



Tips for a Successful Fundraising Committee

Do you need to create a committee to help you raise funds? Or should you revamp the committee you have? These suggestions will pave the way.

By Emily Davis

It's crucial for your organization to have an effective fundraising committee. Such a committee can do far more than help you raise funds. It can hold an essential place in spreading your mission to valuable supporters and networks. Below are some ways to organize a team of volunteer fundraisers for your organization.

- 1. Have a committee description.** How can volunteers know what you need them to do without instruction? Be sure your description includes details such as committee activities, meeting times and length, preferred skills and qualifications, and any other logistics you would want to know if you were joining the committee.
- 2. Be clear about your committee name.** The words “fundraising” and “committee” can scare some people away. Another option is to call your committee the “resource development team.” It sends a slightly different message — that this is a team of leaders who are leveraging not just dollars but resources of all kinds for the mission and cause.
- 3. Identify board leadership.** One of the best practices in nonprofit leadership is to make sure all committees are led by active board members. Board members serve as ambassadors for your organization — both with internal and external networks. Having a dedicated board member lead your fundraising committee will help assure smooth communication and follow-through.
- 4. Share your fundraising plan.** Every organization should have a plan for developing its resources. Share that plan with your fundraising committee members and ask them to provide feedback as well as take on specific projects. Once every year, ask the committee to help you review the plan and find out what worked well, which goals need to be amended, and what isn't realistic.
- 5. Provide staff support.** Don't expect to create a fundraising committee and have the members magically begin raising millions of dollars. Very few people are fundraising experts. Your staff will be the key to committee members' success in many ways. Your employees are on the ground and working with stakeholders


every day. Create opportunities for them to share and support the committee's efforts. Train your staff how to lead, not just manage, the committee. Leaders breed leaders — this is a great opportunity for staff members to support and engage volunteers in a leadership capacity.

- 6. Offer trainings.** Provide your committee with in-service trainings or share regular training opportunities through other organizations, such as your local nonprofit association. Investing small amounts of money in trainings can have a great return on investment in terms of fundraising from your committee members. It also shows you value your committee members and appreciate their work.
- 7. Set the bar high.** Having high standards and expecting committee members to live up to their commitments will set your committee apart from others. You may have a small committee to begin with, but know that you'll slowly develop a strong team of fundraisers, strongly committed to your mission.
- 8. Debrief fundraising activities.** Carefully review all fundraising activities immediately upon completion. You probably already do this for fundraising events, and that's important. But be certain you're doing the same thing for all projects, such as holding annual appeals, sending out direct mail, and researching fundraising databases. Keep a running list of what tasks must be completed and what needs to be improved. Such a list will help keep organizational memory alive even if staff and volunteers change.
- 9. Celebrate successes.** When an individual has a great success or your committee is part of an organizational success, celebrate. Host a lunch, have a cook-out, give a small, meaningful gift, write a thank-you note. Feeling appreciated is a big reason why people keep up with their volunteer work. If they don't feel appreciated by your organization, they can easily share their time with another organization instead.
- 10. Create accountability.** Keep track of committee meeting and event attendance. If committee members aren't honoring their commitments, meet with them face-to-face. Show compassion, and listen more than you speak. Find out why they're unable to follow through and how you can help.

“Very few people are fundraising experts.”

11. Recruit people with a willingness to learn and collaborate.

Volunteers interested in learning new skills and becoming great team members are often more valuable than those who write big checks. Helping people grow and improve can evolve into creating lifelong supporters, ambassadors, and leaders.

12. Regard your committee as a pipeline. Committees are a great way to identify individuals who could be perfect for your board. Committee membership gives both you and the volunteer a chance to “try on” the fit. It’s a little bit like dating: Go on a few dates before making a long-term commitment. 

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Commit to Resource Development

WEB SITES

Check out the following resources specific to fundraising committees and their operations, including sample committee descriptions.

IdeaEncore.org

afpnet.org

fundraising.alltop.com

ARTICLES

For more on effective fundraising, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org/members:

Five Strategies to Enhance Your Fundraising (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Deeper Donor Relationships = Increased Contributions (Vol. 26, No. 4)

How Your Board Members Can Raise Funds without Asking for a Dime (Vol. 19, No. 6)

Training Programs Need More than Good Information (Vol. 21, No. 2)

How to Measure Fundraising Success (Vol. 31, No. 2)

Raising Funds in an Uncertain Economy (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Board and Staff Consensus: A Powerful Fundraising Tool (Vol. 15, No. 1)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity: Exploring New Revenue Opportunities for Nonprofits (NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute).

CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Watch for Restaurant Openings

Newly opened restaurants want extra publicity. You want extra revenue. These are two good reasons to create a partnership.

When you learn a new restaurant is coming to town (realtors, developers, and Chamber of Commerce staff make good contacts for this insider information), be the first to make contact and explore a fundraiser for your organization. Be sure to stress the benefits the restaurant will receive from such a collaboration.

For other creative fundraising ideas, see *Special Events Galore*, published by Stevenson, Inc. (stevensoninc.com).

Fill Empty Bowls

Ask students, church groups, and community potters to create and donate soup bowls for an “empty bowl” event. Find restaurants willing to donate soup.

Guests enjoy a meal of soup and bread and select a handmade bowl to take home. (The bowls aren’t designed for food but as a symbolic reminder of people in need.) Some organizations have included an auction with this event, auctioning off some of the bowls made by local celebrities and artists. Some organizations sell tickets, but others just ask for a donation at the event.

Consider collaborating with other local nonprofits for such a fundraiser. For example, an art center, family center, and food pantry might organize the event and share the proceeds. When several groups in Hopkins, Minnesota, first tried the event, the yield was over \$40,000. 