

Top 10 Fundraising Trends, Predictions, & Tips for the New Year

Here are the key issues nonprofits need to address this year, according to fundraising expert Gail Perry (gailperry.com). In providing this foresight, she notes, “I’m not touting shiny new ideas or be-all solutions. Every nonprofit needs a well-rounded fundraising program with diversified sources of revenue. These are the strategies that are coming into their own as important. Select a few that can enhance your work, and make it happen.”

1. “Donor loyalty” is the place to invest your resources.

Smart nonprofits have learned that it’s much more cost effective to retain current donors than to bring in new donors. Across the board, nonprofits retain only one in five new donors, usually because of an abysmal post-gift experience for the donor. Here’s the place to start — by tackling your donor retention.

- **Invest** more staff and resources in donor relations.
- **Measure** the performance of your donor relations programming.
- **Educate** your leadership and board members in this important metric.

2. Crowdfunding will become a serious fundraising tool — for the right nonprofits. Crowdfunding can enlist new supporters, bring in new major donors, and engage current donors in something playful, social, and mission-focused. And it can raise significant money too.

- **Devote** resources to your social media presence.
- **Identify** donors who are active users of social media and enlist them to be your online “ambassadors.”
- **Participate** actively in Giving Days.

3. The end is coming for general unrestricted fundraising.

It’s undeniable: Donors give more when they’re offered a chance to fund a specific project. Look at the success of DonorsChoose.org or Kickstarter campaigns — they’re focused on specific projects and outcomes, and donors love that idea.

- **Give** donors the opportunity to fund specific projects.
- **Re-frame** your general appeals to focus on distinct programs.

4. The new communications tools will revolutionize how, when, and where nonprofits tell their stories.

All sorts of different platforms and channels are available to help you reach new audiences and connect much more deeply with donors. You can even use technology to develop custom individual stewardship plans for donors. All of these are transforming fundraising today: new (and fun) social media tools, innovations in e-mail marketing, the use of poignant images and video — even video embedded inside paper capital campaign case statements.

- **Increase** your use of technology.
- **Expand** your skill sets in new media.
- **Be willing** to innovate, take risks, and experiment.

5. There’s a new use of the word “philanthropy” instead of “fundraising.” And it has the potential to shift many attitudes for the better.

- **Ask** board members, volunteers, and program staffers to discuss their “role in philanthropy” rather than their “participation in fundraising.” The more all-encompassing view of “philanthropy” feels like a higher calling to our better human nature. Somehow the word “fundraising” evokes sales and pushiness, making people back off.

6. Nonprofit leaders aren’t giving their staff the resources they need to raise funds.

It’s not a new problem, but it seems to be getting worse instead of better. Nonprofits are leaving money on the table — just sitting there — because of their reluctance to invest in fundraising. Development staffers are stretched impossibly thin — with unbearable work loads. Alas. Management issues are the biggest impediment to greater fundraising totals.

- **Budget** adequately for your fundraising programs. Embrace philanthropy as an organization-wide commitment so that staff members aren’t left alone to do the work.

7. Mobile giving will continue to increase. Blackbaud reported that 17% of gifts processed on Giving Tuesday came from mobile devices. The rate peaked at 10 p.m. when 42% came in from smartphones and tablets.

- **Make sure** everything you send out is “mobile-enabled.”


8. New forms of philanthropy will continue to confound regular nonprofits. Moguls and billionaires are challenging traditional philanthropy and coming up with their own strategies to change the world, God help us. Impact investing, venture philanthropy, social enterprise — they’re all pretty far away from the good solid local nonprofit that’s trying to feed kids or serve hot meals to the elderly. Many nonprofits can’t reach these mega donors, can’t talk their language, and find relationships with them to be challenging.

- **Don’t be dazzled** by these out-of-reach donors. Stick to the basics: solid direct mail, great Web site, and major gifts.

9. Funders and donors will require clear measures of performance and impact.

- **Talk about** your accomplishments in meaningful and measurable ways.
- **Demonstrate** clear results for the people and causes you serve.
- **Turn** your annual reports into “impact reports.”

