



Do-Able Fundraising for Real-World Boards

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While it's widely accepted that ensuring necessary resources for an organization is a key responsibility for nonprofit boards of directors, it is often something people struggle with in the real world — especially when it comes to fundraising. But fundraising doesn't have to be as intimidating as it's made out to be. In fact, effective fundraising can be possible without anyone ever making the ever-so-intimidating in-person ask.

A Culture of Fundraising

To succeed in fundraising, your organization's culture needs to support it. This starts from the top. Ideally, your board chair will set the tone and call for all board members to commit to fundraising. But if your board chair isn't engaged with fundraising, can you identify another board member who is? Having at least one person to become your champion and encourage his or her peers to step up is key to getting the board as a whole up to the task.

A good place to start is to include fundraising commitments in an annual agreement that all board members sign. This is a great opportunity to remind them what you expect in terms of meeting attendance and committee participation as well as fundraising. Your agreement should stress the importance of a leadership gift, promoting your organization in the community, and actively participating in fundraising. Be specific about what this means. Give board members options of how they can help.

The truth is that it can be hard to change how current board members view their role in fundraising. That's why it's important to start off on the

right foot with new board members. Early on, be upfront about your organization's fundraising expectations. Start this dialogue during the recruitment process and continue through orientation. It's better to have a prospective board member opt out than to vote in someone who won't support fundraising at an appropriate level.

The Fundraising Process

Board members can and should help with all four stages of the fundraising process: identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.

Identification: Identifying new prospective donors is critical to fundraising success. Unfortunately, it is often an area where board members either share a list of contacts without making introductions or say they don't know anyone with money. Neither is particularly helpful.

What do you do when board members say they don't know anyone with money? Ask them to think about who they know could make a gift of \$1,000 if they were engaged with the organization. Reframe \$1,000 as only \$84 a month. Everyone knows multiple people in their networks who could make this commitment.

Once prospective donors are identified, board members can help with prospect review. They can provide insight into what a prospective donor's interest might be in your organization and help determine connections. They can also provide insight into what size gift a prospective donor could make.

Cultivation: Cultivating donors is a great way to engage board members in fundraising. It's about making friends with prospective donors and sharing with them what your organization is all about. Board members can help by introducing prospective donors to staff and other board members, personally reaching out and inviting prospective donors to events, or even hosting an event themselves. The latter could be a gathering at their home or a special tour of your organization in action. To make your existing events effective "friend-raisers," enlist board members as hosts — have them work the room and talk to donors and prospective donors.

Solicitation: This is fairly self-explanatory, but it is often the hardest part to get board members to do. However, board members not comfortable making an in-person ask can still assist with solicitation. They can accompany staff. They can also add personal notes to direct mail solicitations. This is especially effective for donors board members know. It takes a little time coordinating on the front end, but the effort is worth it.

Stewardship: Thanking donors for their gifts, aka stewardship, is another less-scary-than-asking-for-money way board members can help with fundraising. This can be handwritten thank-you notes — both to donors they know and those they don't — or thank-you calls. Donors feel special when they hear from a board member, and it's a great way to bring board members closer to your organization by allowing them to learn why donors support you.

The secret to successfully engaging your board in fundraising is to make it accessible and less intimidating. Offer training to empower board members and equip them with fundraising skills. Provide the logistical and behind-the-scenes support they need. And most importantly, be patient. Creating a culture where your whole board embraces fundraising takes time.

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