FUNDRAISING IDEAS THAT WORK!

Grassroots Fundraising Journal

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Featuring:

MEASURING CHANGE TO MAKE CHANGE: The Fundraising Case for Program Evaluation

by Rachel Lanzerotti & Laura Lanzerotti

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Also in this issue: Websites for Fundraising | Dear Kim: Advice Column for the Fund-less | Book Review — The Best of the Board Café: Hands-on Solutions for Nonprofit Boards

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

STEPHANIE ROTH

As you may know, two years ago the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* became a nonprofit organization, and formed its first board of directors. I want to introduce you to two of our newest board members, Miguel Gavaldon and Shelana deSilva. Miguel has been the executive director of Fresno Barrios Unidos, an organization that provides services related to health and sexuality to young people, many on a peer-to-peer basis. Shelana, a former staff member of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal,* now works with the Applied Research Center on a project addressing the post-September 11th anti-immigrant backlash in the U.S. Both Shelana and Miguel bring a commitment to helping nonprofits working for social justice grow and thrive, and we are thrilled to have them on the board.

The lead article in this issue, by sisters Rachel and Laura Lanzerotti, addresses evaluation, a topic that is almost as unpopular (to some) as fundraising: Like eating right, we know evaluating our programs and our progress is good for us, especially over the long term, but it can feel like one more thing we "should" do that takes us away from our "real" work. If you feel that way, there are two important messages here: 1) evaluation is not just something you do to please your funders and donors, but something that really can help you make better decisions about your programs; and 2) there are things we do that just can't be measured. When we understand the second point, we'll stay out of the trap of thinking that if we can't easily quantify our work for social justice, we're not making a difference. Rachel and Laura provide some excellent tools for getting the information you need to document your effectiveness, whether you are a community organizer or a service provider.

Michael Stein presents the second article in a series about how to use Internet technology to build your fundraising program. The article here focuses on using your website for fundraising. You'll find that by just applying one or two new ideas from the myriad tools and tips he offers, your website can become a more powerful tool for fundraising.

This issue also contains some excerpts from the popular advice column, "Dear Kim," which appears in our monthly e-newsletter. The column has helped dozens of fundraisers with answers to their problems. We decided to reprint a few of these letters occasionally in the *Journal,* because we know you may not have seen these in earlier editions of the e-newsletter. (If you don't yet subscribe to the free e-newsletter, go to *www.grassrootsfundraising.org* to sign up.)

Some news from Chardon Press: You may have read Andy Robinson's excellent book, *Grassroots Grants: An Activists Guide to Proposal Writing,* which we published at Chardon Press in 1996. Now a new and significantly revised and updated edition of *Grassroots Grants* has just been published by our partner in publishing, Jossey-Bass. Check it out on the Jossey-Bass website at *www.josseybass.com/go/chardonpress.* Get a 15% discount on the book by using the promo code CPØ4 when you place your order.

Measuring Change to MAKE CHANGE…

The Fundraising Case for PROGRAM EVALUATION

BY RACHEL LANZEROTTI & LAURA LANZEROTTI

How do you know if your organization is making a difference? It's a question you probably ask yourself all the time. Your staff, donors, funders, and stakeholders also want to know the answer.

Program evaluation is a key component of operating and sustaining effective nonprofit organizations. This article outlines the benefits of program evaluation and how evaluation results can be used for fundraising. We present information from interviews with three Bay Area nonprofits: DataCenter, Health Initiatives for Youth (HIFY), and Shelter Network of San Mateo.

Evaluation is the way to get *systematic* information about the results of your programs and how you are contributing to individual and community change. Investments in evaluation pay off. Evaluation can help you improve the work you are doing as well as prove your value to others.

WHY EVALUATE FOR FUNDRAISING?

Funders and donors are drawn to effective programs and organizations. They want to know how you measure success. The current trend of foundations wanting "results-based accountability" and venture philanthropists using the model of "social return on investment" are indicative of the attention funders are giving evaluation.

According to Sara Kimberlin, development director of Shelter Network of San Mateo, "Both private and public grantmakers are placing more emphasis on programs that can demonstrate 'measurable outcomes' in order to quantify the community benefit resulting from their grants. Many individual donors are also looking for documented program results before they support an organization."

If your organization receives foundation grants, evaluating your programs may already be a condition of funding. However, developing and implementing an evaluation strategy of your own can help you get ahead of funders' requests. If your organization approaches evaluation proactively, you can take control of your efforts and results.

Moreover, evaluations can spur fundraising. Creating a workable system for collecting information and tracking evaluation findings can help you avoid recreating the wheel for each proposal or program report; when you need them, important statistics and client stories will be readily available.

Carol M. Cantwell, co-director of the DataCenter, offers this advice to other nonprofits interested in using evaluation in their fundraising efforts: "Don't wait for funders to require you to do program evaluations. Evaluations are a great tool for documenting your successes and soliciting constructive criticism. They can also be a great way to include donors, funders, and members in providing feedback, which helps build closer relationships."

In addition to providing proof to current funders that they should continue to invest in your organization, evaluation findings may lead your organization to seek out new funding sources. If your evaluations show that your programs are serving populations you didn't originally expect to reach or meeting community needs in unanticipated ways, you may want to reconsider the program objectives and package your programs differently for varied audiences and potential supporters. For example, if you find that a program that originally focused on helping people find employment also helps clients secure affordable housing, you might look for funders who are interested in funding both employment- and housing-related programs.

COMMUNICATING EVALUATION RESULTS

Evaluation can help you produce compelling information both for specific fundraising campaigns and for a long-term strategy of building community support. The information may include statistics related to program outcomes (quantitative data) and stories about a success with a client or organizing effort (qualitative data).

Using program evaluation as part of a successful fundraising strategy involves incorporating the results, or findings, of your evaluation into your communications. Tell your donors, members, and funders what you've learned about the good work you do! You can use a number of vehicles, described below by audience, for communicating your evaluation methods and findings to current and potential funders.

