Grassroots Fundraising Journal

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 2 • MARCH–APRIL 2011

A PUBLICATION OF

GIFT Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training

What to Do if You Are in a Financial Crisis

Four Social Justice Groups Succeed in the Face of Financial Insecurity

Nonviolent Communication in the Fundraising Workspace

Hanging in the Balance

Grassroots Groups Overcoming Financial Crises

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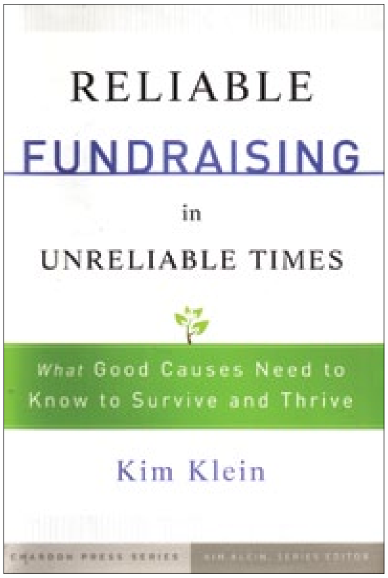

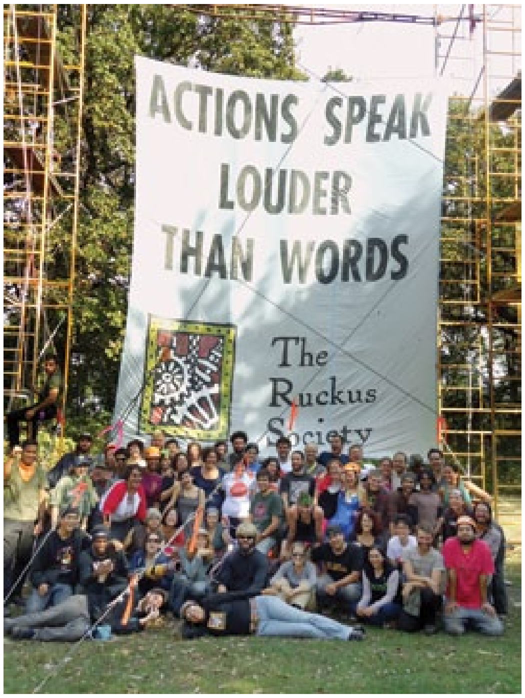

ON OUR COVER

The Ruckus Society provides environmental, human rights, and social justice organizers with tools, training, and support on how to use nonviolent direct action to achieve their goals. Ruckus, which is profiled in Karen Topakian's article on overcoming crises, has been supporting the fight against racist anti-immigration laws in Arizona with community trainings and hard-hitting actions like this banner-hang from a downtown Phoenix construction crane this past July.

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Keeping on...

by Jennifer Emiko Boyden

THE NONPROFIT WORLD LOST A GOOD FRIEND this past December—Bob Zimmerman, president of Zimmerman Lehman. Bob was a well-loved and highly respected trainer and author on fundraising techniques, who worked with nonprofits for more than 35 years. I had the pleasure of working with Bob on his 2008 "Boards that Love Fundraising" webinar with GIFT and was impressed with both his knowledge and the great sense of humor he brought to the work. Bob also generously donated his time to GIFT's social justice fundraising conferences. Our lasting image of Bob is of him sitting on the grass in his suit while providing one-on-one consultation to a conference participant. Thank you, Bob, for your hard work and dedication to nonprofit sustainability—you are greatly missed!

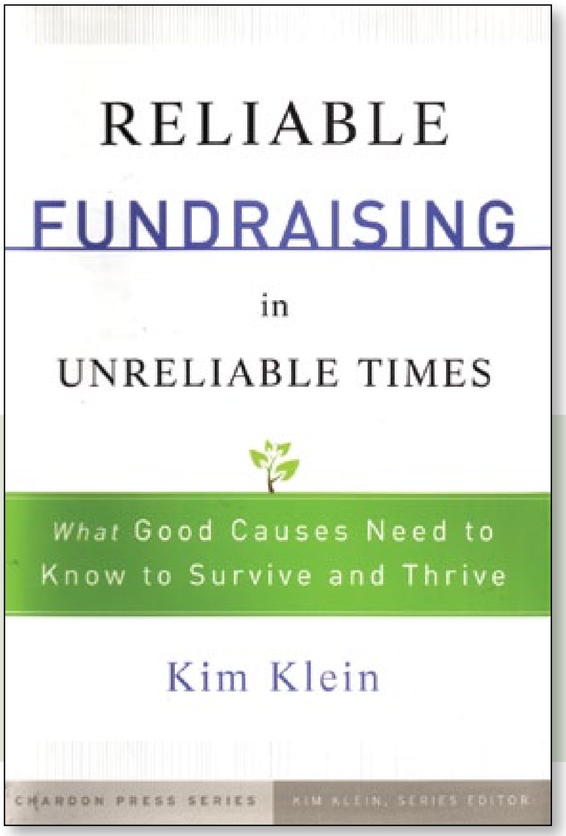
In order to sustain the *Journal,* we need 3,000 paid subscribers this year. We'll soon be launching a Readers Survey so we can learn what keeps bringing you back to the *Journal* or what we can do to encourage you to subscribe or renew. We're already in the process of making it easier for you to use our website and web store, and will be looking to improve your access to the electronic version and to the *Journal* online archive. Keep a look out for the survey—we hope you'll respond and keep us accountable to how we can best meet your needs.

Many grassroots groups lost significant foundation or government funding during the recession. So it's timely that this issue of the *Journal* focuses on crises: how to identify if your group is experiencing one, ways to cope if you are, and examples of groups that used creative strategies for pulling through them.

The issue begins with an excerpt adapted from Kim Klein's book, *Reliable Fundraising in Unreliable Times*. Kim offers ways to recognize when we're truly in crisis, lays out steps for assembling and using a Crisis Task Force, and provides helpful suggestions for donor communication during a crisis. Next, Karen Topakian shares the stories of four social justice groups that overcame serious financial adversity by focusing on what is most important in their work and continuing to raise money from their base. Effective communication often breaks down during stressful times, and Judith Katz explains how nonviolent communication can improve our relationships with coworkers and donors. We round out the issue with a training exercise to remind us of the importance of case statements since, as Kim Klein writes, "The case statement is the cornerstone for raising money effectively—crisis or no."

