

# What Is the Board's Role in Fund-Raising?

by Robert Andringa



Many boards expect members to make annual financial gifts appropriate to their means. They are

expected to encourage others to give as well. Believe it or not, we know board members whose first love is raising money for the organizations they serve. In today's world, every board should have at least a few members who want to work with staff to generate contributions.

Remember, the board, as the corporate entity, holds ultimate responsibility for strategy, a capable staff, and adequate resources. Most organizations depend heavily on staff to assist the board in these functions, but the board cannot legally or morally opt out of any of them. Let's look at some specific roles of board members in fund-raising.

**1. Give generously.** When board members show their personal commitment to give, others will follow. One useful rule of thumb is to expect every member, as a matter of policy, to be a "donor of record" every year—to have made a duly recorded contribution to the ministry. Potential board members should know about this policy before they are elected to serve. During the year, the board should receive information on how much has been raised from the board and how many of its members have given to date. The amounts are not as

important as the fact of giving. Foundations, government agencies, and individual donors will be impressed when your organization can report: "Every board member has donated this year."

Many boards require specific contributions as a condition of board service. While all board members should not be expected to be "heavy hitters," it is fairly common for large ministries to be honest with potential board members that giving or raising a certain amount each year is one of the expectations.

**2. Approve plans and goals tied to the organization's mission.** The board that takes its responsibilities for mission seriously puts its ministry in a stronger position to seek funds from outside sources. As part of its fund-raising responsibility, the board should pay close attention to the nature of the organization's mission and whether it needs review or revision. Fund-raising policies, plans, and goals should be tied closely to the mission, and it is up to the board to make sure this happens.

**3. Establish policies to guide fund-raising.** Written parameters, established by the board, should guide fund-raising. When creating policies, consider the following questions:

- Are there strategies the board does not want staff to pursue?
- What ethical standards should be followed?

- How much of the future budgets should depend on outside giving?
- Does the board want to apply for government grants and contracts?
- What is the maximum percentage of the budget does the board want to spend on fund-raising?

Boards should not get carried away with details. Just provide wise direction for staff.

**4. Select and encourage a development-savvy chief executive.** It is a given that chief executives spend a good deal of time raising money. But everyone needs help. Board members can pitch in with both time and advice. They can also encourage a chief executive to pursue education and training in this area. The board's affirmation of the chief executive—in fund-raising as well as in other areas—sends positive signals to

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*"When I was recruited for the board, no one mentioned I would have to give and get money."*

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staff and constituents and can often translate into fund-raising success.

**5. Recruit a few board members willing to raise funds.** The network of contacts board members bring to a ministry helps immensely in fund-raising. Be straightforward about recruiting prospective members who match a profile of the talents and experiences your board members need. These rare people can do things even the best chief executive can seldom do.

**6. Volunteer to help.** All board members can volunteer a few

hours to do what they do best. Offer many options, and let individual board members select one or two tasks. For example, board members might host a luncheon, sell tickets to an event, sign letters to people they know, and make follow-up thank-you calls to donors. Sometimes, board members who are not major donors are good at bringing enthusiastic support to the volunteer work that goes into reaching goals.

**7. Evaluate your efforts.** Board members often represent a sample of the contributor profile, so they are in a good position to evaluate which fund-raising strategies work within a particular community and which ones do not. Staff members can be too close to the fund-raising process to evaluate the results objectively. Approaches that work well at first have a tendency to continue beyond their effectiveness. Regular informal evaluation helps prevent unfortunate situations like that of the ministry that determined it was spending \$75,000 each year in staff and materials to raise approximately \$60,000 in its annual gifts campaign.

**Summary.** Most organizations have a few primary strategies for developing resources. Identify those strategies that fit your ministry and then invite each board member to select one, two, or three of the areas in which he or she would feel most comfortable assisting.

Every board member should be involved in generating resources. There is a productive role for everyone in fund-raising, and there is great satisfaction in contributing to the ministry in this way. ©

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