

Sophisticated Fundraising

by **Burke Keegan**

An organization's fundraising must become more sophisticated and take on a more deliberate marketing approach as it grows year by year. Continuing to perform the same fundraising tasks, asking the same people over and over, is a cycle with an end. At the very least, those donors will eventually die. More likely, before they die, they will lose interest (both mental and material) and wander away.

Sophisticated fundraising is about more than money. Growing the contributed income is mathematics. Growing the donor base is people management. The corny saying is that it is "friend-raising." But there is some truth in that old chestnut. Sustainable, indeed prosperous, fundraising is rooted in the ability to keep the current donor family connected and happy, to find new donors often and through diverse means, and to give the donors a sense of being important and informed.

Having a Director of Development, a Fundraising Chair, or even an Executive Director, who takes responsibility for doing all of the donor work is a mistake that many organizations make, whether they are big or small, old or new. Putting the fundraising into one office or one body is a temptation, either because one person is good at it, or no one else seems to want to take responsibility for raising the money. While no organization would ever put their entire program onto the plate of one person, in their lack of refinement in the field of fundraising they trust the task to one entity. Fundraising, to one degree or another, should be in the job description of everyone, paid or unpaid, in every non-profit organization that needs to raise money in order to be truly integrated and effective.

Anyone who asks for money to support an organization should have as a goal to make sure that the donor's connection and loyalty are to the cause and not to the asker. Many non-profits have overlooked this aspect of fundraising until the asker leaves the organization and the donors go with him or her.

Also, if an organization engages in a polished fundraising endeavor, it is integrally tied to the organization being well-known and well-respected in the wider donor community. Taking the time to build a good reputation, and a well-known name, goes

hand-in-hand with advanced fundraising.

Key also is having a diverse, tested fundraising plan. While 90% of the money should come from 10% of the people (meaning major gifts, of course), it is crucial to pay attention to the smaller gifts. We know from experience that the \$25 donors, if kept connected and feeling appreciated, may well turn into the \$100 donors and so on. It is also true that elitist fundraising, meaning appealing only to small or only to large donors, is short-sighted and does not work. The wider one can cast the net, and the more proven ways the organization uses to attract donors, the more stable the donor base will be.

And speaking of stable donor bases, it is crucial in a wise fundraising plan to resist the urge to be dependent on foundation or government money. Foundations like start-up or projects and will not sustain an organization. And government money is political and shifts faster than the wind. Many short-sighted organizations have faltered and folded from this foolish eggs-in-one-basket strategy.

Finally, a sophisticated approach to fundraising includes donors in the vision of the organization. Donors are not just the people who write the checks whenever money is needed. They are made to feel, and to be, trusted community partners in the on-going success of the Mission. Planning, informing, socializing, thanking, and listening are all part of successful fundraising.

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