Please don't wait for our Readers Survey to get in touch if you have any questions or feedback. GIFT's success depends on our ability to share practical tools and inspirational stories that nurture and sustain people raising money for social justice. Thank you for reading the *Journal*, and for being *our* source of inspiration and knowledge.

Jennifer



What to Do if You Are in a Financial Crisis

by Kim Klein

Adapted from *Reliable Fundraising in Unreliable Times: What Good Causes Need to Know to Survive and Thrive,* by Kim Klein (Jossey-Bass, 2009).
For more information about this and other topics, or to purchase a copy of the book go to josseybass.com/go/kimkleinfundraising

IT'S USEFUL TO KEEP IN MIND that every problem an organization has will eventually show up in its fundraising and ultimately its financial health, leading most organizations to think that their problem has to do with their fundraising. However, difficulties with fundraising are often simply symptoms of a problem or part of a larger problem. To solve the problem requires correctly identifying it; otherwise, the solution will be a temporary fix.

It's important to remember that a problem is not a crisis. Even a serious problem may not be a crisis. To avoid a crisis, or to deal with one, requires knowing this difference.

How to Recognize a Crisis

In general, these are the identifiers of a crisis:

- **No easily identifiable problem.** If an otherwise healthy organization starts to have a serious cash flow problem, or a serious disagreement arises between the board chair and the executive director, or the group receives bad publicity about something, it may get into a crisis. But it probably won't, for the simple reason that the organization can focus on the single problem, figure out the possible solutions, and solve it. It may not be easy and it may not be pleasant, but it will not likely turn into a crisis.
- **No easy solution.** A crisis is often the result of leaving problems unaddressed or denied. This blinkered approach not only causes the problem to get worse, it often spawns other problems, so the solution won't be a one-step action. In a situation in which it's difficult to identify a single problem that lends itself to a straightforward solution, an organization needs to do something quickly to get out of crisis mode, but it can't be the wrong thing because the group doesn't have the luxury of making more mistakes.
- **If the organization continues on its current path it will have to close.** Situations in which the forecast of more of the same will lead to ruin, the people running the organization have no choice but to change. But what kind of change, how fast they can change, who is going to lead the change, and above all, how the change can be made permanent are extremely serious considerations and will need careful thought and appropriate action.

Why is it important to know if you are in a crisis, as opposed to a serious cash flow problem or a serious personnel issue? For two reasons: first, a crisis requires a plan that causes a fundamental shift in the way an organization does business, and this shift makes a permanent difference. A problem, like loss of funding could get to be a crisis if it causes an organization to lose sight of its mission and principles and if the organization does not see in it an opportunity to build or rebuild its grassroots fundraising program.

Second, donors will respond generously to one or even two organizational crises, but they don't like it when an organization seems to lurch from crisis to crisis. They begin to think that either you are not telling the truth ("crying wolf"), or that your organization is incompetent. Whatever they think, they begin to stop giving, so you don't want to be in a crisis very often and you don't want to exaggerate something into a crisis that is not one.

To determine whether you are in a crisis, ask yourself these questions:

- If left unchecked, will what is happening result in our having to close our doors?
- If left unchecked, will what is happening result in our having to change our mission significantly?
- Do a lot of people around the organization feel that the situation is hopeless?
- Is immediate drastic action called for?
- Is there no clear immediate solution?
- Is this crisis the climax of a series of events that have led up to it, even if it is precipitated by one major event?

If you answer yes to two or more of these questions, you are in a crisis. Mobilizing to solve a crisis is different in scale, in depth, and in outcome than mobilizing to solve a problem. It begins by creating a group to tackle the crisis.

The Crisis Task Force

Once you have established that you are indeed in a crisis, create a crisis task force.

This is a group of three to five people who will act as "mission control" for the next few months. They need to have a calm and reassuring presence, be able to keep focused on the big picture, and be able to keep decisions from being made based on anger, resentment, or other negative (if understandable) feelings. The Crisis Task Force should be made up of people who are eminently trustworthy and are able to keep information confidential. Perhaps most important, they need to believe deeply in the organization and the need for the organization to continue. Obviously, if the crisis is a scandal, no one directly related to the scandal should be on the Task Force.

If the crisis is strictly generated by funding cuts, the Task Force will be made up of people who will focus on immediate ways of raising money and who will create a longer-term fundraising plan. If the crisis has legal elements, then one member should be a lawyer with nonprofit experience. If the crisis is about financial mismanagement or poor budgeting, then having a bookkeeper or accountant as a member will be helpful.

Work of the Task Force

The Crisis Task Force is not an investigative body. It is not so concerned with whose fault the crisis is or what should have been done differently as with what needs to be done now and what needs to be done differently in the future. This is not to say that investigating what happened or figuring out what should have been done differently is not important, but it is not the main work of this committee.

The Crisis Task Force meets frequently for one or two, and maximum three months. In addition, the members of the Task Force will be making phone calls, meeting with staff and other board members, and answering questions as they come in. People have to be willing to make the time to do this job, which is why the length of the Task Force's life must be kept short.

Information the Task Force Gathers

Here is the information that the Crisis Task Force will need to begin developing in their first meeting. If this information isn't available, then one of their first tasks will be to get it.

1. Are people committed to keeping the organization going? If the answer to this question is a resounding, passionate, unhesitating "Yes!" then the rest of the questions are considered.
2. What happened to bring the organization to this point?
3. What is the cash flow projection for the next six months?
4. What fundraising plans are already in place?
5. What, if any, financial reserves are there, and what are the terms of using them?
6. What is the immediate financial need?
7. What are other immediate needs? (Examples: to reassure staff that their jobs are safe or figure out layoff plans, to hire an interim director, to negotiate paying bills late, to deal with the media).
8. What do the funders and donors know about what has happened and what do they think about it? Equally important, which funders and donors should be told and how much?
9. How, how often, and to whom does the Task Force communicate what it is doing?

The job of the Crisis Task Force is to keep the group alive during the crisis as well as figure out a fundraising plan, begin implementing that plan, and put in place steps to ensure that the crisis does not recur. Remember that a crisis is not a one-time-only unfortunate event in an otherwise smoothly functioning organization; it is the result of a series of missteps and miscalculations that have led up to the crisis. There can be a precipitating event, but the event alone cannot plunge the group into a crisis. Therefore, it will undoubtedly take a multilevel process to resolve the crisis and restore confidence.

In cases where an organization does decide to fold, it is the job of the Task Force to decide how that will happen. Should another organization be given the office furniture and the mailing list? What termination package can be given to staff? Are there debts to be paid? What will the organization tell the public? Deciding to close is both a hard decision and surprisingly complicated, not unlike ending a marriage. If that is the decision, the Task Force will probably want to consult a consultant with experience in this arena.

