



Sustainable Fundraising

Organizations that build strong relationships, establish a plan and use their resources wisely will develop a sustainable fundraising function that will enjoy the benefits of this golden age of philanthropy.

By Angela Byrne, CMA

Although competition is fierce, according to a report published by TD Economics¹, we are entering a golden age of philanthropy. Not only are baby boomers expected to receive a large amount of wealth from their parents but they have made significant wealth on their own. This is good news for non-profit organizations that rely on fundraising to support their mandate.

However, in many organizations, fundraising activities are not realizing their potential. Many organizations struggle to raise funds and often targets fall short. Fundraising events start to become stale and volunteers slowly drift away or burn out.

In order to develop fundraising into a sustainable function, 3 steps must be taken.

1. Build Strong Relationships

Building relationships is the most critical element to sustainable fundraising. The strength of these relationships will have a direct impact on donations. Experience indicates that those who feel they are involved and a part of the organization also feel a financial responsibility.

According to Donna Messer², trust is the foundation stone of long-term relationships. You build your credibility one conversation at a time and develop trust by following through with people. This is echoed by the Association of Fundraising Professionals³, who identifies two critical ways to build trust with donors: one, provide evidence of what

contributions have accomplished and two, abide by high levels of accountability. This means telling people how you will use the money raised and then reporting back to them on what actually happened.

2. Establish a Plan

Sustainable fundraising requires a plan. The plan should be grounded in a fundraising strategy that complements the mission of the organization. It should expand beyond the current year and determine objectives for the next 2 to 3 years. Although financial objectives are important, non-financial objectives such as raising awareness are equally important. Activities are then identified that support the achievement of the objectives.

Organizations that are successful at fundraising deliberately implement diversity in their events. Hosting the same event by the same people year after year will eventually drive away both supporters and volunteers. In most cases, events need to change after three years. This may involve hosting a new event or making significant changes to an existing event.

It is also important to refresh the staff and volunteers who organize the event. Rotating volunteers and staff often generates new ideas and new ways of doing things. The intent is to ensure events and volunteers are fresh and exciting.

3. Use Resources Wisely

Fundraising relies heavily on volunteers to perform numerous tasks. Sustainable fundraising requires taking good care of them. This requires

building strong relationships and getting to know your volunteers. Only then can you truly provide your volunteers with a valuable experience that makes the best use of their talents.

There are many different types of fundraising activities; however, some will cost more than others. Sustainable fundraising requires careful consideration of each event to ensure the benefits exceed the costs.

Most organizations will itemize the out-of-pocket costs but fail to consider the cost of staff and volunteer time to organize and host the event. The cost benefit of an event should include a time estimate. Preference should be given to those activities that can raise the most money with the least amount of time. This approach will allow you to focus on those events that generate the greatest return.

Organizations that build strong relationships, establish a plan and use their resources wisely will develop a sustainable fundraising function that will enjoy the benefits of this golden age of philanthropy.

¹ TD Bank Financial Group, "Greying of Canada's Population Has Far Reaching Implications for Charities", TD Economics Special Report, November 22, 2006

² "Effective Networking Strategies", Donna Messer, p. 40

³ [Association of Fundraising Professionals](http://www.aofp.org)

Angela Byrne, CMA & Associates, has a proven track record of helping organizations by providing expertise in the areas of internal audit, risk management, business transformations, project management, and operational reviews. To learn more about how Angela and her team can help your organization succeed, visit our website at [Angela Byrne, CMA & Associates](http://www.angela-byrne.com). You can also reach Angela at (519) 284-0321 or by e-mail at info@angelabymecma.com