Create a Philanthropic Culture in Your Nonprofit

While all nonprofits depend to some extent on philanthropic support, not all are successful at raising funds. The primary difference is the presence, or absence, of a philanthropic culture.

As I work with organizations across the country, I see them struggle with some of the same issues — boards that don't raise money, program staff who refuse to share their lists or give leads, donors whose gift of money is valued more than their input, development offices with imposed and almost impossible goals, and CEOs who say they'll help with fundraising but only show up for the recognition dinners.

When the job of fundraising belongs to only a few people, philanthropy cannot thrive. To raise the kind of resources that today's organizations will need in the future, you must have a carefully crafted philanthropic culture.

How important is organizational culture to a nonprofit? Culture is simply the way people think and behave. It dictates why and how things get done. It's characterized by the values and actions of the people

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Characteristics of a Philanthropic Culture

▼ There is an interdisciplinary development team.
▼ Everyone has contact with donors.
▼ Donors are valued, not for their money alone, but for their input.
▼ Development costs are seen as an investment.
▼ A volunteer from the target group heads campaigns.
▼ Donors receive funding reports, in addition to recognition and appreciation.
▼ Personalized communications have replaced boilerplates.
▼ Tension and conflict are challenged, not ignored.
▼ There is more than cooperation — there is true collaboration.
▼ More time is allocated to keeping donors than acquiring new ones.

who work or volunteer there or whom your services touch.

Culture is the force and the spirit that bring internal values, attitudes, and beliefs into sync, giving an organization the power to connect with external constituents and secure outside resources. Culture can be an asset if it's healthy or a hindrance if it's dysfunctional.

What is a philanthropic culture? It's one that promotes philanthropy and feels no need to apologize for fundraising. Values and beliefs are authentic, not contrived. A philanthropic culture says to the rest of the world, "We exist to fulfill a gap that is significant or to advance a cause that is critical — will you join us?"

A strong organization articulates its mission in human, not merely organizational, terms. People are of primary importance; systems are secondary. It recognizes donors for what they bring to the table (beyond financial resources), respects clients on their own terms (not just for what we think they need), sees employees as specialists in delivering services and as advocates, and taps board members for their expertise (rather than blaming them for the institution's shortcomings). Every resource
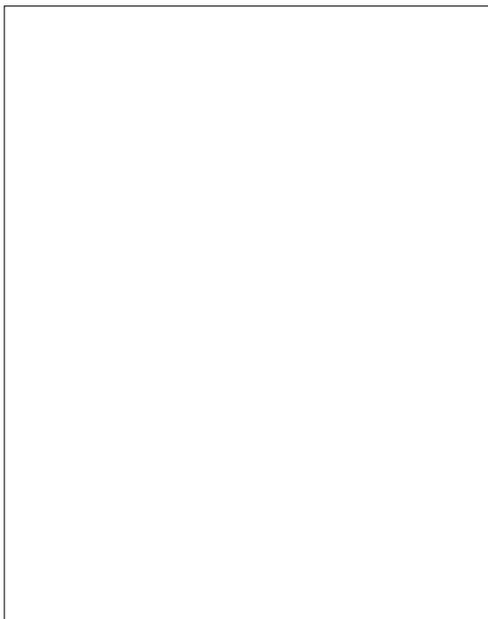
or pathway exists as the means to achieve the organization's mission and its philanthropic purpose.

You can walk in the door, stop the first person you meet, and ask, "how does philanthropy go to work here?" — and they will have an answer for you. Everyone associated with the organization has a story to tell about how they are personally involved in the philanthropic process, be it giving to the employee campaign, working on a taskforce to develop a new community initiative, introducing a donor to a recipient, or writing a thank-you note for a gift designated for their program area. In a philanthropic culture, everyone shares the responsibility for creating it, sustaining it, and celebrating it.

Without a philanthropic culture, can I still raise money? Yes, organizations do it every day. You can always raise some money using the hard work virtue and hard ask technique — for a while. Without the culture supporting your efforts, however, the job of fundraising will be very lonely and probably not satisfying. So, in the long term, the answer is "no, not as well, and not as much."