The Way Out: Think About Raising Money, Not About Cutting Costs

A cash flow projection over the next six months will show how immediately serious the situation is. At least in the beginning, approach the crisis thinking, "How can we raise the money we need?" rather than "How can we cut expenses?" If there are obvious cuts or ways to save money, by all means do them. You should be making any cost savings you can whether in crisis or not. But most small organizations spend so little money that looking for places to save money that don't cause cuts in basic programs is often not a good use of time.

You will find that the instinct of many people is to cut expenses rather than raise money. The Task Force should resist this reflex as much as possible and instead use this crisis to create new income streams. Cutting expenses will not provide any permanent solution to your crisis, nor will it move you in a new direction as an organization.

Mission, Message, and Damage Control

An important aspect of containing the crisis is to create a message for donors and possibly the public that describes the situation but does not exaggerate its dimensions or its implications for the organization. In creating such a message, you find what is important—in fact, what is undeniably persuasive—about what you do. To do that, first return to your case statement.

During a crisis, a case statement becomes a combination of an oath of allegiance, a blueprint for action, and a source of inspiration for the work ahead. Perhaps most important, the case statement is the cornerstone for raising money effectively—crisis or no. *(For how to polish your case statement, see the training exercise on page 6.)*

Create a Message

The message you create is specific to your current situation. To begin to craft the message, once it has found inspiration in the case statement, the Crisis Task Force or the board poses the question: "What does this organization bring to the current reality that is so critical that the organization should exist right now?" To put it more baldly, many organizations are going to go out of business in the next few years. Why shouldn't yours be one of them?

Your message should not be evasive or vague. If there are legal issues involved, ask your lawyer what you can say and what would be legally dangerous or off-limits. But if there are no legal issues, then figure out how you can tell the whole truth, but keep returning to the mission of the group. Part of the message can be that you will be sending out more information as it becomes available. Don't be nervous about admitting that you don't know everything yet.

Get the Board on Board

In crises, we often focus on the opinions of people outside the group—the donors, the clients, even the general public. Yet our greatest difficulty in forming a message and relaying it is often at the board or staff level. It is critical that board and staff know that their opinions and feelings are welcome; further, they must not feel that they are being asked to lie or be evasive with others, but they must also understand the importance of good judgment and tact in handling difficult matters. Board and staff must be involved in the process of exploring options and discussing all points of view, or they can quickly feel stifled.

Deliver the Message

The message cannot be separated from the messenger. Finding well-respected and trustworthy people to help you deliver your message is just as important as the message itself. Long-time donors, funders and volunteers make great messengers. They can deliver the message and then conclude (assuming they feel this way), "I think everything will be fine," or "I have a lot of confidence in the team of people who are working on this." Generally, people should be told through a call or a visit. Avoid e-mail, which can be forwarded too easily and may take on a life of its own.

Fundraisers have to take into account that there is an order in which the message will be delivered. Make sure that you don't inadvertently alienate someone simply by not informing them of the situation early on. Make a list of the people who need to hear about the crisis first. In addition to board and staff, think about anyone who thinks of themselves as close to your organization—the organizational "family." This list will include active volunteers, long-time funders, long-time major donors, and sometimes former staff and board.

Keep People Current

If, as in many crises, the situation unfolds over time, create a phone tree to keep people up to date. You can, at this point, decide to do an email newsletter, but again, remember that anything you write in an email can wind up anywhere. The people who are told first can be enlisted to tell others. Since they will probably want to tell someone anyway, this provides some control over message delivery.

Talking with Major Donors About the Crisis

Major donors get more fundraising time because they are giving more money. They usually feel they have made a bigger investment in the organization than a donor who gives a smaller amount, and a few extra major gifts from them will be a big help in getting an organization through a crisis. When an organization is in a crisis, major donors need reassurance that their gift is not going down the drain. Here are four things that will reassure almost all major donors; most of them need to hear about just one or two:

- **An explanation.** Major donors should usually be told about as much as any funder or board member. Don't feel you have to launch into a long explanation. Give a brief summary of what happened, then be open to fielding the donor's questions.
- **A fundraising plan.** A fundraising plan shows that you have thought through what is going to be required to move out of the crisis. Your plan should be as realistic as possible, but hopeful and optimistic. Be prepared to show your cash flow chart and a strategy-by-strategy description, including gross and net incomes for each strategy. Show them your gift range chart and talk about the number of other people you are recruiting to help with funding during the crisis.
- **Help from other donors.** Evidence that other people have bought into this plan is important. As you get gifts, ask if you can share the donor's name and the size of the gift with other prospects. Having a board that has bought into the plan is critical, too. You need to be able to say, "One hundred percent of our board members have made a gift that is significant for them to demonstrate their faith in our future."
- **An escape plan.** Some donors need to be offered a contingency—they will only give if certain things happen. Of course, such a way out should be offered only if the person clearly indicates that's what is needed. Most people do not require this fourth element. Nonetheless, some may want it. Ask the donor how much money you would have to have raised toward the goal for the donor to feel that the campaign was going to succeed.

When the Crisis Is Caused by a Scandal

Scandals are difficult to deal with because they break trust. Now the question is not whether your plan will succeed but whether you really can fix an organization that has allowed such behavior. Going back to message, you will want to identify people who can say they think the organization can be trusted again and the problems are being dealt with responsibly. Talk with those people. What would they need to see in the organization to feel confident about saying good things about it or putting their own money into it?

In a scandal, finding out the context of the problem often goes a long way to reassuring people that the problem can be solved. Donors need to know that the circumstances that allowed the scandal no longer exist and that the organization is thoroughly evaluating itself to ensure that nothing else is amiss.

In the end, donors are your friends, and major donors are your family. They may not like what you do, but they will generally stand by you if they have enough history with you to know that this scandal is something you did—and not something you are.

Everything Comes Back to Mission

In a crisis, program or fundraising direction may have to change, but that step is possible as long as there is a group of people who care deeply about the organization and who have recommitted themselves to its mission. ■

Kim Klein is Publisher Emerita of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*. The Sixth Edition of her classic book, *Fundraising for Social Change*, has just been published by Jossey-Bass.