Foundations and Government Funders

Include information about your methods of evaluating and important findings about your programs into grant proposals, ongoing reports, and presentations. At Health Initiatives for Youth (HIFY), Executive Director Sharon Dolan explains, "We use the impressive statistics from our evaluations in our applications [to funders] to demonstrate that our work is effective and has an impact. Foundations love this, and many government applications require it."

Individuals

Use media campaigns, annual reports, brochures, your website, and one-on-one meetings as opportunities to communicate evaluation results to individual donors.

The DataCenter uses information in this way. Cantwell says, "Because we ask groups… how they've used our research and what the results of the organizing campaigns were, we often find out about really wonderful victories that we can share with [individual] donors to help illustrate the importance and real-world impacts of our work."

Sharon Dolan of HIFY explains, "When we send out updates to donors, we usually throw in a great statistic or two, or a quote from a participant… Foundations and individuals are moved by success stories, quotes, and anecdotal evidence."

TIPS FOR USING EVALUATION

As you start to plan your evaluation, anticipate how you want to use the results, avoid funder-driven evaluation, measure what is measurable, and prepare for the worst-case scenario.

Plan to Use the Results

Consider how you will be communicating your evaluation results to current and potential donors and funders. What is the most useful format: a presentation, a report, charts and graphs, or some other format? Think about these end results before you begin.

As HIFY's Sharon Dolan cautions, "Decide how you will use the results before you set up your evaluation system. If you don't do this, it's likely the reports will sit on your shelf waiting to be used."

As Much As Possible, Avoid Funder-Driven Evaluation

When evaluation is a condition of foundation or government funding, funders sometimes provide a specific list of outcomes to be reported. When an organization measures only what the funder is interested in, they may miss the questions and information the organization itself may have about a program's success or challenges.

If your questions and the funder's are way out of synch, you may need to educate the funder about the questions you want to answer and how you want to find those answers so you can reach some agreements about the form and content of the evaluation.

As Dolan explains, "We've had to resist pressure from funders — especially government funders — not to use our forms in favor of theirs. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes not. I know they have the best intentions, but the requests are often impractical and have a one-size-fits-nobody nature to them."

If your organization has created an intentional and coherent evaluation plan and design, having that plan may make it easier to advocate with some foundation or government funders for using it. On the other hand, if you know that a funder requires use of a particular form or process for collecting information about funded services, consider how to build these elements into your ongoing evaluation efforts.

Measure What Is Measurable

Particularly if your organization is devoted to long-term and/or large-scale social change, measuring impacts attributable to specific programs may be difficult and costly.

Sharon Dolan describes this challenge for HIFY, saying, "[Funders would] like us to prove impact beyond what we're able to do without a long, expensive scientific study. We can't prove that we're lowering HIV rates among youth, for example, though we can prove that as a result of our workshops young people say they're more likely to get tested for HIV, more likely to use condoms, and less likely to have sex while high."

Evaluation Terms

Here are terms you may encounter when doing research on evaluation or talking with evaluation professionals.

- **Data:** Information about program activities, clients, outputs
- **Impacts:** Community-wide effects of a program, usually related to long-term goals or changes
- **Indicator:** Means of measuring outcomes
- **Outcomes:** Short- to medium-term results or effects of a program's activities
- **Outcomes Evaluation:** An examination of the changes created by a program
- **Outputs:** Products and/or services of a program
- **Process/Implementation Evaluation:** An examination of the functioning and implementation of a program, including satisfaction among community partners or clients
- **Qualitative:** Descriptive and interpretative methods or information
- **Quantitative:** Numerical and statistical methods or information

Organizations dedicated to community organizing or doing public relations campaigns to influence people's behavior — such as using billboards about the risks of smoking, or flyers about preventing HIV — may find it particularly challenging to prove that their programs are effective.

Some outcomes, however, may be finite and measurable: How many toxic sites were cleaned up? By what margin did the local proposition you opposed fail? How many people were likely to see your billboards? If you are doing campaign work, gathering quantitative (numerical, statistical) information by, for example, counting the number of outreach contacts you made or voters you registered, can provide you with helpful data. The challenge for you in evaluating this type of work is estimating how much change can be attributed to your organization's activities.

You can also collect qualitative (descriptive, non-statistical) information from interviews with community members or a focus group of local decision makers to get useful information about what worked and what could have been strengthened.

Prepare for the Worst-Case Scenario

One challenge of program evaluation is resisting the urge to focus only on "positive" results. Any evaluation may end up highlighting the need for program or organizational changes. Evaluation findings may produce recommendations related to changing program administration, rethinking a program's interventions and activities, and even revising program objectives. These are all useful for maximum program success as you proceed. To be prepared to make the most of all your evaluation findings, consider two questions before you begin an evaluation:

1) How can the organization prepare its staff to receive even "negative" evaluation findings?
2) How can you develop a relationship with funders that will promote consideration of all findings, including findings that point out challenges, without jeopardizing future funding?

EVALUATION WITH A LIMITED BUDGET

The biggest line items for program evaluation include dedicating staff time; building technological capacity to collect, store, and report on data; and paying for an external evaluator, if appropriate. There are some choices you can make to manage these expenses.

Internal or External Evaluation?

Many organizations use a combination of internal and external program evaluation methods. Internal evaluations rely on staff to direct and carry out the evaluation design and implementation. External evaluations engage consultants or consulting groups, usually in combination with staff participation.

Internal evaluation by program staff provides opportunities and challenges. You can create an evaluation built on staff enthusiasm and expertise in their program areas, while increasing their knowledge what about evaluation is and their capacity to carry it out. Using staff time to complete program evaluation may also be less expensive than hiring an external evaluation consultant.

On the other hand, there are challenges with an internal evaluation: staff may be reluctant to devote time to evaluation activities if they don't see them as directly related to program; there may not be in-house time or

Developing Research Questions

Your evaluation should be guided by what you want to know about your program. As a starting point, consider the questions below.

SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

Participation:

- How many clients do we serve?
- What are the characteristics and demographics of the clients we serve?
- Has our client population changed over time? In what ways?

Process:

- How many clients have we served through each activity or intervention of this program?
- Are clients satisfied with the services they receive?
- Do clients experience any barriers in receiving or participating in services? If so, what are these barriers?
- How much does the program cost per client served?

Outcome:

- What has changed in the lives of our clients as a result of their participation in our program?
- What changes in behavior, attitudes, and/or skills occur among clients, staff, others as a result of specific activities or interventions?
- Do changes occur among some clients but not others, related to specific demographic or other characteristics?

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PROGRAMS

Participation:

- How many community members have we involved in this organizing campaign?
- What are the characteristics or demographics of these community members? How do our members compare to the demographics of our local neighborhood, city, or county?
- How many community partners (organizations) have we involved in this organizing campaign?
- What are the characteristics of these community partners?
- Has the population of community members and/or partners we work with changed over time?

Process:

- How many and what kind of actions, events, or campaigns has this organizing program completed?
- How do community partners perceive our organization/program?

Outcomes:

- Has this organizing effort achieved its campaign goals?
- What changes in policy have resulted from this organizing effort?
- How have partner organizations implemented resources or policy changes that have emerged from this organizing effort?

expertise to train staff in evaluation frameworks and methods; and funders may not accept the "objectivity" of internal evaluation findings.

Doing evaluation internally is particularly appropriate, however, where there is frequent and ongoing data collection. At the frequent workshops and trainings for youth service providers that HIFY staff facilitate, for example, staff give anonymous evaluation forms to participants and then collect them and enter the data.

The DataCenter, too, launched their evaluation work in-house in order to help staff develop an understanding of evaluation methodology and the importance of record-keeping. As Cantwell describes, "We felt it would strengthen our internal documentation systems once people became familiar with how the information they entered in our projects database is actually used in the evaluation process. Because we designed the evaluations ourselves, we can ask the questions that are most relevant to us."

There also are some clear benefits to using an external evaluator. Even if not a required component of reporting, some foundations may view more favorably those proposals that incorporate external program evaluation. For example, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's *Grantseeker's Guide* describes proposals that "stand out from a crowd" as those that are "willing to let an impartial evaluator assess the project."

Using an external evaluator also makes sense when the scope of the evaluation is big or complex. Kimberlin explains that Shelter Network has "used outside evaluation consultants to complete more intensive and comprehensive program evaluations that require more time than our staff have available or more specialized expertise."

Even if you hire an external evaluator, it's important to stay involved. You and your staff have the best sense of the kind of information that will be useful to your organization. While you won't be responsible for carrying out the day-to-day work of the evaluation, you can't completely hand over the project to the consultant. You should expect to be involved in reviewing their evaluation plan, providing feedback on data collection instruments, and shaping what is included in their final products.

It's not unusual for an organization to rely on a combination of external and internal expertise. For example, an external evaluator could help organizational staff during the early stages of an evaluation to develop an evaluation framework, create or review selected data collection tools, and assist with developing database specifications. Or, an external evaluator might be hired to train staff in basic data collection methods and analysis. In these scenarios, the external evaluator provides a guiding or teaching role and the data collection and analysis are left to internal evaluators. In others, the external evaluator might carry out one piece of a larger evaluation plan, particularly one that requires specific expertise or involves confidential data collection that is not appropriate for staff to do.

Is It Worth Investing in Technological Capacity?

Begin designing your evaluation by assessing your organization's ability to capture, store, and analyze information. Do you have spreadsheet and/or database software applications that could be used for entering and analyzing statistical data? Are staff knowledgeable about creating spreadsheets and databases? Are staff or volunteers available for data entry? Will investing in technological capacity benefit programs in other ways?

Shelter Network, for example, received a grant that required in-depth tracking and analysis of program data for annual grant reports. "In developing the new evaluation system [for this grant], we focused on creating a system that could be integrated into our existing data collection efforts," said Sara Kimberlin. "Doing so required securing additional matching funds beyond the original grant. As a result, however, we now have the capacity to track significantly more information about our program effectiveness, which has been useful for internal evaluation as well as for producing reports to the original funder."

Doing an evaluation in-house could require investing in database software and savvy, so you need to decide if this is a good use of organizational resources. If you are going to engage in ongoing evaluation, this investment makes a lot of sense. It makes less sense if you are conducting a one-time evaluation.

Selected Resources

EVALUATION BASICS

- Mattessich, P.W. (2003). *The Manager's Guide to Program Evaluation: Planning, contracting, and managing for useful results.* Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.
- McNamara, C., "Basic Guide to Program Evaluation," Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits: *www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm*
- WK Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook: *www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf*

WORKING WITH EVALUATION CONSULTANTS

- Kibbe, B. & Setterberg, F. (September–October 2001). "How to Evaluate Consultants," CAN *Alert*, pp. 8–9.
- Advice for nonprofits working with consultants, including specific information for working with evaluation consultants: *www.CAnonprofits.org*
- Rutnik, T.A. & Campbell, M. (2002). "When and How to Use External Evaluators," Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers. Designed for new program officers working with grantee evaluations: *www.abagmd.org/info-url2444/info-url_show.htm?doc_id=204968*

WHERE TO FIND CONSULTANTS

- American Evaluation Association: *www.eval.org*
- Idealist: *www.idealist.org/consultants*
- Consultants On Tap — A searchable database of consultants and technical assistance providers who work with Northern California nonprofits: *www.ontap.org*

Focus on What Matters and Keep it Simple

Ultimately, containing the cost of an evaluation involves making choices about the scope of information you gather. Rather than evaluating all programs, you may choose just one to look at closely. Rather than seeking evidence of community-wide impacts of your work, you may narrow your quest to program-focused outcomes. Which questions about your programs are essential to answer immediately and which can wait?