How long will it take to create a philanthropic culture? It could take 2-6 years to shape a culture, if all goes well. It grows from the influence of a few people willing to promote philanthropy as a donor-focused activity and shift from purely quantitative measures to quality relationships (connecting with everyone inside and outside the organization). This takes engagement, education, and experience.

But you can begin at once, by promoting a basic understanding of philanthropic fundraising. The most successful nonprofit leaders and development professionals are those who know the difference between a charitable fundraising program and a philanthropic development program. The former focuses more on the problem than the solution. The charity case is expressed in what the organization needs, rather than what the *community* wants and needs. It tends to

be crisis oriented, indicating a weakness of some sort, for which there is usually a sense of apology. This leads to a form of begging for support that results in almsgiving — impulsive, based on emotion, and token in its gift amount. A charitable fundraising program is short term by nature, requiring minimal commitment, and often limited satisfaction on the part of the giver. The benefit is often for one person for one time, rather than many people for all time.

In contrast, a philanthropic development program is much broader, aimed at systematically solving the problem. It's based on careful planning and past success that together garner a sense of pride. It focuses on the *community*, not the organization, and as such, it benefits many people. It requires an investment on the part of the giver, and a satisfying outcome for both given and receiver — producing a transaction, rather than a transfer.

Philanthropic fundraising is donor-oriented, but always in balance with the interests and the concerns of the recipient. In a philanthropic culture, there is always evidence of:

▼ Mission language
▼ Ethical behavior
▼ A donor orientation
▼ Expressed values
▼ Integrated and applied principles
▼ Two-way communication strategies
▼ Volunteer partnering.

What's the result of a philanthropic culture? Not only is there a sense of pride in fundraising, but everyone's preeminent objective is a "culture of caring." People give naturally, wisely, and generously. There are higher fundraising goals, greater programmatic achievements, more community outreach, and more philanthropists of all levels and kinds. There is self-actualization of the highest order. ∎

— Karla Williams, ACFRE

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hundreds of people. This makes the tool appropriate for board trainings as well as larger community gatherings. Here are eight steps that work in using the tool:

Step 1: Ask all participants who have a watch with a second hand to stand. Then ask the rest to stand next to someone already standing.

Step 2: The team member with the watch becomes the *coach*. The others become the *presenters*. There can be a single presenter or a group presentation.

Step 3: Give the teams about 25 minutes to develop a 60-second presentation that captures all 10 items of either the organization or issue 10 in 60. They can present the 10 items in any order. Each presentation must also include the six communication components of the Community Rap.

Step 4: Announce a "two minute" warning, then call time at the end of the 25-minute preparation period.

Step 5: Ask a team to present. Before they begin, ask for three volunteers who are not part of the presenting team to assist. One will be a timekeeper for the 60 seconds; the second will be a listener for the 10 pieces of information; and the third will be a listener for the six components.

Step 6: Ask the presenting team to indicate who their intended audience is. Once this introductory information is provided, ask the timekeeper to give the starting signal to the presenter(s).

Step 7: After each presentation, (a) ask the timekeeper how long it took; (b) ask the first listener how many of the 10 items were presented; (c) ask the second listener how many of the six components were covered; (d) ask the presenters for their reactions to the exercise; and (e) ask the audience for their feedback to the presenting team.

Step 8: Repeat Steps 5-7 until all teams have presented, and debrief the full exercise for lessons and insights.

Perfecting the 10 in 60 Community Rap takes time and practice. It's well worth the effort — you'll have a powerful tool to grab your audience's attention and move them to action. ∎

— Jennifer Henderson

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Your "10 in 60" Community Rap

Your Organization:

1. Your name and position within the organization.
2. Organization name and age.
3. Organization mission.
4. Primary constituency.
5. Geographic focus.
6. Priority issue(s).
7. Budget of your organization.
8. The name of one of your organization's funders.
9. One of the greatest challenges your organization currently faces.
10. An example of your organization at its best.

Your Issue:

1. Your name and position.
2. Organization name.
3. Organization mission.
4. Primary constituency.
5. Geographic focus.
6. Priority issue(s).
7. Example of the organization's success or impact on that issue(s).
8. The current issue of your organization.
9. Who is affected by the issue and how.
10. What action you are requesting and by when.