Want to read more articles on surviving through crises? Visit the *Journal* archive at grassrootsfundraising.org/archive to find articles like:

"Five Tips for Nonprofits to Survive & Thrive – Now and into the Future" by Kim Klein (Vol. 28 No. 2)
"Time to Merge? Financial & Fundraising Implications" by Priscilla Hung & Stephanie Roth (Vol. 28 No.1)
"How to Prepare Your Nonprofit for an Economic Recession" by Richard Male (Vol. 27 No. 3)
"How We Survived an Embezzlement" by Teresa Erickson (Vol. 24 No. 2)

Polishing Up Your Case Statement and Putting It to Use

WHETHER OR NOT YOUR ORGANIZATION is in a crisis, the case statement is the cornerstone for raising money effectively. It is a living document that board and staff work with to create programs and policies, and it forms the basis of outreach and fundraising materials.

When it comes to fundraising, the case statement accomplishes three things:

1. Clearly articulates the mission and goals to ensure that the fundraising program is mission-driven
2. Contains the information that anyone who is fundraising for the organization needs to know, and helps make sure that staff, board, and key volunteers are on the same page
3. Serves as the basis for the content that goes into external materials, such as fundraising letters, grant proposals, brochures, newsletters, and so on

The case statement should inform your work on a regular basis, be kept up-to-date, and be reviewed at least annually, with the budget and fundraising plan updated each year. Too often, however, board and staff spend a long time creating the case statement and then file it away never to look at it again. If this is true for your organization, this exercise is for you. Do it at your next board or staff meeting or board-staff retreat.

Exercise: Polishing Up Your Case Statement

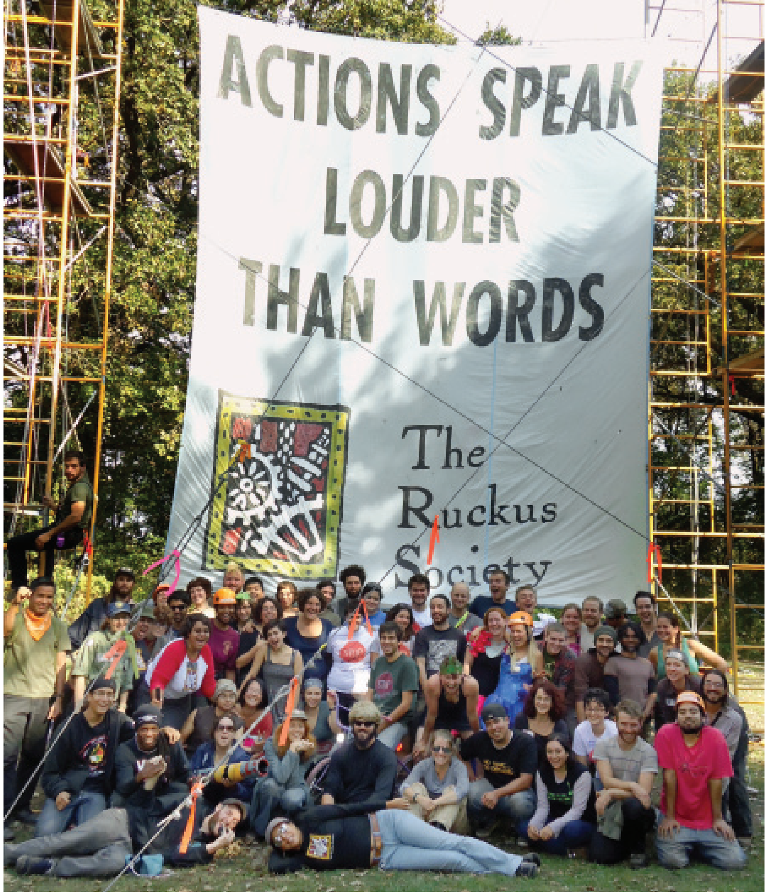
Goal: To make sure your organization has a case statement that provides a shared understanding of what the organization stands for and how it will get there.
Participants: Board and/or staff (preferably both)
Time needed: 30-60 minutes
Materials: Copies of the following checklist, flip chart with an enlarged copy of the checklist on it, markers
Preparation: Decide who will facilitate the discussion. Send the checklist along with your existing case statement (even if it is out of date) to participants before the meeting.

Steps:

1. The facilitator reviews the purpose of having a case statement and the goal of this exercise.
2. The group goes through each item on the checklist and discusses whether it is covered in the existing case statement and if so, whether it is fine as is or needs to be updated or rewritten. Discuss until there is group agreement on the rating for each component. Fill in the checklist on the flip chart so everyone is clear.
3. For the components you already have in place and are satisfied with (don't worry about minor edits for now), give yourselves a pat on the back.
4. For components that need to be created, updated, or rewritten, choose a small committee to draft these elements for group approval at the next meeting.
5. For components for which you have information that has not been incorporated into the existing case statement, assign someone to pull those materials together and share them with the drafting committee. The committee members can then decide whether they are happy with these components or they can make needed edits. Include these components in the drafts for group approval at the next meeting.

Exercise for Reviewing an Organizational Case Statement

Components of a Case Statement	Does it Meet Your Fundraising Purpose?	Rate Your Organization
Mission statement: Why the group exists	Does it inspire donors?	☐ We have it and it meets our fundraising purpose ☐ We have it, but it needs to be updated or re-written ☐ We have it, but it is not yet incorporated into the case statement ☐ We don't have it
Goals: What your group hopes to accomplish **Objectives:** How you will meet your goals	Do the goals and objectives help donors understand what you do?	☐ We have it and it meets our fundraising purpose ☐ We have it, but it needs to be updated or re-written ☐ We have it, but it is not yet incorporated into the case statement ☐ We don't have it
History: Summary of the group's history to show how long you've been doing this work and key accomplishments	Does the history help donors feel confident in the group's ability to reach its goals?	☐ We have it and it meets our fundraising purpose ☐ We have it, but it needs to be updated or re-written ☐ We have it, but it is not yet incorporated into the case statement ☐ We don't have it
Organizational structure: A chart or description of the structure of the organization that tells who is involved	Does the structure persuade donors to trust the organization's leaders?	☐ We have it and it meets our fundraising purpose ☐ We have it, but it needs to be updated or re-written ☐ We have it, but it is not yet incorporated into the case statement ☐ We don't have it
Budget: Expenses and income	Is it clear to donors how much your work costs and where the money goes?	☐ We have it and it meets our fundraising purpose ☐ We have it, but it needs to be updated or re-written ☐ We have it, but it is not yet incorporated into the case statement ☐ We don't have it
Fundraising plan: How you are going to raise your budget	Does the fundraising plan help donors understand how they fit into your fundraising?	☐ We have it and it meets our fundraising purpose ☐ We have it, but it needs to be updated or re-written ☐ We have it, but it is not yet incorporated into the case statement ☐ We don't have it



Ruckus Society's Advanced Action Boot Camp for Eco-Justice in Clarks Grove, MN, September 2010. Photo by Bill Busse

No Money, No Cry

How Four Social Justice Organizations Succeeded in the Face of Financial Insecurity

by Karen Topakian

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT what you and your organization would do if your key funders walked away. Most of them, at once. Would you hold on until you'd spent your last dollar? Would you close your doors immediately? Would you lay off all of your staff? Would you fundraise like hell?

