

21 Elements for Creating a Fund Development Plan

Jennifer K. Pelton, CFRE and Linda Beeman, MBA, GPC

As we plan to raise the funds our organizations need to accomplish their missions, there is much to consider. This 360-degree tool is designed as a series of open-ended questions we think will spark conversation. It considers “development” to be the work that attracts revenue and attention to your mission. Some questions will be relevant for your organization, others not. Some may not be easy for your organization to answer right now but may give you something to reach for in the future. Some questions may bring up other questions for your planning team. Working through this will present your organization an opportunity to see where you are solid and where you could improve. Each section is divided into seven meta questions with sub-questions meant to flesh out your answers and inquire about related information. We designed the process and questions to serve to both reflect your strengths and to also ignite new ideas and offer new angles to view your fundraising responsibility. We welcome your feedback.

SECTION ONE: MATCHING THE ORGANIZATION’S CAPACITY AND PHILANTHROPIC CULTURE TO ITS VISION - 7 Elements

- 1. What are our fundraising expectations and are they reasonable?**
- 2. Where are we now? What is our current budget?**
 - a. Have we experienced recent, rapid growth or recent, rapid reductions? Why?
 - b. What’s our reputation in the area/region/city – with similar or ally organizations, with our donors, with consumers/clients?
 - c. Where is this organization heading? Where will we be in five years?
 - d. What is reasonable growth for our organization?
 - e. Are our values reflected in our budget and in our plan to attract funds?
- 3. What is our organization’s philanthropic culture?**
 - a. How do we treat donors? Do they feel welcome? How do we show our appreciate to donors at different giving levels?
 - b. What is our organization’s history with regard to diversified fundraising?
 - i. Is this appropriate to geographic location and mission? (Think about ranges or donor types, levels of giving, vehicles used to attract support, age, race, gender, so forth.)
 - c. Who do/Who could we invite to help plan, implement and analyze our fundraising and community engagement progress?
 - d. Does our organization have a “black eye” or “skeletons in our closet”? Will these adversely impact our fundraising efforts? How can we improve our work around the situation?
- 4. Is our Development Team equipped to succeed?**

Development Staff:

 - a. Do we have fundraising staff? How many? What are their roles? How are all of these roles covered? Is staffing adequate to meet expectations?
 - b. Does the Executive Director help with fundraising and what does this look like? Is she tied to her desk? Out with donors? A mix of both?

- c. Are development staff members adequately trained to do the work expected of them?
- d. Do our fundraisers have access to the board? Are they included as participants at the board meetings? Do they staff board committees?
- e. Do our fundraisers have access to donors? Are they restricted from talking to specific people? Is this appropriate for our short- and long-term goals?
- f. Do our fundraisers have a network to support them? (i.e. AFP, mentors, dream team of other fundraisers, consultants.)

Board:

- g. Is our board equipped to succeed?
- h. Do they give their own personal gift (not just something they get from employer?)
- i. How do we invite our Board to give?
- j. Do they ask others to give?
- k. What have been the expectations of the Board around fundraising? What was said to them at recruitment?
- l. Are they trained to raise money (at orientation and in subsequent sessions)?
- m. What kind of ongoing skill building do they participate in?
- n. What sort of staffing support do our volunteer fundraisers receive? How is our organization investing in their success at raising money?
- o. How do board members demonstrate their commitment to the organization via attendance/participation/term limits/recruiting/attracting and engaging others?

5. Do our fundraising goals tie in to our organization's strategic plan and/or our programs' annual work plans?

- a. Tier One = We need this to accomplish our basic program objectives. (The amount we need to raise.)
- b. Tier Two = If we stretch and raise more than our goal, what could be possible?
- c. If we don't meet our goals, what will happen? Do we have the flexibility to fill shortfalls? If we need to add an event or extra mailing are we prepared? How do we plan for these contingencies?

6. Will we spend money to raise money?

- a. Have the funds been allocated/budgeted?
- b. Does our budget match our expectations/goals? (Are we willing to upgrade what we spend in order to elevate our results in a particular campaign/vehicle?)
- c. Are you, as a professional, empowered to lead or make suggestions for growth versus implementing same old strategies? How?
- d. (Examples) MAIL CAMPAIGNS: printing, writer, design, postage, etc.
- e. (Examples) EVENTS: event planner, venue, food, entertainment, sound system, etc.

