
The Board and Fundraising

By KIM KLEIN

The broad purpose of a board of directors is to run the organization effectively. To do so, board members are bound to ensure that an organization is operating within state and federal laws, earning its money honestly and spending it responsibly, and adopting programs and procedures most conducive to carrying out its mission. Among the responsibilities that board members must assume in carrying out the board's purpose is responsibility for the continued funding and financial health of the organization. In this respect, board members have two tasks: to give money and to raise money. More often than not, however, board members are hesitant to embrace these two activities.

The resistance to giving money is often expressed with the argument, "Time is money." Board members often feel that because they give time they should not be called on to give money.

The reluctance of board members to take responsibility for raising money can usually be traced to three sources: 1) Board members don't understand the importance of taking a leadership role in fundraising, 2) they are afraid to ask for money, and 3) if an organization has paid staff, board members may feel that it is the staff's job to fundraise.

Let's look at each of these problems more closely.

TIME IS NOT MONEY

While a person's time is valuable to them, it is not the same as money. You cannot go to the telephone company and offer to run its switchboard in order to pay your phone bill. You cannot pay your staff or buy your office supplies with your time. And whereas everyone has the same amount of time in a day, people have vastly unequal

amounts of money.

Comparing time and money is like comparing apples and asphalt. Board members must understand that contributions of time and money are very different, although equally important, parts of their role.

BOARD LEADERSHIP IN FUNDRAISING

The reason that board members must take a leadership role in fundraising is simple: They own the organization. They are responsible for the well-being of the organization and for its successes. Furthermore, the organization's supporters and potential supporters see board members as the people most committed and dedicated to the organization. If they, who care the most about the group, will not take a lead role in fundraising, why should anyone else support the group?

When the board does take the lead, its members and the staff approaching individuals, corporations, and foundations for funds can say, "We have 100% commitment from our board. All board members give money and raise money." This position strengthens their fundraising case a great deal. More and more, sophisticated individuals and foundations are asking organizations about the role of the board in fundraising and taking a more positive look at groups whose boards play an active part.

However, when it comes to asking people for money, even board members who willingly donate may be reluctant to ask others to do so. This sometimes seems ironic in light of the fact that most people are rarely nervous to ask someone for their time, even though, unlike money, time is a nonrenewable resource.

In training, I often use this example: "If a board member is assigned to call three people and tell them about a

meeting on Wednesday night, he or she will most likely do it. If two people can come to the meeting and one can't, the board member does not take this personally and feel like a failure. However, if this same board member is assigned to ask these same three people for \$100 each, he or she will probably be very uncomfortable without training in how to ask for money."

Asking for money is a skill and thus can be learned. All board members should have the opportunity to attend a training session on asking for money, as many fundraising strategies require board members to make face-to-face solicitations.

Not Everyone Has to Ask for Money All the Time

In a diversified fundraising plan, however, some board members can participate in fundraising strategies that do not require asking for money directly. While some can solicit large gifts, others can plan special events, write mail appeals, market products for sale, write thank-you notes, stuff envelopes, enter information into a database, etc. Everyone's interests and skills can be used.

Board members inexperienced in fundraising can start with an easy assignment ("Sell these 20 raffle tickets") and then move on to more difficult assignments ("Ask this person for \$1,000"). Some fundraising strategies will use all the board members (selling tickets to the dance), whereas others will require the work of only one or two people (speaking to service clubs or writing mail appeals).

PAID STAFF CANNOT DO IT ALL

Paid staff also have specific roles in fundraising. These are to help plan fundraising strategies, coordinate fundraising activities, keep records, take care of routine fundraising tasks such as renewal appeals, and assist board members by writing letters for them, form fundraising plans with them, and accompany them to solicitation meetings.

Fundraising staff provide all the backup needed for effective fundraising. It is clearly impossible, however, for one person or even several people to do all the work necessary in a diversified fundraising plan. Just as it is foolish for an organization to depend on one or two sources of funding, it is equally unwise for it to depend on one or two people to do fundraising.

SHARING THE WORK AND THE POWER

The final reason for all board members to participate in fundraising is to ensure that the work is evenly shared. Fundraising is rarely anyone's favorite task, so it is impor-

tant that each board member knows that the other members are doing their share. If a few members do all the fundraising, resentments are bound to arise.

The same resentments will surface if some board members give money and others don't. Those who give may feel that their donation "buys" them out of some work or that their money entitles them to more power. Those who do not give money may feel that they do all the work or that those who give money have more power.

When board members know that everyone is giving their best effort to fundraising according to their abilities, the board will function most smoothly and all members will be more willing to take on fundraising tasks.

"I Don't Know Anyone with Money"

In the August, 1985 *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* article "Major Donor Prospecting," Kim Klein wrote, "Someone should write a song with 'I don't know anyone with money' as the chorus." Margaret Becker, a consultant in nonprofit management and fundraising, did just that.

Sung to the tune of "Side by Side"

Board Member stands and faces the rest of the group, singing:

I don't know anybody with money!
Maybe you think I'm being funny
But it's perfectly true
There's nothin' I can do
Fellow Board Members.

No one ever told me the truth here
"Bout Board Members raising money this year
I'm just a volunteer
Can't you see my fear?
Fellow Board Members.

Refrain:

Let the staff do it!
Let the staff volunteer.
As long as we love the program
Maybe the money'll appear.

When they've all had their flops
And quit trying
We'll cut the budget and buyin'
And our programs will cease
With me still at peace,
Fellow Board Members.