Here are the stories of four social justice organizations—Ruckus Society, Southerners on New Ground (SONG), generationFIVE, and Generations Ahead — that experienced these losses and more. Instead of packing up and closing, they developed new organizational models and implemented successful, bold approaches to tackle their financial instability. By focusing on their core values and reaching out to their members for support, they've all made it through their crises with tales to tell of their successes.

Getting Rid of the Office

When Ruckus Society, an Oakland, California-based training organization for environmental, human rights and social justice activists, experienced an extreme loss of funding in the second quarter of 2008, they took radical steps to reorganize. Their first step: listening to the advice of their GIFT intern, Sabba Syal. "She did a lot to set us up to re-shift our priorities to grassroots fundraising," said co-director Megan Swoboda.

Their second step: heeding Kim Klein's advice in *Reliable Fundraising in Unreliable Times* to form a crisis task force. They called their task force the Ruckus Sustainers Team (RST). All seven staff members agreed to include the executive director, operations director, development director, board president, and their accountant in the RST.

After looking at all of the financial information, the RST decided how many positions the organization could sustain, laying off everyone except the executive director and closing the office.

The former staff decided together on what the new staff positions would be, preferring fewer full-time positions rather than part-time positions merely to retain more individuals. Staff were then free to re-apply for the new positions.

By the fall of 2008, the group's staff had been reduced from seven to three, all of whom would now work from home. Since Ruckus depends on a network of more than 100 volunteer trainers, the staff decided "the best use of our funds (would) go directly to programs."

In keeping with their network model, Ruckus created a leadership team of six people, consisting of two board members, two staff people, and two volunteers, all of whom share power and responsibility, with an equal say in decision-making about programmatic direction and goals. They meet in person twice a year and hold phone meetings monthly. Swoboda refers to this team as being an "overall guiding force in the organization."

She credits the formation of this team with meeting an organizational goal: "We've been trying to figure out for years how to provide transparency," said Swoboda. "This period has provided a really good opportunity to create a good model." Their model inspires transparency by requiring each of the members to collect feedback from, and report decisions to, their constituents to facilitate the team's conversation and flow of information.

In order to build and maintain the bonds among the remaining staff, Ruckus staff hold weekly staff meetings at each other's homes, where they also make lunch together. When they're working on a big program, they add a weekly program meeting to the schedule, providing them with two face-to-face opportunities in a week.

Advanced technology allows the staff to work together regardless of their location. "We swear by Basecamp, an online work-management tool run by 37signals," said Swoboda. "It's a fabulous tool to help track things for full transparency and accountability." Basecamp allows them to share files and store documents.

Ruckus also relied on a technological solution to elect the two volunteer representatives for the new leadership team. Through an anonymous online voting system of one person-one vote, the volunteer network of 100+ members elected their two representatives for the leadership team, who serve staggered two-year terms.

Swoboda attributes Ruckus's success in weathering its difficult period to a few factors, starting with their network model, which she refers to as "really resilient." She credits the network's resiliency to its size — the large number of volunteers allows Ruckus to have its hands in many different projects in many different areas — and to the rotation of power among the volunteers who serve on the leadership team.

By investing in this higher level of engagement with the volunteers, Swoboda believes, "If it got to the point that we couldn't fund the staff at all, Ruckus would continue. The network model would continue."

Swoboda explains their success factors: "In 2008, when we started to focus on the restructuring, we took some advice from Kim Klein, who advises to focus on raising funds, not cutting program." Swoboda admits that "it takes a lot more time and energy to do grassroots fundraising." Taking this "long lens approach to fundraising" explains "why we're here now," said Swoboda who attended GIFT's Money for Our Movements conference in August 2010. Ruckus continues to increase its energy on grassroots fundraising.

She also attributes their success to their commitment to transparency about their financial reality — with both staff and shareholders — and in finding solutions within their community. "We know the best solutions come from communities working together. Having all of the creative brainpower together. Not being afraid that people will be focused on self-preservation," said Swoboda. "The more we align with our values the better we are doing."

Swoboda acknowledged that all of the changes felt like a big risk. "As long as we continue to take the risk and do the work that we need to do, we're getting better and better. We pulled off some of our best work this year with the least [amount of] resources."

Developing a New Generation of Leadership

Organizational changes at Southerners on New Ground (SONG) reached a new level in 2006 when co-directors Paulina Hernandez and Caitlin Breedlove, each 25 years old, wrote a document titled, "Overview of Our New Work." The two women outlined the key problems that faced this Atlanta-based organization, whose mission is to provide a home for LGBTQ liberation across lines of race, class, abilities, age, culture, gender, and sexuality in the South. The new co-directors observed that SONG, founded in 1993, now suffered from a number of problems, including a lack of comprehensive plans in response to older staff transitioning out of the organization, lack of opportunities for younger staff, reduced numbers of organizers, small constituencies, lack of funding, and internal conflicts, especially regarding race, gender, and age.

This bold assessment led the directors to propose solutions in the form of two action plans: "1. Develop strategies to create a younger, fresher board and staff, surrounded by older activists who would transfer their skills and provide ongoing support; 2. Focus our work more strategically, with small, flexible staffing and a modest budget that realistically could be raised."

A younger, fresher board of directors was soon recruited, with five new members between the ages of 24 and 34 who shared SONG's values bringing along their organizing expertise. When this new board of directors first met, they asked themselves, "What do you wish had been in place for the LGBTQ community in the South the day before Katrina hit?" The board replied, "A large number of organizers, all connected to one another."

From that day forward, the staff focused on expanding the number of organizers. They designed an organizing school; built a network of organizers in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alabama who listened to community issues and concerns; and developed community-based organizing projects and campaigns. With this model, SONG built its membership from 0 to 700 in three years. Breedlove describes the membership as a "deep-build model, not just names on a sign-up sheet." SONG members have attended SONG retreats, six-month-long programs, or other events.

