

Who Are My Fundraisers?

Identifying Fundraising Roles for Everyone on Your Nonprofit Staff

Fundraising isn't a department. It's a mindset. And it powers your whole organization. The mantra of effective fundraising:



We do work that matters, work that no one else can do. And the only way we can grow that work is by inviting others to make it their own.

In other words, everyone in your organization is a fundraiser, because it's everyone's responsibility to connect with your constituents by living out a remarkable idea which resonates with your constituents.

Let's get specific about different ways every member of your team can be better fundraisers.

What if I'm a...

Program Director

Those of us who work in programs rarely identify themselves as fundraisers, but we're the soldiers on the front line of fundraising. The warriors in the arena.

One-on-one: Every interaction matters. Each opportunity you have to go above and beyond the call of duty is an opportunity to gain a true fan, a donor, a fellow advocate for your cause. In many ways, you're the most important fundraiser of the organization.

Judicious impact: How you use the funds allocated to your program is a kind of fundraising. The money we're given is an investment from our donors. We're expected to use it to yield the greatest social impact we can.

Storytelling: The stories you gather are the most effective tools in a fundraiser's kit because they're moving, emotional and clearly demonstrate your organization's value to the world. Make a point of noticing and recording powerful moments and sharing them with the rest of your organization, so you can spread that impact. Share them with your executive director, development staff and marketing team. These stories keep everyone going.

Direct Mail Fundraiser

Be an evangelist for good fundraising: Okay, so hopefully you know a bit about effective donor communications. You understand that the donors are the heroes, not you. You get that donors respond to emotions more than logic. You know copywriting is counterintuitive. Now it's your job to artfully, lovingly evangelize to your board of directors and peers. You had to learn this stuff once too—so be graceful and never stop spreading the good news of effective donor communications.

Thank you: The follow-up is even more important than the original copy. Because without it, you're missing the opportunity to make this first donation into a *lifetime* of donations. You're no longer in the donation business, you're in the relationship business. Ask any couple in their golden years: If you want to flourish, the courtship can't end after the wedding vows are exchanged. The best is yet to come.

Board Member

Embrace your style: Some of the world's most effective fundraisers are introverts. That's because the secret of good fundraising isn't to chat donors into giving to your organization. Instead, shut up and listen. Make them feel understood. Then let them know how they can get involved. That's real fundraising. Of course, if you're the exuberant extrovert, volunteer for the gala, set up meetings with your connections, make phone calls. You can fundraise best by being yourself.

Thank them: One of the most cost-effective, high-impact fundraising activities that too few nonprofits do: personalized 'thank you's from board members. A phone call or a handwritten note does wonders for donor retention and takes very little time from you. Please initiate this activity with your board.

Don't worry, you don't need to be sleazy: More than anyone, we board members feel like being fundraisers means being sleazy salespeople, aggressively pushing for the donation. The best fundraising is getting to know other people and genuinely caring about the nonprofit's work; the rest tends to work itself out. People don't like to feel like they're being sold to. Be a friend first. But you can let them know about how they'd love to be part of the cause—not out of guilt, but out of joy for the cause.

Executive Director

Fundraiser-in-chief: Okay, like it or not, you need to be the organization's chief fundraiser. People give to people, not to causes. And inevitably, people will come to associate you with the nonprofit itself, as the face of the organization. So even if you aren't making the ask one-on-one, you need to be at the events, talking to the press and active in the community. Your spirit and enthusiasm is the best kind of fundraising.

Learn the technical side of fundraising: So you're busy as heck. We get that. But one of the best investments you can make is in yourself. Take time to learn the nitty-gritty side of fundraising and donor communications. Since you're fundraiser-in-chief, there are outsized benefits to understanding donor psychology, giving triggers and how fundraising works on a technical level.

Director of Development

Develop strong relationships with the program staff: Since every part of your organization is involved in fundraising in some way or another, it pays to be connected throughout the organization. Get close to people. Encourage them to tell their stories—stories you can use out in the field. Make them feel valued. Make them realize fundraising isn't a necessary evil, but a huge privilege.

Stay positive: It's hard to be a direct fundraiser, making the ask day after day, always being "on." It's hard to be cavalier in a vocation that by definition means you'll face rejection. But it's imperative not to let it get you down, especially around the rest of the team. The moment the donor-to-be becomes an enemy to be defeated or an irritating obstacle, your fundraising is ruined. And worse, your coworkers will feel it too. Every time you complain about a donor, they'll be less enthusiastic.

You serve donors too: Donors aren't just the people you get money from to be able to get to the real people you serve. Fundraising is an opportunity to invest in donors too. Apple sells products to people who appreciate beautiful design, but they also sell the idea that beautiful design is valuable in the first place. You serve your donors by helping them to value the kind of work your organization does, and making their lives richer.

Volunteer Director/Volunteer

Your volunteers are future employees, advocates and donors: Realize that right now, they are probably volunteering for selfish reasons as well as altruistic ones. But they are potential lifelong fans.

Volunteer interactions are what your constituents experience: If you're serving soup at a homeless shelter, the people going through the line don't judge you by your mission statement; they just see whether your volunteers treat them like fellow human beings. That's the most important connection they'll experience with your organization. Choose and train volunteers to respect this power and privilege.

Over-communicate with your volunteers: More than anyone else, volunteers feel underappreciated and left out of the loop when things get busy. Be at least as intentional as you are with your donors with your volunteers. Thank them. Send them emails. Ask for their advice. Ask them about what else they're passionate about. Don't forget about them!

Webmaster/Resident Techie

The unspoken hero: If you're in charge of the website's copy, messaging, social media or blog, you are quickly becoming the most important role in the fundraising department. Your website is the first thing that 90% of your new connections experience. It tells a story about the kind of organization you are and whether it fits in their identity.

Make your website a gift to your donors: Every time you use the word "we" instead of "you," you lose one donor. Okay, maybe it's not that severe, but there's no reason for a new website visitor to care about your nonprofit, your programs or your big plans. They care about how it relates to THEM. Why do you matter to them? What's at stake? Why should they care? Answer this question in every paragraph, every page. Make each page a gift to your donors. Not to your board of directors or program director.

Understand great donor communications: You should spend as much time as the direct mail copywriters to understand donor communications and psychology. Talk with those in charge of direct mail or email marketing. You're fundraising, but you're also recruiting volunteers, new employees and sending a message to every member of the press who visits your website. It's always going to be worth your time to understand how to communicate your mission effectively.

You're in charge of fundraising from this day forward. Yes, you.

Don't let that responsibility go to someone else. Your cause matters way too much for that.

Go make some change!