

Development: What's in it for you?

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Abstract:

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to advocate for the importance of staff support for library development activities.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper discusses basic fund raising principles and how staff can contribute.

Findings – This article includes a success example.

Originality/value – The article is based on experiences of the author and persons mentioned to produce a successful fund raising campaign.

Article:

Activities related to Development and Fundraising has always been an important function for non-profit organizations to pursue, in order to meet the desires of the organization that are not met by the conventional revenue stream. In these tough economic times, those traditional streams of revenue have been hard pressed to keep up with existing liabilities and in most cases the last few years have seen a reduction or change to organizational missions and ability to serve constituencies. Libraries in particular have faced shortages, budget reductions and reduced funding that alters or inhibits the ability to meet patron needs as usual. This creates the opportunity for fundraising and development activities to become even more important so that the organization can continue to provide resources and services to its base set of patrons.

Libraries have numerous examples of opportunity areas related to developmental activities. In addition to replacing or supporting resource and service commitments that have been reduced, other important initiatives exist that help libraries maintain mission vision, relevant to the larger community and keeping up with emerging trends. Some examples could include:

- Develop or enhance special collections, manuscript collections, archives or unique items to the community or educational facility.

- Manage and maintain existing collections that have suffered from inflation and budget woes.
- Engage or provide access to new or continuation of electronic resources including the support needed for equipment and software with new technologies.
- Create and launch new programs and services that have been identified as needs in an ever changing user environment.
- Support for facility and building needs as it relates to use of space, furniture and furnishing as well as proper esthetics for user enjoyment.
- And finally support for staffing needs and the impact on service hours, professional expertise and physical abilities to support infrastructure and serve patrons.

Library Administration including Development Officers, Fundraisers and Campaigners need the support of everyone in the library to help meet the goals of fundraising and development activities. Although the majority of staff might believe that they have minimum exposure to donors or potential donors, the impact of staff can be significant. A thorough understanding of development activities and a good stewardship of the organization's assets, goals and objectives as well as the reputation and character of the libraries', can all be impacted by staff in their daily routines and actions.

So what is fundraising all about, what do staff need to know and how does this benefit them? As mentioned earlier, any given library can provide a list of needs that are not met by available funding but can make a huge impact in the strength of the organization. In seeking donors to help with those needs staff must also understand how vital they are to the organization mission. Staff should also be familiar with some fundraising basics principles in order to support this work either actively or behind the scenes.

In understanding the importance of fundraising it is appropriate to look at both sides of the equation. Fundraising support for libraries can become the difference between adequate resources and services and outstanding resources and services. This can add a layer of equipment, services, programs, resources and in the case of academic libraries scholarship and research possibilities that might not have been possible without the support of willing donors. Donors on the other hand also benefit from giving in many ways. Jerold Panas (often known as the guru of fundraising and development practices), in his book, *Asking*, explains that most donors are not giving away money but they are investing in a cause ([Panas, 2009](#)). They are interested in giving because their contributions can make a difference in the lives of others and that makes it a meaningful reason to support organizations that demonstrate the need.

How it works!

Identifying donors is the first step in a fundraising campaign. Emily Silverman, in her article, "Building your base: identifying library donors", discussed several strong possibilities for libraries ([Silverman, 2008](#)). This includes programming and developing a sustainable calendar of events that is consistent and of interest to possible donors within the community. Programming can include events such as lectures, readings, book discussions or signings, performances and receptions. It can also include exhibits and displays that feature specific collections or artists, which will rotate often to appeal to different interests and keep an atmosphere of freshness.

Silverman also discusses partnerships with other organizations that can attract potential donors. These alliances or collaborations within organizations can be appealing to donors who are looking for the status or feel of connectivity for their efforts. Panas considers such prospective donors to be affluent, influential and connected themselves within the community and thus the library has the opportunity to cultivate their own relationship through others. Robert G. Swanson in his book, *Fundraising Magic*, describes the success of this partnership and cultivation of donors as “magical”, the point in which a person is now connected to the library in a “new” way ([Swanson, 2007](#)).