Co-director Caitlin Breedlove admits to being overwhelmed when she started at SONG, noting that it was the kind of job she would expect to be held by someone with a nonprofit management degree. But she persevered, applying her working-class experiences to help her with money management. "If you've never had to shop for groceries on a budget, it might be hard to tighten purse strings in an organization," she said.

Because many members don't have a lot of financial resources, SONG puts a special emphasis on managing its resources carefully. "When you take money from poor people you have a sacred trust to spend it wisely," says Breedlove.

SONG practices what it preaches about economic equality: "We try to put an economic justice frame on our work," Breedlove explains. "All of our staff make within $2 of each other on an hourly rate." Full-time employees receive healthcare benefits; part-time employees were given the choice of receiving healthcare or earning a higher hourly wage; they chose the higher wage.

WHEN YOU TAKE MONEY FROM POOR PEOPLE YOU HAVE A SACRED TRUST TO SPEND IT WISELY.

When creating new positions, SONG asks itself whether their members' donations should be spent hiring full or part-time staff. "I think it's better for staff to hire full-time employees with benefits," says Breedlove, noting that sometimes that's not financially possible. "How do we do what's best for staff and what the organization needs? Sometimes those things are in conflict."

Because the group focuses on how it is spending its money, SONG also looks at where they are raising it. Currently, 20 percent of SONG's funds come from the grassroots and 80 percent from institutions. Given that imbalance, SONG recently hired a staff person to focus just on grassroots fundraising, which they saw as an area of great potential. They are discussing asking their members to tithe to the organization.

SONG has gone through a lot of changes in the last five years and remains committed to its vision. According to Breedlove, "If we want organizations in the South, we have to build them ourselves."

Going All-Volunteer

generationFIVE, an organization committed to ending the sexual abuse of children within five generations, struggled with financial and organizational problems early in 2008. "We had a sudden collapse in the ability to maintain infrastructural support that we needed," said Chris Lymbertos, a member of the generationFIVE (gen5) leadership team and the director. "We had to lay off staff. We had some internal challenges around skills. We had a bad couple of years."

In order to keep their programmatic work of ending abuse moving forward, the staff of this 10 plus-year-old organization based in Oakland, California temporarily transformed into an all-volunteer leadership team.

The team kept the organization together through meetings, both by phone and in person, every other week that lasted for a few hours even though everyone, Lymbertos acknowledged, was super busy.

"We didn't know when we took that decision (to serve as volunteers) how long we would do it for," said Lymbertos. "One of the most important things I learned: check to make sure everyone has the capacity to do the work involved."

Working on ending child sexual abuse was a personal issue for every team member, so they stuck it out. Lymbertos noted that as a collective they were operating on consensus, making some days really hard.

But they persevered by creating a timeline, incorporating constant assessments, and establishing an internal feedback mechanism. Lymbertos admitted that they thought they'd get further a little sooner.

Lymbertos noted that dealing with an issue that's so intense, "has pushed us into a somatized organization, an organization that sees itself as a living body that holds individual and collective processes."

gen5 works to end abuse through the concept of Transformative Justice, which they define as seeking to provide people who experience violence with immediate safety and long-term healing and reparations while holding people who commit violence accountable within and by their communities. Currently, a Transformative Justice (TJ) Collaborative operates in New York, the San Francisco Bay Area, Atlanta, Seattle, and soon in Los Angeles. Each TJ collaborative raises money for its own work with some help from gen5. Future plans, according to Lymbertos, include holding an annual convening: "We have different approaches and contexts and communities we want to learn and document from each other. And create the space to build together."

Currently, supported by a grant from the Ms. Foundation acknowledging the group's need to stay in existence, gen5 employs three consultants on six-month contracts to serve as executive director, program director, and development director.

"In our next phase we're going to focus deeply on the questions of essential programs, fundraising, organizational development, and coaching," said Lymbertos. "Our hope is that Ms. will continue its funding and that we can reignite some lapsed relationships with donors. We plan to do an assessment of the work in six months, assess people in the positions. Then transition from contractor to staff and run the way we used to be."

Considering Consultants Rather Than Staff

In early 2009, Generations Ahead anticipated major financial problems once several of its key funders announced cutbacks. Major cutbacks from institutional funders were not part of the group's plan when it started in 2007. In fact, Generations Ahead, which brings diverse communities together to debate and promote policies on the just and ethical uses of human genetic technologies, thought that by 2009 it would reach the million-dollar mark.

Instead, the foundations that supported their activism during the Bush years were focused on policy victories in the Obama years. Sujatha Jesudason, Generations Ahead's executive director, realized that the organization's work did not fit its funders' new strategy.

The organization decided to make proactive decisions that would enable it to have the most impact in a short period of time.

Deciding that their greatest impact would be in the area of reproductive rights, they realized they needed to restructure by replacing a mid-level person with a high-impact person. However, they discovered they couldn't afford the best candidate for the new position. Jesudason recognized that perhaps they didn't need a full-time person in the role, asking herself, "If we need high-impact folks and we can only afford this much, can we only hire what we need?" Thus was born the consultant model.

Once the best candidate agreed to serve as a consultant instead of as a staff person, Jesudason felt that they found "a super successful strategy" for her organization. Through attrition of other staff, she implemented the consultant strategy in other positions, allowing the organization to move its resources around. As a result, they've been able to invest more in other programs, such as communications.

Jesudason contends that nonprofits often don't have the resources to hire high-impact people. Instead, they hire people with lower skills who need much more development. "The hardest struggle for the smaller organization is to hire highly experienced staff. When we hire people we can afford, we don't do the high-impact work."

Hiring consultants instead of permanent staff people doesn't entirely feel right to Jesudason. "I struggle with the more long-term social justice implications," she confesses. "Especially about developing and training staff people."

Nonetheless, Generations Ahead's consultant approach has proved successful. "Even so, I'm finding that I adore this model," said Jesudason, as she notes that she spends less time on supervision and more time on program. "Ninety-five percent of my time I'm working to my strengths and doing the things I love. Supervising consultants is so different than managing staff. I don't have to walk them through it. If you don't do the project, I don't pay for it."

For organizations that are faced with similar funding problems, Jesudason advises, "Make hard and courageous decisions to do high-impact, excellent work early and not when you're backed into a corner. Go with the areas that have the most juice and momentum."

