

FUNdraising Good Times: Fundraising: investment or afterthought?

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw
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Investing in the fundraising operations of a nonprofit is an investment in the organization's future. It takes time to build a fundraising program that is capable of securing revenue from multiple sources. It takes vision, planning, leadership and resources – including money. And, it doesn't necessarily "pay off" right away. A fundraising program takes time and attention to mature. Often three-to-five years. And during that time the investment in fundraising needs to be consistent. Once a fundraising program is well established it can support a nonprofit organization or institution in meeting its revenue goals. But, again, it takes time. And even once established, it cannot be put on "automatic pilot."

Fundraising needs consistent attention from the organization's top leadership. That means the CEO and board members have to be willing to cultivate and solicit gifts all the time, not once in a while. The focus needs to be on building and sustaining a pool of prospective donors and funders. You need a pool who can collectively give three times the fundraising goal because not everyone who wants to give will be in a position to do so when asked. You have to know who these people are. You have to be in contact with them. You have to know what they want from a funding or giving relationship with your organization.

Don't wait until the organization needs money to build a fundraising program. That's when it's too late. Our recommendation: attract the people and expertise to build and sustain your programs and simultaneously attract the people and expertise needed to raise money for the program in future years. It can take a minimum of 12 to 18 months to secure meaningful investments from foundations, corporations or individuals. Having a strong program that meets community needs doesn't mean an organization will be able to raise money when funds are needed. Successful fundraising is the result of consistent planning and engagement.

With the economy turning around and money beginning to flow again now is the time for

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nonprofits to build sustainable fundraising programs. Prepare for future challenges. Get your house in order. Be proactive, not reactive. Build a program that attracts unrestricted funding as well as the "easier" to obtain restricted funding. Yes, it takes time and creativity to find ways to secure unrestricted funding: but if you don't make the investment you won't have the unrestricted funds. Ensure your board and CEO are committed to fundraising. Seek out volunteers who are fearless fundraisers. Create a fundraising plan that seeks funds from multiple revenue sources – not only foundation or government grants. Attract, train and invest in committed and experienced staff. Review and refine your case for support. Articulate your uniqueness. Align your organization with community needs. Respond to the market. You can do it: it takes vision, planning, commitment and your time.

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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

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