10. Sustainer fundraising programs will be king.

- **Focus** on developing a monthly donor program. Or if you have one, give it new attention and prominence. It’s the golden place for sustainable fundraising. Hint: Don’t include a monthly request as part of a regular appeal. Instead, make it important — in a stand-alone appeal.
- **Stick** with your sustainer programs — knowing they sometimes take years to gain traction. Brand and promote these programs across the board. Enjoy repeated, rich revenue from a loyal group of donors. 

Does Your Board Model Lack the Key Ingredient?

The problem with most board models is that they ignore the most important factor of all, as Stephen Block points out in his latest book, *Social Work and Boards of Directors: The Board Relationship Model* (Lyceum Books, lyceumbooks.com). That overlooked but essential piece of the puzzle is the human element.

In his book, Block dissects the most common board models, including the Traditional Model espoused by Cyril Houle in *The Effective Board* and the Carver Model promoted by John Carver in *Boards that Make a Difference*. Both models are “rooted in hierarchy, power, and control” rather than interpersonal relations among board members and the executive director, Block says.

Block’s model – the Board Relationship Model – is different. After interviewing hundreds of executive directors, Block found that the most successful organizations eschewed the usual models and, instead, focused on interrelationships.

Although Block notes that it’s not an easy model to implement, he explains why it’s worth the effort. Here are a few guidelines to smooth the way:

Realize that the rule-bound models of the past have led to “expectation overload,” causing board members to struggle to meet impossible demands. Instead of reprimanding them for missing board meetings, not raising funds, or failing to meet all the other expectations set out in earlier board models, find the reasons for their underperformance and help maximize their strengths. Let go of expectations, and be grateful for whatever they can give. Block has found that this simple shift in viewpoint is liberating for executive directors who have been expecting too much from busy people with limits on their time and energy.


Be sure the board isn’t too large. The bigger the group, the more chance that dysfunctional relationships will form and the harder it will be to develop camaraderie. You’ll have the best chance to promote healthy relationships in a board of around 12 to 15 people.

Keep an eye on how board members communicate with you and with one another. Be sensitive to emotions, such as the sadness people feel when a board member leaves; if you don’t acknowledge that sense of loss, other board members may also decide to leave.

Never discount the importance of food. Include breakfast, lunch, or snacks with every board meeting. Eating together bonds people.

Whenever board members have a negative experience, counter it with five positive ones. If there’s a disagreement during a board meeting, for example, balance it with humorous comments, anecdotes, compliments, and questions that draw people into the discussion.


Take time to meet with each board member periodically for breakfast or lunch. Get to know what motivates them, and find ways to provide whatever it is that makes each individual proud to be part of your organization.

Be an equal partner to the board. You’re not the board’s boss, nor does the board hold a position of authority over you. The more you can be a colleague and partner to board members, the more productive the relationship will be. 

Investing in Your People

People are one of the most underutilized resources in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit leaders tend to invest very little in developing the abilities of staff and volunteers.


The Talent Development Platform (josseybass.com) presents a system for leading your organization to increased performance by supporting your employees’ talents. Components of this system include:

- Evaluate the organization’s** learning capabilities.
 - Assess each individual in the organization** in 10 fields of practice.
 - Match people’s learning styles** to training opportunities.
 - Structure a talent development plan** for each person.
- Fiscally constrained nonprofits often place staff development on the back burner. This book not only makes the argument for developing the skills of your people to improve your organization’s work, it demonstrates how to do it and what it takes to make it work well. 

– reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Is Your Board Asking the Right Questions?

Effective board leadership is all about the willingness to ask good questions. Here are a few your board should be asking:

- 1. Are we prepared to respond to a changing world?** Do we keep our ears to the ground by holding public forums where we can listen to community members? Do we know what’s happening in our state house and in Washington? Do we hold an annual board retreat to dig deeper into complex issues? Do we have good radar to sense important shifts in the world around us?
- 2. Do we know if our programs are having an impact?** What is or isn’t working? Why? Do we have hard data to back up our claims?
- 3. Have we built a secure financial base?** Have we saved for a rainy day?
- 4. Do we have monitoring systems in place to ensure that we’re getting accurate financial data?** Have we inspected the organization’s finances ourselves as well as having an outside expert do so?
- 5. Do we govern rather than manage?** Do we have formal policies that help us delegate effectively? Do our board meetings focus on questions of major policy rather than how many fundraising letters to send out this year?
- 6. Do we think and act strategically?** How can we do more of what makes us successful? 

