



UP NEXT MONTH:
Breakthrough Strategic
Planning



**VOLUNTEERS
WANT TO GIVE –
JUST ASK THEM!**

Many organizations hesitate to solicit volunteers, believing they have already given so much time that they couldn't possibly be asked for financial contributions. On the contrary, a volunteer's already-illustrated commitment to the organization reveals a greater likelihood to give financially. Phoenix-based Save the Family — through a communiqué aimed at volunteers — saw a 23-percent increase in giving as a result of volunteer solicitation. Take that first step to a healthy culture of giving: Ask your volunteers first.



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Creating a Culture of Philanthropy

While many nonprofits identify as having a strong culture of philanthropy, research reveals the concept is misunderstood

by Peter Smits and Richard Tollefson

► Ask five different executives sitting on nonprofit boards to define “culture of philanthropy,” and five different definitions will rise to the top. Board members may also differ in their opinion of the role they should play in building a culture of engagement and philanthropy within their nonprofit.

Clarity on these two points is essential, however; if organizations can define and measure the characteristics of their philanthropic culture, they can grow it. If boards understand their role in growing that culture, fundraising inevitably increases.

Fortunately, recent research is paving the way to a better understanding of culture of philanthropy. In a worldwide survey of nearly 400 chief university advancement officers conducted by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), 81 percent of respondents agreed to the following definition: A culture of philanthropy fosters relationships that share a common understanding, appreciation and responsibility for the importance of the joy of giving and receiving for the enhancement of the institution.

The study also pointed to 10 characteristics that define organizations with healthy philanthropic cultures (applicable to *all* nonprofit arenas, not just higher education). These institutions have strong organizational leadership, fundraising goals aligned with the institution's mission, a commitment to stewarding gifts, engaged volunteers and donors, clear and concise mission and vision statements, donors with capacity and interest in major gifts, quality programs that align with the organization's mission, opportunities for stakeholders to engage, quality reputations, and demonstrated need for philanthropic support.

Robust cultures of philanthropy clearly start with strong leadership, and nonprofit presidents/CEOs who lead well do so with the support of engaged boards. In fact, in the most successful philanthropic organizations, there is demonstrable engagement by the board in the fundraising process. First and foremost, board members contribute financially to the organization. In some instances, there is an expected “give and get” amount; in others, board members are asked to give an amount meaningful to them or indicative of their leadership role. A simple fact stands: If board members haven't contributed financially themselves, it is difficult to expect them to ask someone else for money.

Board members who are part of a healthy culture of philanthropy participate in the fundraising cycle in other ways as well. They:

- **Identify:** While they don't have to ask others directly for gifts, board members should assist in the identification of new prospects whose beliefs align with the nonprofit's mission.
- **Cultivate:** Board members should play a role in introducing prospective donors to the organization, taking them to activities or events sponsored by the nonprofit and introducing them to the leadership, services offered and clients served.



Solicit: Facilitating meetings with others who might support the nonprofit financially — and attending those initial visits alongside the nonprofit's president — is a key component of fundraising.

• **Steward:** Thanking donors for their generosity and keeping them engaged in the mission of the nonprofit is a key component of stewardship.

Executives who sit on healthy philanthropic boards also understand that *everyone* in the nonprofit is responsible for improving attitudes and behaviors toward fundraising — from the grounds crew and volunteers to vice presidents.

And they know it all starts with customer service: How are visitors greeted in person? How enthusiastic are employees about the organization's mission? How are phones answered? How quickly are questions from guests, volunteers, donors and prospects resolved? How does the organization treat the community members it serves? How does the board member speak about the institution to others — what uplifting stories does he share? Client- and constituent-centered approaches to daily operations repeatedly illustrate the strongest cultures of philanthropy.

Mark Stuart, president of The Foundation of San Diego Zoo Global, couldn't agree more and tells the story of a secretary whose enthusiasm for the zoo's aviary operations, quick response and ability to articulate the vision and mission of the institution led to a multi-million-dollar gift.

Locally, Thunderbird School of Global Management realized a multi-million-dollar endowed professorship because of the development staff's stewardship and enthusiasm toward a gift that larger, out-of-state business schools initially deemed insignificant.

In the end, healthy cultures of philanthropy come down to engagement: among volunteers, employees and even the people served by the nonprofit. Stakeholders — both internal and external — who understand an organization's clearly articulated mission and purpose, and see it effectively making an impact, respond most favorably to philanthropic requests because of their belief in the cause. ■



Boards with healthy cultures of philanthropy: 1) Hire CEOs who are good at fundraising and hold them accountable; 2) partner with the institution in developing long-range plans; and 3) ensure an adequate budget to support continued fundraising activities.



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