7. What is the role of program (staff and consumers) in fundraising?

- a. Beneficiaries/Consumers/Clients: Are we including them as volunteers, welcoming them as donors, and providing opportunities for them to choose to be both?
- b. Is fundraising an afterthought/extra burden? Or is it integrated into the work of the program?
- c. What is expected with regard to fundraising of the staff who deliver programs? Has that been clearly communicated to them? Do they understand why their role is important? (i.e. their perspective is interesting to donors; their paychecks rely on participation.)

- d. How do they participate? Grant report writing? Donor visits? Pipeline of inspiring stories re: mission? What is appropriate level of participation in these three areas (balance between fundraising and delivery of programs)?
- e. Are program staff trained and supported to succeed in the fundraising role(s) we ask them to play?

SECTION TWO: CREATING OUR PLAN AND UNDERSTANDING WHAT RESOURCES WE HAVE AND NEED - 7 Elements

1. What vehicles (methods, strategies) will we use to attract funds?

- a. What vehicles have we used previously and how have they performed for our organization?
- b. How are our organization's values reflected in how we raise money and whom we solicit?
- c. Do we have a gift acceptance policy and does it offer guidance on how to avoid inappropriate vehicles and gifts? (Example: high school for students in recovery chooses not to accept contributions from charitable liquor distributors.)
- d. What vehicles can we use with the staff/volunteer capacity we currently have? How do our vehicles match with the different donor segments? (Example: promoting monthly giving with younger professionals; planned giving for loyal donors.)
- e. Are there new donor constituencies we could reach? What vehicles would be appropriate?

2. What supplemental activities could support/enhance our current fundraising strategies?

- a. Where can we experiment with new ideas or adjust to reach new goals? (Time e-appeals to support direct mail campaign; add flyers to race bags, etc.)
- b. Are there ways we can demonstrate our expertise in the field that relate to solicitation messages? (Share newspaper articles about relevant topics with donors, etc.)
- c. How do we share our expertise with the outside world? What activities can we participate in that would elevate the organization's credibility? (i.e. publish an OpEd piece; become a "go-to expert in the field" for donors, foundations, media, etc.; accept invitations to speak about a given topic)?

3. How will we lay out our work over a specific timeline?

- a. What are the dates of our fiscal year?
- b. What is our business cycle? Do we have specific financial needs at certain points of the year?
- c. Do we have to work around any constraints? (United Way black out dates, key personnel commitments such as working in a legislative session, expected parental leave, holidays or vacations?) Are there certain times of the year when key people will be less productive or available to support development efforts?
- d. What opportunities exist within our organization's work for new strategies or collaborations to raise money (milestone anniversaries, major victories, launching new programs, etc.)?
- e. What internal opportunities present themselves? (Examples: theater company production schedule, advocacy organization's legislative rhythm.)
- f. What external opportunities present themselves? (Examples: author writes bestseller about our main issue, news item brings attention to our cause, there is a disaster, etc.)

- i. Do we keep current on relevant issues and look for ways to connect our mission/story to the current social dialogue? Is there a system in place to review periodicals, Google alerts, etc.? Do we regularly participate in trainings? Are we part of a large group of organizations with similar goals?

4. Have we built benchmarks into our timeline?

- a. Are we measuring cumulative to year-end progress throughout the timeline?
- b. How do we know if we are on target to achieve goals or whether we will fall short?
- c. Have we provided opportunities for contingencies or mid-stream corrections?

5. Who is assigned to do what?

- a. How are responsibilities for implementing vehicles dispersed? (Committees? In-house staff? Volunteers? Consumer/clients?)
- b. Are people clear about what they are expected to accomplish?
- c. Who leads and who makes decisions?
- d. How are we building the skill set of the people (staff and volunteer) who are expected to implement the work?
- e. Do we need additional expertise such as from a consultant or mentor?
- f. How do we work as a team? How could we do better?
- g. Are we allocating personnel resources appropriate to our goals?

6. What is the state of our donor list?

- a. Do we have a database and do we have the expertise to use it well?
- b. Is our data clean? Current?
- c. Can we easily segment our donor lists? (i.e. Current year, last year, lapsed? Or by demographics or interests?)
- d. What do we know/need to know about our donors (Type? Loyalty? Motivation? Relationships?)
- e. What would we like to know but don't? How can we learn?
- f. Do we have the tools to define the capacity of our donors to continue or increase giving?
- g. Does our team have appropriate access to the information they need? Do volunteers have access to data or is it channeled through a professional?