– from *Make Your Board Dramatically More Effective, Starting Today* (Emerson and Church, emersonandchurch.com)


Why We Need a Fundraising Revolution

“Fundraising results are lousy” throughout the nonprofit sector, says Ellen Bristol in *Fundraising the SMART Way* (wiley.com, bristolstrategygroup.com). Nonprofits’ dismal results, compared to much better outcomes by for-profits, reveal the need for a revolution in the discipline of fundraising.

Nonprofits possess many advantages – such as high public awareness and admiration – that for-profits would kill for. So why do nonprofits tolerate such anemic flows of income when they could do so much better?

The problem, Bristol says, is that many nonprofits rely on hope rather than a documented, measurable set of key performance indicators, so their development efforts focus on working harder, not smarter. She urges nonprofits to remember four simple rules of process management:

1. **You can’t manage** or improve it if you can’t measure it.
2. **What you measure** is what you get.
3. **You can’t figure out much** by using a single measurement.
4. **If the only thing you measure** happens after the process is complete, you won’t learn much.

In other words, measuring things that are diagnostic, using a range of measurements, and making sure that you measure things at the beginning, middle, and end of a process all combine to provide management controls over the fundraising function. Nonprofit leaders who practice these principles will enjoy a revolutionary surge in fundraising results. 

How to Avoid Burnout

If you’re feeling unmotivated and stressed at work, you’re not alone. Studies find that almost half of all surveyed workers admit to feeling burned out. Here are some strategies to help you prevent, mitigate, or recover from burnout.


Explore your creative side. An innovative mindset is a vital key to staying fresh, passionate, and engaged. It’s also one of the keys to organizational success. Take a class in art, music, or writing. Read books such as *Ordinary Genius* by Kim Addonizio and *The Poetry Home Repair Manual* by Ted Kooser, which explain how to unleash your imagination by writing poetry.

Find one or more buddies, and get together on a regular basis to discuss your stressors, your worries, your failures, and your successes. Be sure there’s someone outside your office who will let you vent, in confidence, about your work. Also find someone you can talk to about your personal growth and non-work development.

Imagine you’re interviewing people for your own job. How would you describe it to them? What are the benefits, challenges, and opportunities inherent in your work? See if this perspective gives you ideas about how to enjoy your job in a new way and delegate the parts of it that you don’t relish.

Keep a log of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences of your day. Feel the emotions connected with these experiences as fully as possible. Recognize, accept, and then release them.

When you wake up in the morning, don’t leap out of bed. Take five minutes to lie there and take advantage of that wonderful twilight between sleeping and waking. That’s when you’re likely to have your greatest insights. If you use it well, it can be your most productive and rewarding time of the day.

Do exercises like the ones in *Waking Up Happy: A Handbook of Change with Memoirs of Recovery and Hope* (<http://www.amazon.com/Waking-Up-Happy-Handbook-Recovery/dp/1468126350>), which includes “365 Steps on Your Journey” – an exercise you can do every day to renew yourself. Ask others to do the same exercises so that you can discuss results and share insights. 

How Resilient Are You?

Resilience is one of the key components of emotional intelligence, which is an important prerequisite for effective leadership.

Are you a resilient person? Consider the following scenarios, and answer these questions “Yes” or “No.”


1. **You make a mistake** and are criticized for it. Can you shrug it off and take it as a learning experience?
2. **Your water heater breaks.** Can you keep it from affecting your mood, knowing you can just call a plumber and get it fixed?
3. **You’re being considered** for an important professional award, and it goes to someone you consider less qualified. Can you move on quickly?
4. **A driver uses the shoulder** to zoom in front of a long line of traffic. Can you shake it off quickly rather than fuming about it for a long time?
5. **You try a new restaurant** and the food is awful and the service snooty. Can you accept the situation without letting it ruin your evening?

