

Running a Successful Board Giving Campaign

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Why Your Non-Profit Needs an Organized Board Giving Campaign

While almost every non-profit I have worked with has recognized the need for their board members to lead the overall fundraising effort by making a donation, I have been surprised at just how many schools, churches, and charities fail to implement an organized “board giving campaign.”

Instead, these organizations mention that they would like board members to give... they may even include a line item in the budget for “board giving.” But instead of relying on a well thought out board giving strategy, their plan is simply to wait around and hope. This is a huge mistake. Every non-profit, no matter how small or large, *needs* to hold an annual board giving campaign to encourage 100% of their board members to make a general fund donation to the cause.

If your organization is not yet running a campaign like this – or are holding a less effective “informal” board giving effort, here are three reasons why your non-profit needs to launch a formal board giving campaign this year:

1. More Board Members Will Give, and Those That Do Will Give More

Do you know why annual fundraising events raise so much money for so many organizations? Because they are formal channels for giving that are well planned and organized. Development teams sit down, decide how much they want an event to raise, develop a plan for sponsors, tickets, silent auctions, etc., set a firm deadline (the date of the event) and publicize both their goal and the results of their efforts. This is a highly organized and planned event that encourages people to give.

Likewise, a formal board giving campaign that is well planned and well organized will encourage your board members to give... and will encourage those who already give to give more. The board will have a concrete goal and a set deadline, along with a formal ask. All three will combine to create a powerful incentive for board members to write a (larger) check.

2. You Will Encourage 100% Participation

Make sure that part of your plan for your board giving campaign is 100% participation (i.e. that every board member gives at least something to the organization). This is important because many donors, most foundations, and almost every major philanthropist will want to know that your board is fully invested in your mission before they themselves make a donation. The best way to show this is to be able to announce that your non-profit has a 100% board giving rate.

A formal board giving campaign is the best way to encourage 100% board participation.

3. It Takes the Pressure Off...

A formal board giving campaign takes the pressure off of your development staff when it comes to board fundraising. The best board giving campaigns involve the chairman of the board of directors making the primary ask of the board (even if this is through a letter). The board knows the goal, and sees progress... Thus, instead of spending all year waiting around dropping hints to the board, a board campaign allows the development staff to work with the chairman to set and publicize a goal, and to encourage board members to meet that goal... ideally, one they all vote to approve at a board meeting, which creates buy-in.

How to Run a Successful Board Giving Campaign

This is a formula that has been put into practice at hundreds of non-profit organizations, and is suitable for any non-profit launching (or re-organizing) it's board giving activities.

Step #1 – Get Board Buy-In

The first step for running a successful board giving campaign is to get buy-in from your board of directors. This step is often overlooked by non-profit development staffs, but is crucial to running a smooth and successful effort. Simply put, your board must “own” the board giving campaign if it is to reach its overall goal, which should be ambitious.

The best way to get board buy in is for the chairman and executive committee of the board to present the concept of an organized board giving campaign at a regularly scheduled board meeting. This discussion should occur at least one board meeting prior to the meeting where you launch the effort. Your chairman can explain why your non-profit is holding an organized board giving campaign, why board leadership is so important, and float a financial goal for the effort. The board should then be invited to discuss the campaign and the goal, and to vote to approve the plan.

It is imperative that your board chairman and/or executive committee take the lead in announcing the campaign – so important, in fact, that the success of your effort relies on it. Board giving campaign should be board-led. Very few board giving efforts are successful when the development director or other development staff are the ones announcing the campaign and doing the solicitations. The primary driver of the board giving campaign must be the chairman and other executive officers of the board.

Equally important is that your board vote on, and approve, an overall goal and timeline for the campaign. Board members must go on record stating their approval of the goal and the deadline by which it should be raised.

Step #2 – Officially Launch the Campaign

At the next board meeting (after the board votes to approve the campaign), your chairman should announce the official launch of the campaign, remind the board of the goal and the deadlines, and set a deadline for every board member to make a pledge. Board members should be invited to fill out a pledge form for their board gift and confidentially transmit it by mail, email, or fax back to the chairman of the board. Be sure to make provisions for board members who want to spread their gift payments out over time, or who want to pledge and pay through the United Way.

Step #3 – Letter from the Chairman

In the month following the official launch of the campaign, every board member should receive a letter from the chairman of the board, along with a blank pledge form, reminding them how important this campaign is to the overall mission of the charity, and reminding the board members to get their pledges back in as soon as possible.

Step #4 – Begin Regular Updates

After a significant number of pledges have been received, the organization should begin sending out monthly e-mail updates to the members of the board letting them know (a) how much has been pledged to date, (b) how much has been received to date, (c) what percentage of board members have made a pledge, and (d) what the average pledge amount is.

Give these numbers only in the aggregate. I have found that the strategy of “name and shame” doesn’t work well with board giving campaigns... that is, putting out a list of board members along with the size of their gift, and circulating it regularly, generally does not have the desired effect for board giving efforts.

Step #5 – Follow-Up Calls

Finally, as the deadline for pledges approaches, your board chairman should make follow-up calls to those members of the board who have not yet made their pledge, asking them to do so. Your goal should be 100% board participation in the board giving campaign, as well as successfully meeting the overall fundraising goal for the effort.

Remember... your board should take the lead in your fundraising efforts. Their participation in an organized board giving campaign will send a strong signal to others that this non-profit is well-run, stable, and poised to do great things.