

What Can You Do When Board Members Are Unwilling to Make the Ask?

Board members — when appropriately recruited and trained — can be among a nonprofit organization's strongest fundraising assets. But remember: The very best time to engage board members in fundraising on behalf of your organization is *before* they join the board. If, during the recruitment process, you haven't made it clear that your board members are expected to give and get, don't be surprised if they don't see this as part of their job! Board members should be willing to:

- Give personally
- Introduce others to the organization
- Solicit funding from others on behalf of the organization

Determining a prospective board member's level of comfort with asking for money is an important step in evaluating them as a candidate for service on your governing body. And it helps you avoid having a board filled with individuals who are too uncomfortable to make the ask.

Existing board members

What if your organization's board is already in place and members were not recruited with an eye to their capacity to give and get? Even as you conduct targeted recruitment for the future, how do you fine-tune the fundraising skills of *current* board members?

- First, if these individuals are not fully versed in the board's role in fundraising, take time to educate your board about best practices and about *why* board engagement in fundraising is essential.
- You might also work with individual board members or with the board's Fund Development Committee to establish board giving and involvement policies for approval by the full board. Directors will be more effective and more credible solicitors once they have made their own commitments.

But even if some of your board members are not comfortable asking their contacts to support the organization, there are ways they can help. Try to identify alternatives for these board members' involvement. As you empower them to help in ways that are comfortable for them, they're learning how to become fundraising board members — and may even gain enough confidence to start soliciting others in the future.

Here are a few of the ways we suggest to involve board members who are reluctant to make the ask:

- *Introducing friends to your organization through an event.* Inviting friends to join them at event table they've sponsored may be a comfortable first step for some

board members. Be sure to work with these board members on post-event follow-up, with the goal of building relationships beyond the event itself.

- *Holding intimate friend-raising events at their own homes.* When a board member's inner circle gathers to hear from your organization's inner circle, you are building connections for future follow-up. (Don't forget to follow up!)
- *Engaging contacts with funding institutions.* Ask board members to identify their connections with local foundations and work with them to leverage these connections to support your grant requests. Then, be sure to recognize these board members for their outreach on your behalf. It's not only polite; it may encourage others to do likewise!
- *Introducing prospective corporate sponsors.* Ask directors to help connect you with their professional communities. They may be familiar with businesses you haven't yet engaged.
- *Provide prospect information to guide outreach and stewardship.* Even when a board member is not comfortable making the ask, s/he may provide valuable background information about prospects. This can in turn help you identify who *is* the right solicitor — and allow you further customize your outreach.