7. What other resources do we need in order to be successful?

- a. What is our budget for implementing fundraising strategies?
 - i. Do we create fundraising plan at the same time as we create organizational budget?
 - ii. What is the total allocated for our fundraising strategies?
 - iii. How is it parsed out across strategies? How do we measure: Gross revenue? Net goal? Fundraising costs? (Budget for each vehicle)
- b. What mission-connected stories do we have to tell to inspire and engage?
- c. Where are our resource gaps? How can we fill them?

SECTION THREE: MEASURING PROGRESS AND PLANNING NEXT STEPS - 7 Elements

- 1. What are the tangible quantitative goals we want to measure (basic and advanced)? What are the industry standards for an organization of our age, size and/or type?**
 - a. BASIC
 - i. Number of donors
 - ii. Number of prospective donors added/reached
 - iii. Dollars raised
 - iv. Number of volunteers
 - v. Press coverage/hits
 - vi. Number of collaborations
 - vii. Number of consumers/clients served because of funds raised
 - viii. Number of additional funding sources
 - b. ADVANCED
 - i. Percentage of lapsed versus recaptured donors
 - ii. Upgraded gift amounts
 - iii. Frequency of gifts
 - iv. Trends of giving
 - c. What goals can we reach for in this next year? What structures are required in our database in order to meet this future goal?

- 2. What are the qualitative benefits of our success/progress?**
 - a. Have we been able to add or experiment with new or improved fundraising vehicles (i.e. planned giving program, endowment campaign, impact of social media presence)?
 - b. Are the volunteers or board members more engaged and participating in the fundraising efforts? How?
 - c. How has the public perception/awareness of our mission expanded? Why do we think this expansion was possible?
 - d. Are our donors more connected to the purpose of our organization? Did we help them deepen their understanding of why our organization must exist? How?
 - e. What stories have come out that we can use to benefit our mission?
 - f. How is staff morale? Staff burnout?
 - g. How is board morale? Board burnout?
 - h. We achieved success but at what opportunity cost? (Especially consider this with events and other time intensive methods.)
 - i. What qualitative measurements matter for this and next year?

- 3. Do we have a method for measuring progress/benchmarks on a regular basis so we can adjust our plan as needed?**
 - a. If we didn't achieve a certain result, but other good came from the effort, will we try again next year? Do we need to replace it with something else?
 - b. Did one vehicle fall short and do we need to add another effort to meet the shortfall?
 - c. What are we learning as we experiment with new ideas and trends?
 - d. Are we building measurement into vehicles (i.e. on-site surveys at events)? Are we still on good terms with venues/contractors/consultants/donors, etc.?
 - e. What and when do we need to measure next year?

4. **What are we doing this year that we can build on next year (or in subsequent plans?)**
 - a. How can we improve on our own individual abilities to make helpful connections and to raise funds (i.e. improved skillsets, more comfortable with new methods, deeper expertise.)
 - b. How can we improve on our volunteers abilities to make helpful connections and to raise funds? (i.e. improved skillsets, better staff support, more information.)
 - c. How can we improve on our organization's capacity to attract and sustain funds (i.e. image, additional partners, advanced credibility)?
 - d. What do we need to add to next year's plan?

5. **[POST IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION] Did we meet our goals?**
 - a. Did we meet our minimum "must raise" goals? If not, why did we fall short?
 - b. What did/would stretch our capacity to raise more than our goal?
 - c. At what point in our fiscal year did we reach our goals and what does this tell us about our plan?
 - d. How does this inform our planning for next year?

6. **[POST IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION] How did this development plan help the organization advance toward its strategic goals?**
 - a. Did we raise the funds necessary to increase services, offer more scholarships, serve more hungry children?
 - b. Did we increase visibility of mission? Of the services we offer?
 - c. What did we do to increase the awareness that potential donors have of our mission? (i.e. media partnership with an industry paper?)
 - d. What did we do to increase the awareness that potential consumers/clients have of our services?
 - e. What are our follow-up activities in the next year's plan?

7. **[POST IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION] How did we grow the sustainability of the organization?**
 - a. Are things better than when we started?
 - b. How did we support the advancement of the greater issue/cause?
 - c. How did we contribute to the local/regional/national/international dialogue about the issues that concern our consumers and clients?
 - d. Have our values or mission evolved over the year?
 - e. What are our priorities next year?

Authors:

Jennifer K. Pelton, CFRE

(740)739-3356

jenniferkpelton@gmail.com

Linda K. Beeman, MBA, GPC

(713)398-9711

linda@auroragrants.com