Fundraising for Evaluation

You may want to build funding for evaluation directly into grant proposals. Research which foundations encourage and provide funding for evaluation as an integral component of a program plan. Some foundations consider program evaluation a capacity-building project; your organization may want to seek a capacity-building grant to develop the infrastructure for evaluation.

According to Shelter Network, "There are fewer foundations now than there were a few years ago that are willing to award grants specifically for program evaluation. With the more challenging fundraising climate of the past few years, we have found it helpful to emphasize in our requests to funders not only the value of the program information we gain from evaluation activities but also the ways in which improved evaluation systems can help us build our capacity to fundraise more effectively and improve our staff efficiency."

WHERE TO START

The first step in evaluating any program or organization is articulating the purpose of your work. What are you trying to achieve? Then work backwards and think about what information would indicate that you are or are not making a difference. Evaluation requires collecting the evidence you need in order to document and analyze how well you are achieving your objectives.

There are a number of resources that can guide you through your evaluation planning process (see Resources). Though the content and context of your work will affect the evaluation design that works for you, here are a few first steps to get you started (see the sidebar on Evaluation Terms for explanations of terms used here).

1. Find out how *other organizations* working in your issue area have evaluated their programs. A simple Internet search can get you started, but you might also want to ask funders or colleagues in your field.

2. Review and clarify the *objectives* of your program. What are you trying to achieve?

3. List and describe the specific *activities* or interventions you are carrying out to achieve each objective.

4. With your program's objectives and activities in mind, develop a set of *research questions* detailing what you want to learn about your program (see sidebar "Developing Research Questions").

5. Based on your questions, define program *outcomes* (the desired changes you are working toward in the clients or community you serve) and *indicators* (how you will know if these changes are occurring).

6. Consider your organization's or program's ability to collect, store, and analyze *information*. With this capacity in mind, develop a list of possible methods for collecting information about your program (for example, tools such as new forms, surveys, interviews), or a plan for increasing your evaluation capacity.

What Does It Cost?

One ballpark estimate of how much to allocate for program evaluation is three to five percent of a program or organizational budget. Of course, this varies based on the complexity of the evaluation, which is determined by the type of information that will be collected, who will collect it, and the type of analysis and reporting that will be done.

How Can We Pay for It?

Many funders allow grantees to incorporate evaluation activities into requests for program support. Shelter Network has found larger funders to support developing their evaluation systems. They then cover the costs of continuing and maintaining evaluation with general program funds. DataCenter's evaluation costs are in staff time, which is included in their budget as part of personnel expenses.

Who Should Do It?

If staff are going to carry out the evaluation, select key staff with a background in research or evaluation for an evaluation team or committee. To find an external evaluator, ask other organizations you work with whom they would recommend. (Also, see sidebar, "Resources.") Always ask for references and sample work so that you can assess if they are the right fit for you.

How Long Does It Take?

How long evaluation takes depends on your research questions and the scope of the evaluation plan. It is possible to get meaningful information from a single focus group, which can take from 8 to 20 hours to plan, implement, and report. A three-month, six-month, one-year, or three-year evaluation will provide you with different levels of information. Multi-year evaluations provide long-term findings, which can inspire greater confidence and information about changes over time. GFJ

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WEBSITES *for Fundraising*

BY MICHAEL STEIN

Since the creation of the World Wide Web in the late 1990s, organizations of all shapes and sizes have struggled with a few constant questions: Is our website as effective as it can possibly be? Is it helping us meet our goals for information dissemination and community engagement?

More recently, online fundraising has become a part of organizations' development strategy, and this has added some complexity to the Web equation. Now people are also asking: How do we raise money with our website? Is the structure and content of our website effective in encouraging potential donors to give gifts online?

The craft of working the Web for donor prospecting, gift solicitation, and donor renewal is relatively new. The lessons that nonprofits have learned about online fundraising mirror many of the other findings about how the Internet relates to the real world of human relations. It is now understood that websites and e-mail communications must be fully integrated with all the other activities that are undertaken by nonprofits as they conduct their mission and engage in fundraising.

The time-tested fundraising approaches of face-to-face contact, slow building of relationships, events, and direct mail are deep components of most organizations' fundraising programs. The Web is not a replacement for traditional fundraising practices, but rather an important supplement to it. This understanding should reassure nonprofit staff that online fundraising is not some new, arcane science, but a set of practices that are quite familiar and attainable by even the smallest nonprofits.

Recent studies are demonstrating that nonprofit websites are playing a role in the fundraising process. In 2003, a survey conducted by The Bridgespan Group and Network For Good demonstrated that 10% of Internet users have made online donations, and that it engages a younger demographic. The most interesting part of the findings were that 39% of users reported giving offline after visiting a nonprofit website. Donors are visiting websites to learn about a charitable organization, read about its recent programs, scan publications, and sign up for e-mail updates. Website research is playing a role in traditional giving.

HOW YOUR WEBSITE CAN HELP YOU FUNDRAISE

Here's an overview of how the basic components of your website can help you attain your fundraising goals.

Websites vastly increase your reach, visibility, and outreach. The Internet offers nonprofits a vast capacity to reach its stakeholder community and communicate its mission. Make sure people can find your site through three easy practices:

- *Search engine listings* — Have a volunteer update your site listing on the top search engines (Google, Yahoo, Excite, Alta Vista, GoTo, AskJeeves, HotBot); it's free and easy.
- *Links from similar websites* — Build traffic from allies and friends in your issue area.
- *Visibility of your Web address* — Showcase your commitment to the Internet medium and give your supporters more to do by putting your Web address on all your printed pieces: brochures, flyers, letterhead, etc.

THE WEB IS NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR TRADITIONAL FUNDRAISING PRACTICES, BUT RATHER AN IMPORTANT SUPPLEMENT TO IT.

These actions all add up to brand visibility and traffic to your website. And visits to your website amount to an incessant direct mail campaign conducted through the electronic medium of the Internet.

