

Starting the New Year Right with Some *Fundraising Resolutions*

By Ann Klucsarits

Whether your fiscal year begins in January or at a later date, that month is a good time to make some fundraising resolutions. As everyone who has ever tried to lose weight or start an exercise program knows, nothing changes overnight. It's important to work steadily at establishing and achieving good fundraising habits to build the foundation for future success.

ESTABLISH A CLEAR VISION. Marketers often tell us: If you don't define your company and your product, your customers will do it for you. That holds true for charities as well. If we don't communicate our mission clearly and compellingly, our donors define it for us. And when our programs don't live up to their definition, donors won't be motivated to give. Therefore, it's important to have a concise, credible, relevant, and urgent description of your cause. This needs to be understood internally and then communicated to supporters.

In addition, you may want to develop a case statement to spell out why you both need and deserve philanthropic support to advance your vision. Broadly, the case statement should answer the following questions: Who are you? Why do you exist? What makes you unique? What do you want to do? How will you do it?

PLAN THE WORK AND WORK THE PLAN. Set aside time at the beginning of the year to evaluate your programs and resources

and then set strategic goals. What are your organization's needs and interests? What are your financial goals? Who are your best donors? What are their interests? What motivates them? What other gifts have they given? How much should you ask for? Once you've identified your top targets, develop a plan to cultivate them professionally in a way that will build a long-term relationship and lead to an appropriate gift solicitation.

When setting your goals for the year, make sure that they are attainable but enough of a "stretch" to be challenging. And remember: What isn't measured isn't achieved, so review your progress monthly. Discuss which strategies are working—and which are not.

UPDATE YOUR WEB SITE. In 2005, over three billion dollars were raised online from more than 8.6 million households. Even if you aren't ready to accept donations online, review your Web pages and ensure they are donor-friendly. More than 65 percent of donors go online to research causes, and more than 75 percent of those who go online say the Internet affected their decision to give. If that isn't enough to convince you to update your site, consider that on average, online donors donate in total—both online and off-line—50 percent more than those who do not give online.

How should you update your Web site? First, make sure the site's purpose is clear on



the homepage: Explain who you are and what you do. Then identify and emphasize four high-priority tasks for visitors—for example, donating money, signing up for e-mail updates, and forwarding information to a friend. Finally, update all the organization’s information and have it available in one easy-to-find location. Some sites create an area for “first time visitors” that helps answer frequently asked questions.

CREATE A CALENDAR OF COMMUNICATION. How many times do your donors tell you that they receive too much mail from you? Or that they don’t remember what you sent? Review your mailing schedule and communication pieces and develop a calendar that shows every mailing—including e-mails. Eliminate redundant mailings or adjust the schedule to better space the mailings. Review the content to ensure that each piece communicates your message effectively, emotionally, and persuasively. Your goal is to establish a dialogue with your donors so that every piece is anticipated, personal, and relevant—and builds on the last communication.

MEASURE YOUR RESULTS. A new generation of philanthropists is beginning to emerge in America. These individuals are more personally involved with their gifts and are looking for measurable results for their charitable donations. Are you prepared to respond to their needs? One way to do this is to begin with your long-term goals and then set more immediate objectives that relate to specific legislation or initiatives. Also, outline a marketing plan to get your ideas to policymakers, the media, and supporters.

When tracking your results, ask the question: How did we make a positive impact or change? This will keep you focused on being as effective as possible. There are many things you can measure to demonstrate your work, such as visits to your Web site, briefings you’ve conducted, and editorials you have

published; but keep in mind that you need to track accomplishments, not just activity, to show effectiveness.

COMMIT TO EXCELLENCE. Successful companies and organizations often ask the question: How can we be the best at what we do? They recognize that their biggest investment is often in personnel, so they start at the top by committing to a leadership team that shows vision and good judgment. Then they “hire smart” so that managers and staff are constantly working to improve their skills and add value. In *The Fiefdom Syndrome*, former Microsoft COO Robert Herbold writes, “Rather than assuming you are already good enough at your job, assume instead that there are competitors out there who are learning to do things differently and better.”

In many ways, we are all competing for our donors’ attention and dollars. By challenging staff to continually improve, we can promote top performance, which leads to more effectiveness as an organization. This will resonate with your donors.

DOCUMENT WHAT’S IMPORTANT. With tax season around the corner, January is a good time to get your personal paperwork in order. It’s also a time to think about professional documentation. Every nonprofit has to contend with staff turnover. Reduce stress by documenting important internal systems and policies. These could include (among others) the history of your organization, instructions on your database, policies on gift acceptance, expectations for your board of trustees, and job descriptions of staff members.

Once you set your fundraising resolutions, put them in writing and share them with your organization. This will serve the dual purpose of committing everyone to your vision and motivating you to meet your goals.

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