

Transformational giving: No vision, no gifts

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw, FUNdraising Good Times: Part one of two part series
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Philanthropy makes front page news with the announcement of large, transformational gifts. Think Bill Gates. Oprah Winfrey. Warren Buffet. With the news comes the question “What would it take for us to receive such a gift?” This two-part series seeks to provide insights that can help nonprofits begin a conversation that may itself be transformational.

We recently asked Barbara Pierce, founder of Transformative Giving, to share her experience working with donors who give transformational gifts. Pierce works with local and national nonprofits who want to grow their major gifts programs. She has experience soliciting gifts ranging from \$10,000 up to \$10 million. Her comments can stimulate conversation and an examination of how your institution or organization approaches fundraising, and those who can make transformational gifts.

We asked Pierce what guidance she would offer to an organization or institution who wants to secure transformational gifts, and she got right to the point. “You need to be able to answer, without hesitation, what you would do if a donor gave you a million dollar gift. It is harder to answer than you might first think. If you don’t have a vision, don’t expect visionary gifts,” she said.

That’s a strong message. And we totally agree with Pierce. Those who can give at the highest levels want to know your vision, how you would deploy a major investment. Pierce continued, “You also need to have the organizational capacity to take advantage of such a large gift. I use the word transformative because such a gift will transform an organization and if you aren’t ready, it can take you off course, possibly in the wrong direction.”

She also highlighted the need to have your financial house in order before focusing on transformational giving. “You have to be financially sustainable before you can take advantage of a transformational gift. This type of gift allows you to move beyond “we’re surviving” to a point where you are thriving. As an organization, you have to demonstrate your capacity to steward a transformational gift. Nonprofits need to have the business knowledge of how to ramp up in terms of institutional capacity and implement a plan for the vision that the donor is funding.”

Transformational donors look closely at your institution’s leadership. “The first things to be satisfied before someone will consider a major investment in your group is a belief in the management of your organization. They want to know and trust your executive director or president and your board. These donors are people who have made smart decisions in earning and investing money. They want to know such a gift will make a lasting impact, and that means it will be well managed.”

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Next week: Part Two. Are you interested in donors or their money?

Visit Barbara Pierce at www.transformativegiving.com .

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Mel and Pearl Shaw are the authors of “Prerequisites for Fundraising Success.” They position nonprofits for fundraising success. Visit them at www.saadandshaw.com .