She continues, "One of the hardest things to say is, we're going to focus on one thing and not everything," said Jesudason, who acknowledges that organizations often value inclusivity over effectiveness. "We could be making scratching sounds on a number of issues instead of zooming sounds on one."

"We cared about the results more than about the process or the relationships," said Jesudason, who also noted that this isn't necessarily good. It took a tremendous amount of courage and risk for the organization to focus 80 percent of its energy on one issue and only 20 percent on the others. "There are moments where you have to say, we have to show results."

They are showing results in fundraising as well. They've retained three out of four of the funders they thought they had lost and raised an additional $95,000. "We're now seen as a good investment," said Jesudason. "We have more money than we expected with a low-overhead model. We have more opportunity than I expected us to have at this point."

In the face of serious financial and organizational challenges, each of these four groups created new ways of working to accomplish their organization's mission. By developing teams and task forces they kept their programmatic work alive. By changing their fundraising focus from a reliance on institutional funders to a cultivation of grassroots donors, they will achieve greater financial stability. By being resilient and transparent, intentional and honest they will continue to be effective social change organizations. ■

Karen Topakian is the owner of Topakian Communications, a freelance writing and communications consulting business. You can find her at topakian.com or on Facebook at Topakian Communications. She served as the executive director of the Agape Foundation from 1993 to 2009.

Compassionate Communication

Navigating Challenges in the Fundraising Workspace

by Judith Katz

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH SPEAKING and listening are key skills in our personal lives—and in our fundraising work. Our ability to convey and to understand meanings on an emotional as well as intellectual level is a critical factor in our success. In every area of our lives, communication skills help us to collaborate, to navigate differences, and to enjoy what we do.

Learning Compassionate Communication, also known as Nonviolent Communication, or NVC, can increase our capacity to do all these things and more. For almost a half a century, people have applied NVC in education, law, parenting, psychology, health care, spirituality, politics and other venues where a high level of communication skill is critical.

I learned about NVC more than 10 years ago. Since then, my NVC practice has become a key strategy in both my personal life and my professional work as a nonprofit manager. I'm not a certified NVC trainer, but I've consulted to one of the largest hubs of NVC training and practice in the world, Bay Area Nonviolent Communication (BayNVC), since 2007. In this article, I share some of the core aspects of NVC. Applying them may help you increase your effectiveness as a fundraiser.

About NVC

First, a little background: The founder of NVC is the psychologist Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, who developed the method while working in the 1960s-era Civil Rights movement. The word "nonviolent" is a rough translation of the Sanskrit word "ahimsa," and is historically associated with movements of spirituality, dialogue and peace, such as those led by Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. More than being about the avoidance of violence, however, NVC is about connecting with others in ways that enable compassionate giving to take place.

Core Principle: Needs and Behavior

The game-changing principle at the base of all NVC learning is that needs are the motive force for all human action. From an NVC perspective, everyone in the world has the same fundamental needs (see the abbreviated list of needs, also called values, in the box below). This core principle is true whether we are male or female, young or old, wealthy or economically

Human Needs/Values
(An abbreviated list)

Acceptance	Interdependence
Affection	Freedom
Appreciation	Learning
Autonomy	Love
Celebration	Participation
Closeness	Physical nurturance
Community	Play
Connection	Respect
Consideration	Rest
Contribution	Safety
Creativity	Spiritual communion
Empathy	Subsistence
Honesty	Support
Identity	Trust
Integrity	Understanding

marginalized. Seeing people's behavior and responses from the view that each action is striving to meet one or more needs is a radical departure from the typical practice of labeling people and their behaviors with judgments such as "good," "bad," "right," "wrong," "caring," "selfish," and so on.

The qualities included in the needs/values list are ones that are really important to people – the things that people need in order to thrive in their lives. What varies from person to person is how we honor those needs, those values, or what's important to us. I further describe thus distinction between needs and how we meet needs in the next section. But first, here's an exercise to apply this learning about human needs: What is motivating you to read this article? Do one or more of the words in the needs list resonate with you?

Core Distinction: Needs vs. Strategies

NVC makes the core distinction between needs and strategies to meet needs. Conflict arises when people have different strategies, even if their needs are exactly the same. For example, have you ever watched people argue about the best way to get from Point A to Point B? Both people agree that Point B is the goal, but they have different strategies for getting there. For instance, if there is a mountain of work that needs to be done before the annual event, one committee member may prefer to hire a temp, another would rather make do with rearranging the workloads of existing staff, and a third wants to recruit volunteers. While they all have different strategies, they likely share the same needs for effectiveness, support, and organization.

Conflicts occur when strategies cannot be agreed on, even though the needs might be exactly the same. In such times, an understanding of the distinction between needs and strategies can help create peace of mind for ourselves and increase our capacity to see things from one another's point of view.

For instance, the board president tells you, "We need to raise $50,000 in the next three weeks! I don't know how we're going to do it!" Here are some of your options mapped out from an NVC perspective. *(See Figure 1 below)*

In this instance, it's likely that both you and the board president came into the interaction feeling stressed and wanting support. The first nine types of responses are less likely to create connection around that shared reality. NVC training helps us learn how to increase connection through the use of the tools exemplified by the last four options. See the Tree of Life graphic on page 14 for more details about these four choices.

Core Need: Contribution and Connection

Although some economists see selfless giving as an inexplicable divergence from logical self-interest, from an NVC per-

Figure 1

	TYPE OF RESPONSE	EXAMPLE
1	Giving advice	"You should start calling people!"
2	Correcting	"Actually, I don't think we need to raise that much money."
3	Interrogating	"Did you check to make sure that's an accurate amount?"
4	Diagnosing	"I know, it's totally ridiculous."
5	Sympathizing	"I feel sorry for you. It must be hard having so much responsibility."
6	Consoling	"Don't worry, we'll do it somehow."
7	Story-telling	"I heard about how another organization raised $50,000 in three weeks…"
8	Blaming	"It's because the board has been slacking on their responsibilities."
9	Disconnected self-expressing	"You think you're stressed! Imagine how I feel!"
10	Self-connecting (or self-empathy)	(To self) "I am noticing that I am feeling relief that she is tracking the budgetary situation. This meets my need for shared reality."
11	Giving empathy	"Are you feeling stressed and wanting more support?"
12	Silent empathy	(Silently guessing, imagining that she's feeling stressed and wanting more support.)
13	Connected self-expressing	"Thanks for telling me… I'm relieved to hear that you are tracking it too."

spective, it is human nature to willingly give from the heart. As fundraisers, we often see people giving joyfully and altruistically without any sense of duty, obligation, or expectation of material reward. Rather than understanding giving as a momentary lapse of self-interest, we as fundraisers see it as strategy to meet needs for compassion, integrity, interdependence, and more. This framing helps us see that as fundraisers, we are offering strategies to help people meet their natural human desire to contribute to well-being in the world.

