

TIPS to Help Your Organization

Things to do during the recession (actually all the time!)

Board engagement

1. Engage your board members more.
 - a. Convene a special retreat with the board to talk about what's happening. (Alternate approach: Incorporate into regular board meetings – but make sure people commit sufficient time.)
 - i. Focus of retreat: Providing information to build knowledge and stimulate dialogue.
 - ii. Provide information from *Giving USA* and the Philanthropic Giving Index from the IUPUI Center on Philanthropy – and other insightful, useful sources. Fundraisers should be sharing this information – and discussing trends and implications – with agency staff and board regularly, no matter the economy.
 - iii. Provide comparative data from your own organization and your donors. (Make sure you're sharing more than just quantitative information.)
 - iv. Get all the tough questions on the table. Talk together. Create a shared understanding of what good fund development is – and what needs to be done over the next 12 – 24 months to keep you on track (with good fund development) and ready for the turnaround whenever it happens.
2. Engage trustees through conversation and strategic dialogue at board meetings.
 - a. Conversation is a core business practice¹. Engaging trustees and staff in meaningful conversation – focused on strategic issues – builds understanding and participation.
 - b. What are the strategic questions your leadership needs to ask – and discuss – re: philanthropy?
3. Engage board members more and more. And other volunteers, too. The more the merrier. Share stories with them. Use their talents effectively. Thank them lots. And give them all the good enabling you can to get the work done. See handout about enabling on Joyaux website. Too many fundraisers do this too poorly. A great fundraiser is a great enabler of volunteers and staff colleagues.
4. Adopt a job description for the board. There isn't much mystery to this. And there isn't much discussion about what corporate governance is. See sample board job description at www.simonejoyaux.com. Click on Resources / Free Library / Board Development.
5. Adopt performance expectations applicable to all board members. There isn't much mystery to this either. See sample performance expectations for the individual board member at www.simonejoyaux.com. Click on Resources / Free Library / Board Development.
6. Meet personally with each board member to ensure that s/he understands the performance expectations, whether these are the same or different than their original understanding or commitment. And make sure that every single board member understands s/he is expected to give a gift to the best of personal ability, help identify the predisposed and qualify them as prospects, nurture relationships, and solicit gifts.

¹ This is straight from Peter Senge and learning organization and systems thinking theories. The leadership team – at the staff and board levels – design information and meetings to engage participants in strategic dialogue. Through strategic dialogue, people learn and change – and that changes the organization.

7. Develop a menu of fund development choices that include relationship building and solicitation. Meet personally with each board member to make choices and commit to moving forward. Then follow-up and enable them well. See Joyaux handout on enabling – and the chapter in *Strategic Fund Development: Building Profitable Relationships That Last*.
 - a. Ideas for that menu you can offer to board members
 - i. Give a personal financial charitable contribution annually (all board members)
 - ii. Help identify those who might be predisposed to supporting your agency's cause (all board members)
 - iii. Make thank-you telephone calls to donors annually (all board members)
 - iv. Serve on various task forces / committees to support fund development (e.g., help plan and execute cultivating gatherings and fundraising events; define broad strategies for relationship building and solicitation; develop recognition strategies; etc.)
 - v. Host cultivation gatherings (e.g., board members take turns hosting them at the institution; board members also host these gatherings in their own homes or offices)
 - vi. Schmooze with donors at the institution's programs, activities, fundraising events, etc.
 - vii. Write personal notes on solicitation letters.
 - viii. Take on one-on-one cultivation assignments with specific donors.
 - ix. Personally solicit prospects and donors face-to-face (e.g., for gifts, sponsorships, etc.)
 - x. Write personal thank-you notes to donors.

Management / staff

8. Evaluate your chief development officer – and make sure that all development staff is evaluated. Now is actually the time to change poor-performing staff. And poor-performing staff is not about how much money is raised. There's so much more to it. Get the right people on the bus, as Jim Collins says.
9. Examine (and as necessary, revise) your charitable contributions goals (e.g., in your budget). Did you set these with due consideration to all the various criteria? Or, is this how much you want and need (which, I maintain is the least important criteria). See Joyaux blog about setting charitable contributions goals.

Relationship building and donor centrim

10. Make sure your institution is donor-centered. For example, discuss the Donor-Centric Pledge (DCP) with everyone – trustees and staff. You'll find the DCP posted in the Free Library at www.simonejoyaux.com. How well is your organization currently performing? Does your fund development program meet the standards stated in the DCP? Why or why not? What improvements can you make now, immediately? What's the plan to make those improvements?
11. Evaluate your relationship-building program. Expand it. Make it better and stronger and more donor-centered. Consider core elements like communications, acknowledgement, recognition, and cultivation. And don't forget research – in the sector and about your own donors. Joyaux blogs list lots of research sources. Have you read *Giving USA: The Annual Report on Philanthropy*? It's research findings are useful. And it lists lots of top research for each year.
 - a. How well do you know your donors? How much information do you have about your best donors (and best doesn't just mean money. How about regularity and frequency of giving? What else?) Find out more. Now. This is a great way to involve trustees and other volunteers.
 - b. Find out more about your donors by meeting with them. Yes, right now. This is a great time to reach out more and better. Remember, this is not a presentation about your institution. You are asking questions and listening.
 - i. Host focus groups to gather qualitative information. How about these topics for focus groups: evaluating a recent fundraising event; identifying how donors want to be recognized; testing

