

Three Expensive & Common Nonprofit Conflicts: Turn Your Struggles into Wins

Every nonprofit must reconcile these goal-related conflicts. Here's a way to make it less tortuous.

By Karen Eber Davis

Conflicts are inherent in all groups. But some conflicts – goal conflicts baked into the system – are specific to nonprofit organizations. That's because nonprofits seek three bottom-lines: mission, community, and money, unlike governments and businesses that seek a single bottom line (votes and profit, respectively). Seeking three results at the same time leads to special challenges.

Since goal conflicts come with the territory, to succeed you need skills to manage them. What happens if you lack or don't use these skills? Stagnation. Lost revenue. These bottom-line conflicts lie at the epicenter of nearly all the trouble nonprofits have raising funds and creating sustained income.

Use "Name and Reframe"

Naming your conflict will help you make tremendous progress on challenges that previously stumped you. Why? Named conflicts lose their mystery. They gain portability. Portability allows you to mentally move problems from their current context, or reframe them, and play with solutions.

By classifying conflicts, you can help your organization stop cross-purpose efforts. Names help people discuss fears and explore ways to reduce them. Reframing allows you to ask this interesting question: How can we move toward all three bottom lines simultaneously in this situation?

The Three Conflicts

Here are the three expensive and common conflicts inherent in all nonprofits, along with an example of each, and a question you can ask to reframe the issue.

Conflict: Mission & Money vs. Community

Example: A donor gives \$2,000,000 to your organization. Success securing other donations sharply decreases.

Reframing Question: How might you use the donor's gift to grow your community?

Conflict: Money & Community vs. Mission

Example: Your full event calendar leaves everyone with minimal energy for improving mission results.

Reframing Question: Which events can you tweak so that they offer opportunities to grow your mission, your community, and your revenue all at the same time?

Conflict: Mission & Community vs. Money

Example: Almost all your efforts go toward your mission. This results in constant revenue shortages.

Reframing Question: How can you rethink how you do your mission today to enhance your revenue streams tomorrow?

Your Challenge

Identify your slow or stalled income growth efforts. What role do bottom-line conflicts play? Name the conflict or conflicts. As you do, watch for shifts in your thinking. Simply being aware of these three conflicts will help you juggle them. 



Karen Eber Davis (karen@kedconsult.com) is an expert in maximizing philanthropic impact. She is the author of *7 Nonprofit Income Streams: Open the Floodgates to Sustainability!* and *Let's Raise Nonprofit Millions Together*. Sign up for her free newsletter "Added Value" at kedconsult.com.

Reframe & Overcome

For more on reframing your challenges, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Sustainable Forever: How to Develop Income for the Long Term (Vol. 38, No. 1)

The Mission Myth (Vol. 33, No. 1)

Do You Know Where Your Goals Are? (Vol. 26, No. 5)

Grounded Visioning: A Quick Way to Create Shared Visions (Vol. 26, No. 4)

Can We Call a Truce? Tips for Negotiating Workplace Conflicts (Vol. 27, No. 6)

How Changing Your Lenses Will Strengthen Your Leadership (Vol. 34, No. 2)

Making Much of Little: Turning Untapped Assets into Gold (Vol. 36, No. 1)

The Risk of Not Risking: Experimenting with New Sources of Income (Vol. 35, No. 2)