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A cornerstone of successful nonprofit fundraising is trust. While there are many reasons to give, there are also reasons why people, foundations and corporations do not give. One reason is a lack of trust: donors and funders don't trust the nonprofit to use the funds for the stated purpose. Here are some suggestions to help ensure your institution or organization retains a high level of trust from current and prospective donors.

Whether you are raising funds for an annual campaign or for a capital, endowment or other campaign the process of building trust begins with how you define what you are raising money for. Gain consensus amongst leadership (board and executive) regarding how much money you seek to raise and how the funds will be used. Be specific. Measure your progress against the agreed upon goal.

Work with the development committee of the board to develop gift acceptance policies. These can help avoid future confusion. For example, how long are your pledge periods, and when do you write off uncollected pledges? How do you account for gifts of real estate?

Be specific when talking about fundraising progress. A donor may have given a verbal commitment for a large gift, but you can't include it in your fundraising total until it has been received or until you have a signed pledge agreement in place. The gift may not materialize.

Develop standardized fundraising reports that clearly communicate how much has been raised and for what purposes. Differentiate between pledges and actual funds received. When in the midst of a major fundraising campaign you are sure to receive multi-year pledges. These are vital, but they are also typically difficult to spend until the funds are received. Develop reports that show when pledge payments are expected to be received. These should match the terms of each pledge agreement.

When conducting a comprehensive campaign, list your fundraising priorities, and how much has been raised towards each. You may be able to reach or exceed your overall fundraising goal but may not have the funds you need to implement all stated priorities. This can occur when donors are inspired by a campaign and choose to make a restricted gift to a non-campaign priority. You should celebrate such gifts – but be careful how you include them in campaign accounting.

Remember – different people have different foci when it comes to counting money. Bring in the CFO, the CEO and your fundraising team and agree on how you will record and report on your fundraising. Be sure to reconcile fundraising reports with those produced by the finance office. Do this on a monthly basis.

If it sounds like we are focusing on small details, you are right. Don't claim a fundraising success you cannot substantiate – it can come back to haunt you.

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