

Assessing Your Organization's Fundraising Readiness

Your ability to fundraise successfully is directly related to your organization's capacity to support and sustain fundraising activities. Take a moment to assess your organization's readiness to do good fundraising by thinking about the following six areas.

For each category we've provided a checklist of things that are most needed to best set you up to successfully raise money. In categories where you only have a few checks, you may have some significant work to do before you are truly ready to do effective fundraising. In categories where you have many checks, you have helped to position your group for strong fundraising.

1. Do you currently have a fundraising plan?

A fundraising plan needs to be long-term (what strategies will best serve the group now and 5-10 years from now) as well as be specific about what tasks need to be done, when and by whom. Check off the following things you currently have in place for a fundraising plan:

- Clearly defined needs for what dollars are needed to do your organization's programs and achieve your goals.
- One-year goals for each income category.
- An agreed-upon strategy for reaching each one of those goals.
- A one-year or six-month calendar of activities and deadlines.
- An over-arching assessment of what fundraising strategies or techniques you want to add, grow, or delete over the next five years.

2. What is the size and shape of your current donor base?

Your current donors are the best resource you have to build upon. It is essential to understand the current abilities and the future potential of your donor base. You need to be able to readily access the following information about the people and institutions who give you money:

- How many donors do you have in each income category?
- How often do these donors give?
- How long have they been giving to you?
- At what level do your donors give? What has been their range of gifts over the last two or three years?



- What are they most interested in (detailed records for each donor - the larger the donation the more important this is to track)?

3. Do you have the human power and time that is need to ask for money from your identified sources?

Fundraising doesn't happen unless people do it. People in your organization have to ask other people for money or it won't show up in your bank account! You need human power to organize and manage the fundraising and you also need bodies to carry out the critical tasks. Which of the following pieces do you have in place for fundraising?

- An active fundraising committee that creates and manages the fundraising activities (can be all volunteer leaders, or in staffed organizations should be a mix of board and staff members).
- A board of directors that understands asking for money and giving money is a central part of their work as board members.
- A dedicated core group of at least 8-10 people who on average give 2-5 hours a month to fundraising tasks (24 to 60 hours per year).
- A group of at least 25+ people who will give 6+ hours a year for fundraising tasks.

4. Do you have the fundraising expertise, and/or access to training or other resource people to gain the needed fundraising expertise?

This may be a little harder to assess, but for your organization to be successful in fundraising, you need people in your organization who have experience, knowledge and a very positive attitude about fundraising. If you don't have them in your organization right now, a next option is to find other resource people who can help you build that expertise. Can you find help through pro-bono assistance, paid consultants, or training workshops and mentoring? Here are a few questions to think about:

- Who's done fundraising in your organization and what is their level of experience?
 - A. _____ Years of experience ____
 - B. _____ Years of experience ____
 - C. _____ Years of experience ____
 - D. _____ Years of experience ____
- We don't currently have lots of expertise in the organization, but we know who we can ask for help in our community.
- We don't have lots of expertise, but we know where to get training and mentoring to strengthen our skills, knowledge, and contacts.

- We don't have lots of expertise, but we could raise the money we need to buy help and advice if we need it.

5. Do you have the physical and human resources needed for tracking your donors, managing the money, and thanking donors?

Getting new donors takes a lot of work. And to encourage those donors to continue to give to your organization, and to really work your list of donors over time, you need some key administrative resources in place. Think about the following areas as a place to begin:

- We have a database in place that can track the donor's information and giving history.
- We have financial management system that deposits checks within 3 days of receipt.
- We have a system in place that allows our organization to acknowledge a gift and send a thank you note or letter within 1-3 business days after receipt.
- We have mechanisms in place for regularly communicating about our programs with our donors (newsletter that goes out at least 3-4 times per year, special mailings that go to donors, an annual report, etc.).
- We have defined other benefits for our donors (we know what they want or expect and we give it to them).
- For significant donors, we know their specific interests and we work to communicate with them on the phone or in person 1-3 times per year.

6. Do you have a written case statement (and/or specific and defined program needs) and well-developed solicitation materials?

Your success in fundraising depends upon your ability to make the case to your individual donors and institutions. The following things will help you make the case verbally and in writing:

- We have completed a case statement and all who are actively engaged in fundraising have access to it.
- We have defined our program goals and needs and we can articulate these to donors.
- We have defined our internal needs (organizational capacity building, training, equipment, publications, etc.) and can articulate these to donors.
- We have developed appropriate materials to support our in-person solicitation work and our mail solicitation.