Websites are electronic "brochure ware." First and most obviously, the website provides information about what you do, who you are, and how to contact you. This may sound a lot like the purpose of a brochure, and that's exactly what it is. Your website should clearly and directly communicate who you are, what you do, and how you do it. With its own unique Internet address *(www.savethecreek.org),* your electronic brochure is on the global Internet 24/7, promoting your mission, seeking out volunteers and donors.

Websites provide multiple levels of information about your work. Beyond the brochure, you can include the most basic, succinct summary of your work, and provide more in-depth, specific content for those who want to "drill down" or delve more into your organization. You can provide many ways of presenting your work that increase the reader's depth of understanding about your organization: what you do, how you do it, and underneath all of that, why people should be involved and make financial commitments. This can take the form of offering statistics and data, downloadable white papers and documents, having clear biographical information (including photos!) of your staff and board, or having the annual report available for review. For example, Global Exchange *(www.globalexchange.org)* has a wonderful About Us section with photos, position papers, and more; and Sweatshop Watch *(www.sweatshopwatch.org)* has a very helpful Common Questions section, as well as a very readable History page as part of its About section.

> THE VISITOR NEEDS TO KNOW WITHIN SECONDS WHAT KIND OF ORGANIZATION YOU ARE, WHAT YOU DO, AND HOW TO PARTICIPATE.

Websites offer opportunities for involvement. This is where the Website becomes truly *interactive* — you can invite people to sign up for e-mail updates, gather visitor information through online forms, and make it easy to get involved. Ways of inviting participation can be seen in prompts such as "Join Now," "Support Us," "Tell Us What You Think," "Subscribe," "Join the Movement," or "Donate Now." These are all different ways of inviting participation, with the desired result of increasing your community of supporters, building relationships, and nurturing fundraising prospects.

Online advocacy and activism are increasingly being incorporated by nonprofits, both to further organizing goals and to engage prospects. For example, Courage to Refuse *(www.couragetorefuse.org)* clearly offers engagement opportunities for Israeli soldiers, academics, or the general public; Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center *(www.rmpjc.org)* always has urgent action appeals for international aid, plus regular public comment on local issues of interest to the community.

Websites invite financial support. And, let's not forget the opportunity to allow people to donate to your organization. The website is a powerful mechanism to do this easily, quickly and safety — and thousands of organizations, from small grassroots nonprofits to large, international NGOs are finding this to be the case. The ability to facilitate one-time credit card gifts, recurring donations, gifts in kind, and planned giving has made the website a convenient transaction center for a nonprofit. For example, The Lower Eastside Girls Club of New York *(www.girlsclub.org)* and Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy *(www.laane.org)* have engaging websites describing their community efforts where their online fundraising tools are prominently displayed.

GIVE YOUR WEBSITE FUNDRAISING IMPACT

The Web medium and your website in particular are a powerful opportunity to get your message out, find prospects, and get donations. So how do you mold your website to take advantage of these opportunities? Here are 11 specific suggestions for giving your website fundraising impact for your visitors:

1) Write clearly and concisely, and use visuals. The Web is not the place for verbosity — people are moving quickly and you need to present your message both visually and textually in very clear terms. The visitor needs to know within seconds what kind of organization you are, what you do, and how to participate. Lack of clarity in this area translates into impatience and departures. Don't make people work hard to figure you out. Visuals can help expand a viewer's understanding by showing what you are advocating for or envisioning. Photos or other illustrations make it real for the viewer. Take a look at The Lower Eastside Girls Club of New York *(www.girlsclub.org)* and The Pacific Forest Trust *(www.pacificforest.org)* and notice how you're immediately inspired and drawn in by the visuals.

2) Make your mission statement easy to find. Many people coming to your website are new to your organization, so make it easy for people to find your mission statement. The mission statement often lives in the "About Us" or "Who We Are" section of your site, which needs to be clearly accessible. The mission statement should be presented clearly and succinctly, and if you wish, have a link for more detailed program information for those who want to delve deeper into the specifics of your work.

3) Adopt organizational transparency. Donors and prospects are trying to learn about your organization. To facilitate their trust, include the history of your organization, a list of your board, biographies and photos of the staff, and financial disclosure information. Help your website visitor to make a personal connection not only with your ideals but also with who you are. People don't only connect with values and ideals, they connect with other people. Show yourself and don't be shy. The Global Exchange *(www.globalexchange.org)* About section is a great example of transparency that makes the organization accessible and open.

4) Use clear website navigation. Provide clear directions for your visitors in the form of navigation. This is important not only for a pleasant website experience, but also because your navigation tells the story of who you are and what you do. For example, Bluewater Network *(www.bluewaternetwork.org)* provides a navigation that showcases their program areas (Clean Vessels, Public Lands, Global Warming). Under each of these items is a

Application Service Providers

An Application Service Provider (ASP) is a technology company that develops and delivers software tools over the Internet, usually for a fee. ASPs that focus on the nonprofit sector offer services to meet nonprofit needs, such as online fundraising, website management, e-mail messaging, online surveys, and volunteer recruitment.

Here are some ASPs that serve nonprofit needs:

- **Altrue.com** — Website content management
- **CharityFinders.com** — Website content management, donor management, e-mail messaging, events, advocacy
- **Convio.com** — Website content management, donor management, e-mail messaging, events, advocacy
- **CTSG.com** — Website content management, donor management, e-mail messaging, events, advocacy
- **eTapestry.com** — Donor management
- **GetActive.com** — Website content management, donor management, e-mail messaging, events, advocacy
- **Groundspring.org** — Donation processing, e-mail messaging, surveys, advocacy
- **Groupstone.com** — Website content management, donor management, e-mail messaging, events, advocacy
- **Kintera.com** — Website content management, donor management, e-mail messaging, events, advocacy
- **NetworkForGood.org** — Donation processing, volunteer recruitment
- **NPOGroups.org** — E-mail messaging, online discussion groups
- **VolunteerMatch.org** — Volunteer recruitment

pull-down menu that allows greater specificity and demonstrates their range of work. This is straightforward and communicative at the same time.

