

Boards and Fundraising: The Role Every Board Member Can Play

In our experience, there isn't a board that doesn't groan when the topic of fundraising comes up. Board members often consider fundraising one piece of an organization's fiscal health. When it comes to rolling up their sleeves and getting involved in it, they suddenly disappear. This happens for three reasons:

- 1) Board members may think that soliciting gifts is the only way to participate in fundraising. To debunk this myth, explain the different roles board members can play in fundraising.

Some board leaders are ambassadors who cultivate connections and introduce new people to an organization. Some can be connectors to their networks and bring other donors to you. Some may enjoy being solicitors and asking potential and current donors to invest in your work. Finally, all board members can and should be stewards of your donors. Board thank you calls to donors for example, have an incredible effect on your retention rate.

Pro Tip: Build time during every board meeting for members to write thank you notes and regularly assign calls to board members to thank your donors. The next time your board balks at calling or writing to a donor, show them this graphic:



2) Your board needs help talking about your organization and why it deserves donor support.

This may seem strange given the assumption that board members are the real “insiders” of an organization. However, they may be wary of fundraising if they weren’t given a good orientation when they started or aren’t provided regular updates about your organization’s latest successes, challenges, and opportunities.

Pro Tip: Give every new board member an in-depth orientation that includes fundraising training. Kick off each fiscal year with a refresher orientation to ensure that all board members really understand your work and how to ask for support. Create standard talking points and an “elevator pitch” so everyone is literally speaking from the same script.

3) They fear rejection. Who doesn’t, right? Board members may feel that fundraising is “begging,” or that they’ll make a prospective donor uncomfortable or caught off-guard. Here’s a little secret: If you’ve trained your board members to exude passion for your mission, they’ve made their own personal financial commitment, you’ve cultivated the prospect, and brought that board member into the process well before the ask, there’s no question you will get a yes. It’s a lot like dating. If you propose to someone on the first date, your chances of getting accepted are pretty unlikely.

Pro Tip: Ask board members what’s holding them back from talking about your organization or feeling comfortable soliciting a gift. How can you allay their fears? Coach the board member on the fundraising cycle and what they can do to ensure a potential donor eventually says “yes.”

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