



I've Been Thinking about... Fund Development Strategies

Have you seen a drop in donations? An expert fundraiser shares her advice.

By Martha Golensky

Giving USA Foundation's latest study shows a plunge in donations to nonprofits for 2008. No great surprise there, considering the economy. In fact, the 5.7% decline compared to 2007 was better than many experts expected. What was most disturbing was the sharp drop in gifts to charities providing basic services, such as food and shelter, just when these groups are seeing an upsurge in demand.

In interpreting these numbers, I would discount the idea that donors' philanthropic instincts have eroded. This same study indicated gifts to religious organizations increased last year, which tells me people haven't abandoned the causes they're passionate about. Perhaps when one's own finances have taken a major hit, the possibility of needing help with food or shelter may hit too close to home, and so a contribution to the arts or for education might seem less personal.

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Whatever your organization's mission, this is a time to stick to fund development fundamentals and wait out the storm. Here are the strategies I recommend:

Examine your case for support. Are you making people aware of

how much demand for services has increased? Call in a favor from someone connected to your local TV station or newspaper to feature a story on your organization, to humanize the issues you deal with.

Galvanize your board members to help make up the budget shortfall. Talk to them both as a group and separately. Come up with specific ideas on how each one could help. Avoid spinning a scenario of doom and gloom. Instead, emphasize even the smallest success.

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If your organization depends on one or two major sources of support, it's time to broaden and diversify revenues. Can a board member or other volunteer introduce you to a wealthy individual you haven't cultivated before? Have you fully explored the potential of every local business and foundation? Friend-raising may not yield immediate results but can lead to stronger annual fund drives and major gifts campaigns in the future.

Examine each program and service with a critical eye. Do its results justify the resources necessary to sustain it? If you can't make a solid argument for continuing a poor performer, it may have to go.

Consider with an open mind all opportunities for collaborating with one or more nonprofits in your area. Collaborations can take many forms, often realizing



cost savings without sacrificing autonomy. In addition, funders look favorably on such efforts.

If these ideas sound familiar because you're already practicing them, keep up the good work. It will pay off in the long run. For the rest of you, get busy! ■

Martha Golensky, D.S.W. (golenskm@gvsu.edu) is professor emerita of social work at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where for 12 years she taught nonprofit management courses and assisted local nonprofits with strategic planning, financial development, and board governance. Previously, she spent 15 years as a nonprofit executive.

Next Steps

Use these articles (www.snpo.org/members) to put the five tips in this article into action:

How to Get Quoted in the Press (Vol. 25, No. 4)

Bring a List of Names to the Next Meeting (Vol. 24, No. 5)

Recession-Ready Fundraising (Vol. 26, No. 6)

Keep Or Kill? Score Your Programs (Vol. 21, No. 5)

A Collaboration Checklist: Ten Questions for Success (Vol. 24, No. 1)