5) Deploy easy and secure online donation tools. There are a wide ranges of tools, services, and vendors that are at a nonprofit's disposal to facilitate the process of collecting online donations. The easiest solution is to open an account with an Application Service Provider (ASP) that will rent you a credit card processing tool for a monthly fee and a per-gift fee (see sidebar). At the very least, you'll want a service that can process one-time gifts, permit recurring monthly or quarterly donations, handle premiums and thank you gifts, send an e-mail receipt to the donor, and allow you to download donor data to integrate into your in-house database.

6) Offer an array of donation options. Use your website to showcase the many opportunities for financial and other support. There are many types of donors, and you should widen your appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Offer a selection of giving choices, such as one-time gifts, recurring gifts, planned giving, gifts that offer premiums, and e-commerce gifts. While the average online donation amount is approximately $42, you can also cultivate larger gifts by recognizing a particular donor (with their permission), or showcasing your planned giving program. The Trust for Public Land *(www.tpl.org)*, does a nice job of showcasing their planned gift options on their website. The Rainforest Action Network *(www.ran.org)* has a wide array of choices under its Join Or Give section, including workplace giving, staff wish list, and volunteering.

7) Collect your visitors' e-mail address and other personal information. A great deal of the traffic to your website will be from people who are learning about you for the first time. Be sure to invite people to leave you their e-mail address and other personal information so you can keep them updated about your work via e-mail and postal mail. The e-mail address is what most people will leave. Every e-mail address you gather is a fundraising prospect, so honor it and guard it.

One effective way to engage people with a website is to offer free downloads of documents, perhaps a recent report you've published. At the time of download, be sure to ask for their e-mail address and other personal information so you can follow up with them at a later date.

8) Demonstrate your commitment to donor privacy and confidentiality. Many donors are concerned about how their personal information will be used. Display a privacy policy on your site that explains how you use personal information, the security of a donor's credit card information, whether you'll send them an e-mail newsletter, and whether you rent out your mailing list — with a chance to opt out. This information will build trust with your donors. An example of a very simple privacy policy may be found on the website of the Data Center *(www.datacenter.org)* when you click the Info button next to the e-newsletter signup form on the home page. A more detailed privacy policy can be found at Trust for Public Land *(www.tpl.org)* at the bottom of each page.

YOUR WEBSITE SHOULD CLEARLY AND DIRECTLY COMMUNICATE WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU DO, AND HOW YOU DO IT.

9) For people who have left you their e-mail address, be sure to keep in touch with an e-mail newsletter that keeps them informed about your work, excited about your successes, and engaged with your mission. Fundraising is facilitated as a result of an ongoing relationship, and by getting people excited and hopeful about your impact. An e-mail newsletter should highlight new content that you've added to your website and provide quick links to that content.

10) Use online advocacy campaigns to engage supporters. If your organization engages in advocacy or activism campaigns, use the Internet to get people involved. Not only can you spread the word about your campaign through your website, e-newsletters, and e-mail alerts, you'll be developing a strong connection with individuals who participate. Studies have shown that nonprofit supporters who engage in advocacy are usually more generous donors to an organization. An inspiring example of an advocacy campaign website is the Act Now section of the Amnesty International site *(www.amnesty.org)* where there are choices to act on a wide range of issues and the content is in multiple languages to engage a global audience. Another example is the Action Center section of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America site *(www.plannedparenthood.org)*, which has choices such as volunteering, sending a postcard, and sending letters to the editor.

11) Make the ask! The main reason that people donate to nonprofits is that they've been asked. This is never truer than on the Web. Review your website and find ways to blend in content that highlights how the support you receive from individuals helps you do your work. Don't banish your fundraising appeals to one section of your website called "Support Us." Sprinkle it around your site, particularly in the sections that showcase success stories and project updates. National Abortion Rights Action League *(www.naral.org)* places visible appeals in a column on the right of every page of its site to encourage visitors to donate now. Gay Men's Health Crisis *(www.gmhc.org)* also has appeals for donations and volunteering in many of the right-hand columns on its site. Use all these examples to turn your own website into a powerful fundraising tool. GFJ

DON'T BANISH YOUR FUNDRAISING APPEALS TO ONE SECTION OF YOUR WEBSITE CALLED "SUPPORT US."

MICHAEL STEIN IS THE ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF GROUNDSPRING.ORG, A NONPROFIT TECHNOLOGY AGENCY THAT PROVIDES INTERNET TOOLS AND TRAINING TO NONPROFITS NATIONWIDE. FIND HIM ONLINE AT WWW.MICHAELSTEIN.NET.

Dear Kim...

For many years, people who have been in my workshops or read my articles in the *Journal* contact me with questions. Once e-mail came on the scene, the volume of questions increased exponentially and I was no longer able to respond personally to every question. Further, I realized that the answers I was providing to one group would often be helpful to many others. So when the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* started its monthly e-newsletter in 1998, we decided to include an advice column, "Dear Kim." Every month I answer two questions from the dozen or so that come in. Since not everyone receives or reads the e-newsletter, we will include a few Dear Kim's in the *Journal* every so often. The Dear Kim's reprinted here represent some of the most commonly asked questions.

If you would like to receive the free e-newsletter, simply go to our recently redesigned website, *www.grassrootsfundraising.org*, and click "e-newsletter." It's easy to subscribe, and it's easy to unsubscribe. We do not trade our e-newsletter list. While you are at the website, please check out the Letters to the Editor. We love hearing from *Journal* readers and have started posting your letters so that others can enjoy them too!

—*Kim Klein*

Dear Kim,

I work at a regional grassroots organization that's always struggling to raise money. Last year we worked on a campaign to stop a ballot initiative that would have hurt immigrants. In one city where we have a number of members and donors, but don't focus our grassroots organizing work, a local group was launched to work against the initiative. We helped them with their efforts, they worked hard, and then shut their doors after the campaign.

