

Whittier Trust Senior Vice President of Philanthropic Services Pegine Grayson shares “Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Grantseekers.”

Are there any common “mistakes” that nonprofits make when trying to solicit funding or conducting outreach to funders?

I recently gave a talk to a convening of nonprofit grantseekers entitled “The Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Grantseekers.” Here are the top seven missteps I described that hamper nonprofits’ success in raising funds:

1. Not having the right executive director and development director in place.
The best ones are:
 - Prepared.
 - Creative.
 - Excellent communicators AND good listeners.
 - Knowledgeable about their organization and the community it serves.
 - Passionate about the mission.
 - Responsive.
 - Full of warmth and humanity.
 - Sensible and polite.
2. Believing (as board members) that you’re too busy, important or irrelevant to participate in site visits. Funders need to see board engagement and it affords directors a perfect opportunity to witness your executive leader in action and sing his or her praises in a way s/he can’t do for her/himself (see # 1 above).
3. Failing to be proactive about explaining problematic financials. Don’t make funders call to ask. Instead, draft an explanatory paragraph that accompanies the information you submit and that reassures the funder that the remedy is well in hand.
4. Failing to use your board members’ connections to support your grant proposals.
5. Missing the forest for the trees — failing to make effective use of storytelling and getting too bogged down with data and statistics.
6. Failing to recognize the power of board/volunteer outreach. Fully 95 percent of the solicitations we receive are from staff. The requests and calls that come directly from board members really get our attention.
7. Assuming your development staff and/or board members know all of this already.