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Board Giving

Introduction

In the context of a non-profit organization's ongoing effort to create and sustain a viable fundraising program, the sensitive subject of board giving will inevitably emerge as an important consideration.

Certainly board members should make annual financial contributions to the organization they serve. For non-profit organizations that are engaging in any kind of fundraising, at any level, board giving should be commensurate with the emphasis that the organization places on fund development.

Frequently, non-profit board members are recruited in a manner that does not accurately portray the true expectations the organization holds for them related to fundraising. This makes for nothing but problems in the long run, especially when organizational priorities change to make fundraising a more important component of the board role. Prospective members should be as well informed about the expectation for giving as they are about their other responsibilities on the board.

Related Foundations

Some non-profit organizations form a separate foundation to focus solely on fundraising while the parent organization focuses on fulfilling its mission. When such a foundation is formed, it is possible for the parent board to infer that, because the foundation and its board have been created, they no longer have any kind of obligation to participate in fundraising other than to make sure that the foundation's bylaws are being enforced and implemented appropriately.

From a leadership perspective, the foundation board has an appropriate role not only to create policies for its own giving, but also to recommend guidelines or suggestions to the governing board for its giving.

Strategies for Board Giving

Organizations typically start their board giving strategy with the concept of 100% participation as donors on an annual basis. In this scenario, board members (of either the governing or foundation board) are not expected to make a gift of any particular amount, rather simply to make some financial contribution. This kind of first-year strategy is often well received, especially when a solid rationale is presented for why board giving is important to achieve organization's long term goals.

Once the concept of board giving is accepted into the culture of an organization, as it should be for a whole host of reasons, some boards begin to set macro monetary goals for annual board giving. In some cases, a board may choose to focus on a particular project or to fund something that would not normally be attractive to other donors to the organization. An example might be a board choosing to set a \$50,000 fundraising goal for its members to purchase a new fundraising database and to pay for data conversion and analysis.

Another strategy is to set a specific amount that each board member is expected to give. Philosophically, Richner & Richner is opposed to this type of arbitrary individual giving expectation, because it inadvertently sends a poor message to board members. To more financially capable donors it sends the message that it is acceptable for them to make a token annual contribution that is not personally significant. To less capable donors, it sends the message that the organization is insensitive to their financial circumstances and puts a monetary value on their service in a way that does not take into account other kinds of services they might be contributing to the organization.

Giving programs that are based on equal gifts for all do not recognize the realities of wealth distribution in our society and also run contrary to a relationship-based philosophy of fundraising that is always sensitive to individuals and their situations. Board members in particular should be treated with the greatest care, but too often are taken for granted. "One size fits all" monetary giving goals for board members simply perpetuate this unfortunate trend.

Getting Started

When starting a board solicitation program, the first step is typically holding a discussion at the board level about launching the program. This conversation is appropriately initiated by the chief executive of the organization in conjunction with the chief fundraising staff person. From there, conversation often is carried forward by the CEO to the board chair

and then to the executive committee for consideration. The first year, of course, will be the most difficult.

The actual solicitation strategy varies widely from organization to organization. These approaches range from a personalized letter from the board chair with or without a follow up phone call, to the CEO and board chair personally calling on each board member during a clearly defined board giving campaign. In any case, having deadlines for giving is essential.