When they closed, the local group sent us their donor list. I want to approach these donors for support, but I'm not sure how to do it. Should I just add them to our mailing list so that they'll get our next newsletter and mail appeal, followed by a phone call during our membership drive? Or should I craft a letter for them, praising them for their support of the local campaign and explaining how we're connected? I don't want any of them to think that their name was sold as part of some mailing list deal.

— *Not Feeling Listless*

Dear N.F.L.,

The list you have sounds valuable for your work. I would suggest sending the people on the list a direct mail appeal that thanks them for supporting immigrants rights, or something fairly general like that. Chances are that the people who gave to defeat the initiative give to a number of similar organizations. The reason I would not refer to the initiative specifically is that some of them may have forgotten that they gave to it, but none of them will have forgotten the general values that brought them to give in the first place. The problem with placing these people right on your mailing list so that they will get your newsletter is that they did not ask to get your newsletter, and your newsletter ought to go to people who have shown interest in getting it by making a donation or requesting to be put on the list. Good luck in your important work!

Dear Kim,

When is it time to give up on a prospect? We have many people in our database who have received direct mail appeals for years (some for five years or more) and have never made a gift. How long should someone be courted and informed of an organization's work before they are taken off the mailing list?

— *Hope Is Waning*

Dear Hope:

People who have never given to an organization, but who have been identified as prospects (that is, they care about your cause and they give away money) ought to be asked at least twice, and at the most three or four times over the course of 12 or 18 months. If they haven't given by then, they should be taken off the list. There are many reasons that people don't respond to direct mail; here's a sampling:

- They simply don't respond to direct mail. If you phoned or canvassed, they might respond.
- They don't open any mail except bills and personal letters.
- They don't like your group.
- They like your group fine, but have other priorities. No one can give to everything they care about.
- They have moved, divorced, or died and are not able to respond.
- They are tired of hearing from you.

Many nonprofits get hold of a name of a prospect and think that, by repeated mailing, they are cultivating the person. However, if Person A asks Person B for a date several times a year for five years and never even gets their phone call returned or has any reason to think Person B is interested, we would hope that Person A's friends would tell him or her to get a clue. Person B may feel stalked, but she or he would probably not feel courted.

Sending one appeal after another is a waste of paper, ink, transportation, time, and money. It costs two to three dollars a year (at least) to keep someone on your mailing list. If you are getting no response, you might as well take those two or three dollars, tear them into little pieces, stuff them down the sewer, and call that fundraising.

Take the money you are spending on the deadbeat names in your database and use it get new names, some of whom may actually respond.

Dear Kim,

I manage the major donor program for a small national women's issues group. After many years of resistance, our board of directors is finally willing to get involved with fundraising and has begun making visits to our major donors. But geography is a big problem. Our board members are concentrated on the East and West coasts. Some of our donors live far away from any board members and some board members live far away from any donors. How can we include everyone in our major donor effort?

— Wondering About the Wide Open Spaces

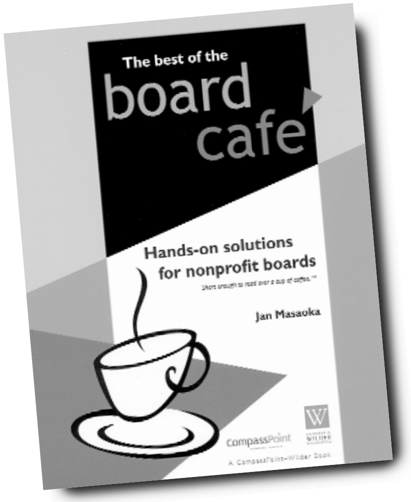
Dear Wondering,

Yours is a common problem for national organizations. It is fairly easily solved. First of all, congratulations to your board members for finally being willing to live up to their responsibilities on fundraising. Now, even though each board member has agreed to do personal visits, not all may be able to. Board members who live far from current donors will need to call them. Certainly, someone who gives $500 or $1,000 who lives in Davenport, Iowa, does not expect that someone from Seattle will fly in to see them. A phone call will take the place of the personal visit.

On the other hand, if 10 donors live in Davenport, a trip would be a good idea. Many national organizations try to involve the major donors themselves in donor contact or solicitation. Playing out our Davenport scenario, your board member goes there and meets with a few people. She then asks one or two of them if they are willing to be the "liaison" to your group and once a year or so to call or visit all the donors in their area to give them an update about the organization's work. People are often willing to do this, even if they are not willing to solicit the gift. Just getting that personal touch in there is enough to keep the donors giving, with, of course, actual direct solicitations from someone in your group.

While I accept that some of your board members don't live near current donors, I do not accept that board members don't live near any *potential* donors unless they don't live near anyone at all. Board members who have no current donors to visit will have to identify some new donors from among their friends and colleagues. Everyone lives near major donors — some have already given and some are going to give once they are asked.

Hope this helps to get you started. GFJ



BOOK REVIEW

THE BEST OF THE BOARD CAFÉ:

Hands-on Solutions for Nonprofit Boards

BY JAN MASAOKA AND COMPASSPOINT NONPROFIT SERVICES

Reviewed by Kim Klein

Published by Amherst Wilder Publications, 232 pages, $27. Order online at www.boardcafe.org (see link to bookstore).

Since 1997, I, and by now 30,000 other people, have been informed, entertained, and enlightened by the e-newsletter, Board Café. Board Café, from CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, is aimed at helping board members understand their role and do a better job in it.

This book is a collection of the most popular articles from that publication, all of which have been edited, clarified in response to readers' comments, and brought up to date. The articles are formatted as handouts and the reprint policy stated in the beginning of the book is one of the most generous I have seen: Readers are encouraged to copy and distribute articles as long as they place a copyright notice on the handout. An article (or a combination of articles totaling fewer than five pages) can be reprinted in another publication, such as a newsletter, as long as a copyright notice appears on the articles and two copies of the publication are sent to CompassPoint.