Other ways, which are helpful in identifying new donors can include discussions and conversation within member groups created to support the library through leadership and consulting. These types of groups can include friends groups, boards for trustees or commissioners and advisory groups for providing advice on specific subject items. Not only can these people become donors, but they are also advocates for the library in identifying and cultivation additional donors by lending their credibility to the process. Another type of partnership within the university setting is sharing and coordinating events with other departments on campus, both academic and others such as museums and athletics. And it is important for the library to be included in any kind of larger organization annual fund program so that the library is an option and provides a foundation for future solicitations from donors interested in the library and its mission.

Challenges?

The library has some specific challenges to developing interested donors but this can be addressed by strategically planning for those challenges and seeing them as opportunities. For example, in an academic environment the library has no official alumni like other academic departments. The opportunity is treat the entire university community as potential donors as viewed as library constituents during their educational experience. This also means that the library could be competing with other departments on campus for the same donor attention so it is important to create a vision and communicate a mission that is appealing to donors and demonstrates the need for development activities.

Another challenge that the library could be faced with is other ways in which to develop leads and get people interested in giving to the library, especially in a down economy. This is where library image becomes very important and how evidence of need(s) can be demonstrated through assessment activities. In her article, “Staying positive in a down economy”, Emily Silverman addresses how image is critical to donor cultivation and compares library donors to sports fans, stressing that both want to support winning teams ([Silverman, 2009](#)). She also indicates that being forthright about tough economic impacts, but being able to pull the positive side out in conversation, is important to a potential donors perspective of how their investment could help. The idea is for a donor to be able to take pride in their contributions and know that it is meaningful.

Panas and Swanson both give good tips on the details of asking donors for money and development officers, as well as some library administrators, receive ongoing training in these details. Professional organizations exist to support these activities and provide professional

development and a critical review of trends that can affect these activities. And these organizations, such as the Association of Fundraising Professionals include documents such as a Donor Bill of Rights, a Code of Ethics and others that foster an ethical, quality environment to promote and support philanthropy and stewardship of how fundraising activities are approached to the benefit of the organization. What the fundraisers need is the support of the rest of the organization in producing and sustaining the type of environment that is worthy of receiving the benefit of donor contributions.

So how can you help?

All staff can play an important role in how a library is perceived from outsiders. Staff must understand and contribute to the development of fundraising goals and objectives and be able to communicate the needs as appropriate. The image of the library, the perceived good stewardship as well as trustworthiness, are all critical components to a donor and are important tools for any development officer, asking for money. Staff should also be able to articulate why giving to the library is more important than giving to a potential competitor on campus or in the community.

Library staff can also be the front line of identifying potential donors due to contact and interaction with individuals or groups that might have an expressed or focused interest in collections or services. This can provide an opportunity to express the need for additional funding in order to enhance those collections or services into something more substantial, moving from adequate to outstanding perhaps. Staff can also be consciously aware of development activities, such as programming or campaigns as well as looking out for potential donors who express an interest in pursuing particular needs. Connecting “persons of interest” with development officers or administrators is an extremely worthy enterprise.

A case in point

In October 2008, the University Libraries at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro conducted an all staff seminar on “The importance of development”. This was led by our development office Linda Burr and included a wide range of information about the basics of fundraising as well as the importance of these activities to our organization specifically. We were also in the middle of a Students First Campaign for the entire campus and the larger impact of what that campaign means to the campus was conveyed as well.

The University Libraries campaign goal was \$1.7 million and we are proud to say that \$2.25 million was raised overall. The types of gifts included naming opportunities, planned and outright major gifts, annual enrichment gifts as well as gifts generated through the Friends of the Libraries. Staff played an important role in this success and this has created a foundation for future campaigns and a strong foundation for development.

References

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