



Gain Extraordinary Impact: Fund Your Most Difficult Challenge

Look with fresh eyes at what people need and what you can offer them.

By Karen Eber Davis

Four years ago, The Workplace (a nonprofit in Bridgeport, Connecticut) launched a new program: Platform to Employment (P2E). Born during the recession, the program provides those who've been unemployed longer than two years with classes, an internship, and other services.

At the end of the pilot program, 70% found employment, compared to a national average of 10-15% percent for the same demographic. Building on this success, Platform to Employment will be started in four additional cities this year with plans in place for 25 more cities next year.

For nonprofit leaders like you, Platform to Employment's design contains a number of replicable components, including:

Produce Results Based on Your Customers' Needs. Staff at The Workplace, who provide workforce development services, noticed growing numbers of people experiencing long-term unemployment. The needs of this group are different from other job seekers: They face more self-esteem issues and workforce prejudices. Many employers assume they're lazy or unemployed for a reason. Staff designed Platform to Employment to overcome these and other barriers by offering five weeks of classes to sharpen participants' skills, the services of an employee-assistance program (EAP) to enhance their bruised self-images, and a paid internship.

Find Creative Ways to Offer What You Have. The Workplace staff realized that one of the most valuable things they possessed was influence with local employers. When those employers advertised jobs, The Workplace asked them to hire an intern for eight weeks. The Workplace paid the intern's salary for the first four weeks and asked the employer to split the cost for the second four. (Only 50% of the employers elected to take the funding; the rest were happy to pay for the full eight-week internship.) This solution saved employers money and made them active participants in doing social good.

“What results can you create using this model?”

Use Cash When Necessary. Once the program was designed, The Workplace presented the idea to individuals and at meetings throughout the community, asking for cash to jumpstart the project. Sponsors were offered an opportunity to

be part of a national model to help people who had been tax-paying citizens to regain their place in the American Dream. Each donor was asked to sponsor just one individual, for \$6,000, which made the sponsorships feel personal and doable. The organization raised \$600,000, over half from corporations.

Craft Your Funding Request to Meet Donors' Needs. When The Workplace staff went out to seek sponsorships, they understood that for some corporations and people, government funding created anxiety. So they eliminated government money from the program.

How to Use the Ideas in this Model

Be inspired to boldly design programs that serve your customers' needs. What are the critical areas in your program design? What do your customers need most? How can you obtain the resources (in this case, jobs for the long-term unemployed) that you need? Raise money as a tool to fund your most challenging components as necessary.

Platform to Excellence is worth examining for its success, its design, and as an example of a traditionally funded government nonprofit that created services without government funding. What results can you create using this model? 



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