An emotionally resilient person will be able to answer most or all of these questions with a resounding “Yes.”

To become more resilient, use mental techniques such as these:

Cognitive behavior therapy. Identify irrational, hurtful thoughts, and replace them with more rational, helpful messages to yourself.

Mindfulness meditation. Sitting quietly, turn off the chatter in your mind by observing your thoughts without judgment, then letting them go.

Well-being therapy. Pay attention to ways you can be more generous, positive, and optimistic. 

—adapted from *The Emotional Life of Your Brain* (Hudson Street Press, penguin.com/meet/publishers/hudson-street-press)




Money for Meaning

As practitioners steeped in capitalism, the authors of *The Impact Investor: Lessons in Leadership and Strategy for Collaborative Capitalism* (John Wiley & Sons, wiley.com) believe strongly that capitalism will continue to evolve and not collapse in on itself. Evolving means capitalism must turn outward, collaborating with the civil and public sectors. Most business people (although not necessarily the most influential—yet) are realizing that a social contract requires at least some private sector investment in social concerns.

Collaborative capitalism acknowledges that people can make a profit while investing in projects that have a community impact. Such impact investing can be done by individuals or institutions. The authors (Cathy Clark, Jed Emerson, and Ben Thornley) explore impact investment opportunities across the board, insisting that investment without consideration of community impact is unsustainable.

Especially intriguing for nonprofit stakeholders are the last two chapters. The first of these discusses “multilingual leadership” – that is, learning the language of both the financial and social sectors so that people from one sector understand what people from the other are talking about. This is vital to collaboration. Then there’s a look at trends in impact investing and scenarios for its future. These trends are occurring now, and nonprofit leaders would be wise to pay attention to them.

This book should get organizations thinking about their own investments, no matter the size. More to the point, there has been increased overlap in the operations and goals of the social and business sectors recently, and the kind of investing highlighted in this book will have tremendous—and growing—impact on our organizations. 

– reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

laughter alert

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Is There an “I” in “Team”?

The title of Mark de Rond’s book says it all: *There Is an I in Team*. Trying to pretend there isn’t, as many have done over the years, only makes team-building more difficult. Instead, we need to recognize, appreciate, and build on people’s individual differences.


This insightful book (published by Harvard Business Review Press, hbr.org) debunks many long-held assumptions and identifies the challenges involved in this new way of thinking about teams. For example:

The old: Everyone needs to be on the same page.

The new: People have different versions of reality. Whether they’re correct is less relevant than what their realities tell you about their priorities.

The challenge: Learn to manage conflict constructively.


Conflict within teams is inevitable. Rather than something to be avoided, it’s a good thing, as long as people remain respectful of one another. Simply reminding people of what matters to each of them personally is often a good first step in calming the waters. Doing so will help them realize how working on their own aspirations can often be the best way to support the team.

Research shows that coaching team members *one-on-one* greatly improves the team’s performance. Helping people work through individual issues is one of the best ways to strengthen the team as a whole. 

Creating Social Change

What do ousting a murderous tyrant and increasing the minimum wage have in common? They’re both acts of social justice. Although not as oppressive as tyrants, bureaucratic rules can repress people. In *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World* (Spiegel & Grau, www.spiegelandgrau.com), Srdja Popovic recommends many of the tactics professed by Saul Alinsky in the mid-twentieth century to correct social wrongs – creating dilemma situations, helping people claim their power, and isolating the target, among others. He combines these tactics with the nonviolence promoted by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Fighting injustice takes more than tactics. But the tactics are what get noticed and tend to motivate people, which is why they must be fun, easy, and tied to something most people care about. There must also be commitment to the long haul and willingness to sacrifice, whether it’s giving up shopping at a favorite store or risking jail or being beaten – the level of sacrifice will be different for different people. Social justice can happen anywhere, because the vast majority of people want it and believe in it.

It is people, in the form of supporters, that make up nonprofit organizations. In offering a new perspective in organizing our supporters, this book is a valuable addition to nonprofit literature. You may not use all of Popovic’s suggestions, but *Blueprint for Revolution* can help you rethink how to organize people for social change. 

–reviewed by Terrence Fernsler