Core Method: Receiving a "No"

From an NVC perspective, there are two ways of making an ask: a request and a demand.

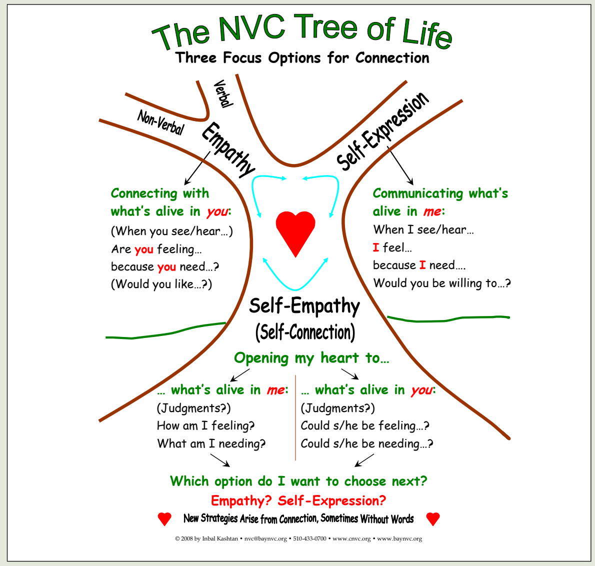
A request is an ask that can be denied without any consequences to the person responding to the request. Requests tend to nurture open communication, authenticity, and trust. On the other hand, demands are characterized as asks that leave no room for a "no." In demand mode, responses to a "no" may include criticizing, guilt-tripping, or subtly shaming people for not acceding to what we want. The only way that we can tell whether an ask is a request or a demand is to see if there are consequences when it is denied.

A "no," from an NVC perspective, is valuable feedback to help us support people in their efforts to contribute to life.

A Note About Money

From an NVC perspective, money is a strategy, not a need. Money has no intrinsic value —you cannot eat or wear it, and study after study has shown that having money does not equate with being happy. However, because money is a strategy that we use daily to meet all kinds of needs in all kinds of ways, we often talk about it as a need in itself.

This understanding can help fundraisers craft more powerful messages. Focusing on the need(s) donations will meet will contribute to more compelling pitches built around those needs. For example, a suggestion to "Donate today so that people have food to eat tomorrow" will be more powerful than the less direct, "Your gift will help us reach our goal!"



The NVC Tree of Life

The NVC Tree of Life, developed by NVC trainer Inbal Kashtan, is a map of the three options for connection offered by NVC at any moment, a way to see our choices in any situation.

Here's an example of using the Tree of Life. Let's say that your director routinely asks you to do more work than you find possible in the time that she wants it done. You realize that in order to accomplish all the work, you would have to forego other activities that are important to you.

You feel torn about this ongoing problem – worried about speaking up for yourself and at the same time annoyed with the continual stress of having more tasks than you can possibly do. What can you do?

Starting at the base of the Tree, you self-connect. You listen to your own feelings of anxiety and pain around your workload, and you connect with the needs you are drawn to meet by prioritizing work. You then also empathize with the needs you meet by prioritizing other, non-work activities. This consciousness grounds you before you take action. "Don't just do something, sit there," is Marshall Rosenberg's exhortation. You can return to sit at the roots of the Tree for strength at any time.

When you feel ready, you can "climb" to one of the two branches of the Tree, which represent, on the one side, self-expression, and on the other, empathy. Both branches are choices for you to explore as you learn about your needs and those of the other person.

When we hear a "no," it's an opportunity for us to learn what needs the nay-sayer is trying to meet. Their "no" is a "yes" to meeting their needs in a way that does not involve the particular strategy that we've proposed to them.

This distinction can help us cultivate long-lasting, trusting relationships with our donors. For example, if a prospect says "no" to our request for a $10,000 gift to the annual fund, we could explore whether they mean "Yes, but I'll give at a later date," or "Yes, if the Board President asks me," or "Yes, but I'll give a smaller amount," and so on. By valuing the needs of nay-sayers, you will build more resilient relationships with them.

Connecting and Contributing

Applying NVC in our grassroots fundraising work helps accomplish a couple of important goals. The first is to increase our consciousness of the needs we are meeting by helping people to contribute to life. The second is to improve the quality of our connections. Putting connections first continually shows how much we value our relationships with our donors, our colleagues, and the people our organization serves. Our fundraising is more likely to be successful — and fun — if we are connecting in an effort to contribute to other people's well-being.

Many of the most successful fundraisers intuitively put connection first, and NVC offers valuable tools to make connecting easier. Through the effort to learn more about universal human needs, and by making requests rather than demands, we are leaving the door open for creative thinking, joyful contributions, and an increased likelihood that everyone's needs will be met. ■

For classes, workshops and more info on Nonviolent Communication:
Bay Area Nonviolent Communication: baynvc.org
Center for Nonviolent Communication: cnvc.org

In addition to being a consultant to Bay Area Nonviolent Communication (BayNVC.org), Judith Katz works at Bay Nature Institute in Berkeley and is active with Bay Area Transition Initiatives. Contact her at judith@judithkconsulting.com.

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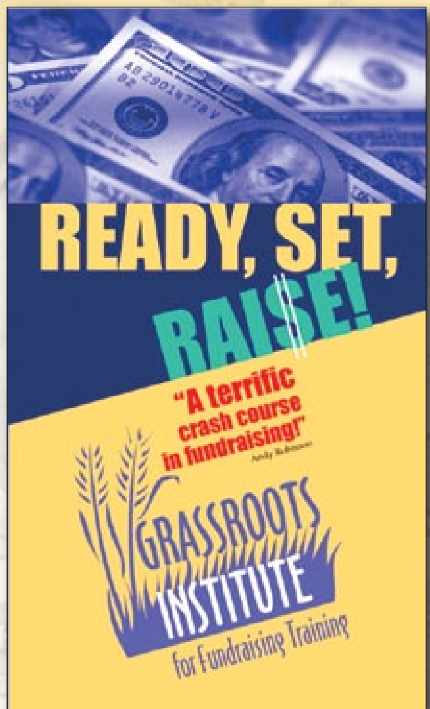

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