- key communications messages; discussing cultivation strategies; identifying topics for your donor newsletter.
- ii. Host one-on-one private meetings. Actually, you should do both regularly. Yes, this is a great time. Remember this is a conversation, listening to the donor. (Get board members to help.)
 - iii. Conduct a written self-administered donor survey. (See Sargeant's sample questions in *Building Donor Loyalty*. See sample in *Keep Your Donors* by Ahern and Joyaux.)
- c. Do you make thank-you calls to donors once per year? That's okay but it's best to make the calls within 2 – 3 days of gift receipt. Who makes the call? Staff only? It's best if trustees make the calls. Once per week, send out a list of donors (and their telephone numbers) so board members can call. Don't include the gift amount; that doesn't matter. See Penelope Burk's research about donor thank-you calls and letters.
 - d. How effectively do your board members schmooze at your programs, fundraising events, any time there are donors and prospective donors present? Make your schmoozing better. Take advantage of every single opportunity to thank donors, ask their opinions, and find out their feelings and interests.
 - e. Host regular gatherings with donors – low cost. Maybe quarterly coffee and muffin at your facility to hear an insider update about what's happening.
 - f. And, as previously noted in this document, your board members can host gatherings at their homes or places of business to introduce the predisposed to the institution and discuss community needs.
12. How effective is your story telling? After all, that's what fundraising is: telling stories about how donor gifts made it possible to ... produce a result. See Tom Ahern's work on donor-centered communications, www.aherncomm.com.
- a. Tell donors why their gifts matter. Be specific.
 - b. Tell donors what you're doing to better manage costs and still provide quality service in these tough economic times. Be more specific.
 - c. Ask donors to help. Don't use generalities!
 - d. Make sure you collect donor stories – and then share them in newsletters and solicitations.
13. How about interviewing all your bequest donors? Keep their stories forever for your organization's history. Give the donor a copy to share with his / her family. Do you realize how powerful this is?
14. Evaluate your written communications, e.g., your donor newsletter and anything else you send to donors. Most organizations can make immediate improvements. And then donors may actually read what you send them.
- a. Staff does this using Colin Wheildon's readability research and the donor-centered communications standards articulated by Tom Ahern². Tom did the work for all of us. He read hundreds / thousands of books and examples and put it all together in one place. Remember, this is donor-centered communications, not corporate communications.
 - b. How often do you send your donors updates about how their gifts are used – and the difference those gifts make? Maybe you do a quarterly donor newsletter. Add one more issue. If that's too much work, keep the quarterly newsletter. Then add a couple "insider update" letters or emails (only if they give you permission). Be in touch more without asking for money.
15. Create an exclusive program to bond with first-time donors. It costs about 10 times more money to acquire a donor than it does to retain one. And second gifts are darn hard to get. See Merkle's (www.merkleinc.com) research and recommendations for this. So does *Keep Your Donors*.

² See Tom's books listed in Resources, pages 2 and 3 of this handout. Check out Wheildon's research at www.aherncomm.com.

Soliciting gifts

16. If you don't already do face-to-face solicitation³ every single year, then this is the moment to start it. Sitting down face-to-face with a donor or prospect is the best way to nurture a relationship and to solicit a gift. Start now with a few donors / prospects and a few volunteers. Then grow it every year.
17. Launch a monthly giving program. Canadian organizations have good monthly giving programs. So do other countries. Not so much in the U.S. Harvey McKinnon of Vancouver, B.C., Canada is an expert. Get his book, *Hidden Gold*, and then do it.
18. Multiple specialists (including Jerry Huntsinger⁴) tell us to increase the number of mailings to the most productive segments of the donor list. (And by the way, I recommend at least 3 direct mail solicitations per year to your direct mail segment – even those who've already given. Use different themes, not the old and tired and uninteresting “give to our annual fund appeal”! I debunk the “annual fund” in my blog and in *Keep Your Donors*.)
 - a. Huntsinger also says, “start using higher suggested gift amounts. Try a 50% increase in suggested dollar amounts. In your copy, tie the reason for that to the recession.”
19. Get Mal Warwick's book *Fundraising When Money is Tight: A Strategic and Practical Guide to Surviving Tough Times and Thriving in the Future*. For release by Jossey-Bass in March 2009.
20. How do you measure the effectiveness of your fund development? Measures are even more important now, when the economy is tough.
 - a. Unfortunately, traditional measures focus on money. What message does that send to your institution and to your donors?
 - b. And even when you measure money, do you measure lifetime value of your donors? See Sargeant's research in *Building Donor Loyalty*.
 - c. Measure your relationship-building program. Engage boards in discussion of measures and why those matter. See sample measures in the Free Library at www.simonejoyaux.com. See *Keep Your Donors*.
 - d. Evaluate the productivity and cost effectiveness of your current solicitation strategies. Figure out how to make improvements and make them.
21. How involved are you with e-philanthropy? Now is the time for more web 2.0. Read some of the Pew research about use of the Internet. Check out Ted Hart's books on e-philanthropy. Ted is probably the person who coined the term – an early user, adopter, and leader in social networking and all things e-philanthropy. www.tedhart.com.

What NOT to do in these tough times. What would you add?

1. Cut fundraising expenses.
2. Reduce solicitations.
3. Avoid asking people for money . . .

³ When I was a chief development officer at a \$3.5 million theatre company, I developed and managed an annual face-to-face solicitation campaign. Seventy-five (75) volunteers (only 10 of whom were trustees) personally solicited 500 individual and corporate prospects each year.

⁴ Jerry Huntsinger, freelance writer “A contrarian approach to coming out of a recession.”