

Planning for Fundraising

By

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There is a saying in folklore, “If you don’t know where you’re going, how will you know if you’ve arrived?” This certainly is true in fundraising. While sometimes we manage to raise funds without much planning, eventually we will find that if we don’t have a clear, yearly plan, several results occur. For example:

- Our donors won’t trust us anymore if they don’t see that we clearly know what we’re doing and where we’re headed.
- There will be confusion and lack of confidence in the organization.
- We could be asking the wrong donors for the wrong cause.
- We might suddenly find ourselves against deadlines we hadn’t anticipated.
- In short, we aren’t very credible if we don’t plan.

There are many ways to plan, and also various formats that can be appropriate and comfortable to use.

Some people don’t like to plan because such a document holds them accountable. Others simply aren’t organized enough or dislike actually putting something on paper (or on the computer) and would rather “just do it.” Still others don’t know how to plan. This chapter will help you to at least take the first step in formulating a good plan you can live with, and live by, and which promises results.

There are several management functions that precede the creation of the plan, and in one way or another, are included in the plan:

- *Analysis*—determining what the needs are, what funds are needed to fulfill the service needs, what donors may be needed, what is the climate for fundraising, who will perform what tasks, and similar questions.
- *Planning*—while this may sound redundant, it’s actually important to plan how a plan will be developed. What group will meet, who has what assignments, what is the timeline, and other critical questions.
- *Implementation*—when will the plan be ready, how will it be launched, who will have access to the plan?
- *Monitoring*—will there be meetings of critical personnel, when and what reports will be issued, how flexible can we be, and who has the need to know about the plan?
- *Evaluation*—there should be both formative and summative evaluation. The plan should be reviewed periodically and adjusted as needed, and at the end an evaluation should take place that determines how well the goals were reached.
- *Professional stance*—what is the best way to carry out the goals and objectives of the plan, and are best practices supported by research and experience considered?

Those who should be involved in the planning include board and development committee members, the leaders of the organization, those who carry out the plan, and experts whose help might be needed in the planning. This, of course, represents a large and probably unwieldy group, so the suggestion is that representatives of these groups be included, with plan input and approval accorded to the rest. The core planning group should include the development committee chair or at least someone from the board, the key fundraisers (senior personnel, if available), and the president of the organization or his/her designee. This group formulates the plan and periodically shares it with a wider group for suggestions and approval. Finally the board reviews and approves the plan.

The fundraising plan should, of course, be part of or at least congruent with the institutional plan. Should the organization lack a plan, the fundraiser still should develop a plan, for the reasons mentioned early in this chapter, not least of which are credibility and accountability issues. There can be many kinds of plans—strategic, long-range, operational, visionary, to name a few—but the plan discussed in this chapter is a yearly fundraising plan.

The sequence for developing a plan can include these steps:

1. Gather facts.
2. Determine and validate needs.
3. Consider and evaluate markets.
4. Consider vehicles.
5. List and evaluate resources.
6. Select appropriate vehicles.
7. Determine goals.
8. Prepare plan.
9. Install and use control mechanisms.

Regardless of what format you use for a plan, it should have these components:

- *Mission statement.* A review and clear understanding of your organization's mission is essential because all other planning components must relate to this.
- *Internal and external assessment positive and negative factors.* Determine what inhibits or promotes fundraising is vital so that unrealistic expectations aren't set.
- *Goals and objectives for each program.* This could include programs for which specific amounts are raised, fundraising descriptions such as direct mail, or goals that relate in some way to fundraising, such as board training.
- *Program descriptions.* What tools will you use to accomplish the above?
- *Possible donors.* Who might give and how likely are they to give and how should they be asked?
- *Timeline and assignments.* Who is responsible for what and when must that be done?
- *Budget and gift range chart.* The fundraising budget should clearly describe efficiency and effectiveness factors. The gift range chart describes how you will raise the money and is congruent with the "possible donors" step.
- *Monitoring and evaluation.* How will you check on yourself and your department and to whom will you report?

The benefits of planning are obvious, and these most stand out:

- Improve performance.
- Stimulate forward thinking.
- Clarify future direction.
- Solve major organizational problems.
- Survive—even flourish—with less.
- Build teamwork and expertise.
- Influence rather than be influenced.
- Meet others' requirements.

At the same time, there are limitations to planning. Costs could outweigh benefits, the planning process could become an end in itself, sometimes life-threatening problems should be handled before formal planning takes place, and when poor planning is worse than no plan at all!

Finally consider how you will stick to the plan, motivate and urge others to do so, revise the plan as needed, and work with it as part of your daily operations.