardship is crucial. At one institution, we discovered through research that a student's parents appeared very capable of giving. We involved them in university activities and then began soliciting them for \$10,000 annual fund gifts. When the student graduated, we continued communicating with the parents—and eventually obtained a significant gift for a building renovation.

Any successful campaign achieves its fundraising goals while also preparing the organization for the next campaign. I like to call the process of planning for a new campaign while completing an earlier one “the rendezvous with déjà vu.” With the right structures in place to support effective research, communications and stewardship, the organization will be well positioned to ask for more and bigger gifts in the future.

Carol Wittmeyer, a professor of management at St. Bonaventure University, is president of the Meliora Group LLC, which provides executive placement and fundraising campaign management and consulting. She will present “Implementing ‘Good to Great’ in Development Programs,” on Sept. 25 at Oak Hill Country Club. The luncheon is sponsored by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Genesee Valley chapter, and the Meliora Group. For information, go to www.afpgv.org or call (585) 586-7810.



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