I have always liked Board Café (to subscribe, go to *www.boardcafe.org*), but I was amazed at the number of topics this little newsletter has addressed in only six years of publication. Board Café uses the tag line, "Short enough to read over a cup of coffee," which gives an idea of the brevity and accessibility of the information.

The book is sorted into ten chapters by topic, beginning with a broad discussion of "Responsibilities of the Board." The following chapters explore the most common issues Board members deal with, some of which are "The Board-Executive Director Relationship," "Composition and Recruitment," "Meetings," "Boards and Fundraising," and "Boards and Finance." Each chapter reprints three to ten articles related to the broad topic. A most helpful feature is that at the end of almost every article a box called "Also Try…" leads the reader to articles on related topics elsewhere in the book. Most of the articles also recommend helpful websites with more information.

The book's editor, Jan Masaoka, Executive Director of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, wrote many of the articles, but she also includes articles and input from many other highly qualified writers.

I learned the most from the section on "Boards and Finance," and I will include as must reading in my future board trainings two articles from that section: "Seven Things the Board Chair Should Check Before Filing Form 990," and "What Boards Need to Know About Insurance." Take, for example, Tip #7 from the first of these articles: *"Make sure your website address is on the first page (of Form 990).* Remember, a photo is taken of your Form 990 so whatever you put on it (including coffee stains) will appear. Take advantage of this opportunity for publicity and make sure your web address is clearly marked on the first page, so that even a casual reader will see it and go to your site for more information." Or Tip #5, *"Remind staff and other board members that Schedule B need not be disclosed to the public.* Schedule B (an attachment to Form 990) lists the names of major donors and the amounts given. If someone asks you for your organization's 990, you are required by law to give them the 990 and any schedules other than Schedule B."

The section on fundraising is the shortest of the book; readers looking specifically for fundraising tips will be disappointed. However, because so much has been written about boards and fundraising, (including many articles in the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*), this is not so much a defect of the book as a thoughtful decision to include other information that can't easily be found elsewhere, especially in one place and in such a concise and easy-to-understand format.

The book is augmented with a bibliography, wonderful quotes from readers that are incorporated into the articles, and a reflection from Jan on the importance of nonprofits to building democracy. In it she reminds us of some of the many ways our country has already changed because of the work of nonprofits — led by active, motivated, and informed boards of directors. GFJ

CLASSIFIEDS

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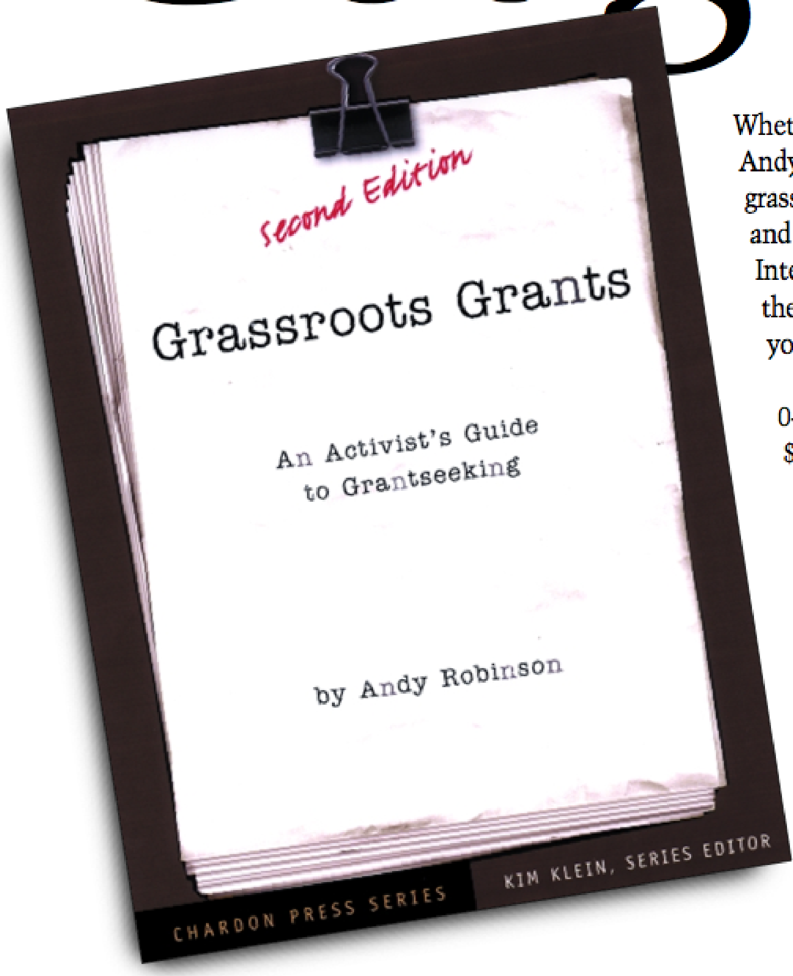

Whether you're new to grantseeking or a skilled professional, Andy Robinson's *Grassroots Grants* is a must-have for the grassroots community. Updated with new model proposals and budgets and information on such issues as using the Internet for grantseeking and strategies for faith-based funding, the *Second Edition* of this classic guide gives you the skills you need to raise money from grants.

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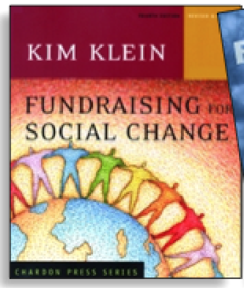

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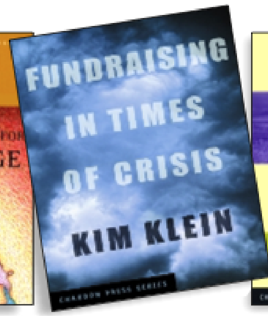

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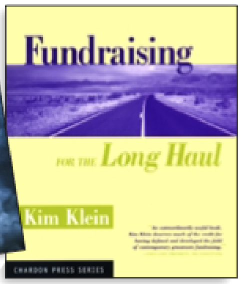

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