

Advancing Your Skills: Engaging Your Board in Fundraising

Board members are pivotal in the success of your nonprofit organization. In addition to setting the strategic direction, managing finances and providing governance oversight, they also play an invaluable role in your fundraising efforts. If your board is not actively involved in fundraising, it impacts not only the likelihood of your success but also your development team's job satisfaction. Hoping to better engage your board in fundraising? Start with these helpful tips:

TIP: Set Expectations for Success

Take the time to develop a job description that outlines exactly what you expect from board members, including their responsibility in fundraising. Vague statements will leave expectations up to the imagination and likely lead to frustration all around. Specify the level of gift you want board members to make as well as the type of fundraising activities you need them to engage in. You can tailor expectations based on each board member's capacity, availability and comfort level. Be as clear as possible when describing the fundraising role you need your board members to play and the effect it will have on your success.

TIP: Stay Focused on Your Mission

For board members, the most effective fundraising tool they bring is their passion for the mission and work of your organization. In conversations, there is a tendency to want to focus on numbers and stats: what new programs we have, how many clients we serve or the numbers of services we provide. What donors want to hear is why board members care about the organization and why the mission is so personally meaningful. When board members bring their passion for the mission to conversations, donors listen, connect and are more likely to give.

TIP: It Starts with a Plan

It is important to remember that fundraising is led by staff. Your board members didn't join ready to start asking people for money. Staff must intentionally include their board in the process, starting with your annual fundraising plan. The plan and the process of planning help create a sense of ownership in fundraising. Board members need to be integral to strategy development, the process and the goals. Once the plan is in place, they need to be part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. As staff, you should be continually coaching, supporting, recognizing and rewarding your board's engagement in fundraising.

TIP: Asking is the Smallest Part

Most people associate fundraising with asking for money, but even if board members don't feel comfortable or confident enough to make the ask, they can still be an influential part of the process. Making the ask is the smallest component of the fundraising process, and there are many other ways board members can have an impact. Educate your board on the steps in the fundraising cycle and help them understand how they can be engaged without ever making an ask. Brainstorm together creative ways that board members can help with identifying, cultivating and stewarding potential donors.

TIP: Don't Forget the Thank You!

One of the easiest and most valuable ways board members can get involved in fundraising is by thanking donors. Thank yous from board members provide incredibly powerful boosts to your fundraising results by helping to retain donors and generate more significant giving. Have your board members make calls to thank donors, write personal messages on acknowledgment letters or send handwritten notes to special donors. It is guaranteed the effect will be positive for your donors, your board members and your organization.