



Fundraising Strategies for Small Non-Profits

Does size really matter?

No matter how much work and dedicated effort you exert to secure funding, or how skilled your development team is, sometimes it doesn't feel like you're making enough progress. This is especially true when you see a well-established non-profit across town continue to raise six-figure gifts or secure those time-consuming multi-year grants.

The secret to their success might very well be a well-staffed and strong skilled development office, a fundraising savvy board, and possibly well-connected volunteers. But if you work in a small (or even one-person) development shop, it doesn't mean you can't improve your fundraising footprint. Despite the fact that they may have more staff or a bigger development budget, you can employ many of the same fundraising tools as the larger non-profits, even with your limited resources.

Here are some ways you can fundraise like the larger shops, no matter how small your non-profit is:

Build Fundraising Networks

Large non-profits are very good at asking their board and key supporters to open up their rolodexes to fundraise on behalf of the organization. Likewise, big organizations are great at forming affinity groups like young professionals associations and giving clubs. These tactics need not be reserved for large non-profits though. In fact, because they allow your staff to multiply their efforts, these tactics are tailor-made for small development shops.

Focus on Cultivation

While larger organizations have enough staff to spend a significant amount of time cultivating prospects before making an ask, many smaller organizations jump the gun and make asks before really cultivating prospects. This is a big mistake. Prospects don't become lifelong supporters unless they are properly cultivated. Even if you have a limited amount of staff, spend time cultivating your prospect before you ask.

Determine How Much, When and Who will Make the Ask

While cultivation is important, don't get comfortable in this stage. With the proper cultivation and proper planning it will become clear on who will be involved in the next phase: solicitation. Track your progress through the cultivation stage and set target dates. Determine who might be the best person or persons to make the ask and who might have a better chance at landing that gift.

Diversify Your Tactics

Too many small non-profits rely on one major fundraising event per year to raise most of their budget. Likewise, many small shops are grant-dependent, or focus almost entirely on board giving or on direct mail. Putting all of your fundraising efforts into one basket is a recipe for disaster. Instead diversify your tactics. Don't rely too heavily on any one fundraising technique. The more successful you are in diversifying, the more stable your non-profit will be in the long run.

Be Active Online

Many large non-profits are putting a lot of resources into online fundraising efforts. They're using websites, blogs, and social media sites to connect with prospects, cultivate and steward donors, make asks, and more. Many non-profits believe that being active online is too time-consuming, but it does not have to be. Make the investment to get your website up to date and looking nice, and then spend 15 minutes each day on social media. That's all it takes.

Being Small Can Be an Advantage!

A small fundraising office has one key advantage over larger non-profits which is their ability to make decisions and implement changes quickly. At many larger non-profits, changing course or launching a new fundraising effort requires moving through several layers of bureaucracy which can delay progress.

When things change it's much easier to refine your game plan and react to them in a way that larger organizations can't.

Know Your Prospective Donors' Objectives and Priorities

This is especially true for corporate sponsors who see the value of their support much differently than an individual donor. But for each type of donor prospect - individual, foundation, corporate, or media – you must invest time in learning about their objectives and priorities.

Develop Your Fundraising Collateral

Create a funding opportunities brochure. Explore creating more than one piece that are directed to individuals, corporations, foundations, or media sponsors. Include a menu of support options at varying levels that will appeal to donors with different funding capacities.

Believe in Your Mission

It may seem strange, but there are many fundraisers who are simply not personally vested in their organizations. This can be, and is more often than not, very apparent to donors and prospects. If you are not willing to support your organization with a personal donation – *the size does not matter* – then how can you ask others to support you? Supporters invest in people just as much as they invest in a cause or organization. Your genuine belief in your mission is the key to your success.