

Grassroots Fundraising Journal

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PUBLISHER EMERITA
Kim Klein

EDITORS
Jennifer Emiko Boyden
Ryan Li Dahlstrom

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Chris Martin

COPY EDITOR
Sonny Singh

COVER PHOTO
Elana Redfield, Sylvia Rivera Law Project staff attorney & director of the Survival and Self-Determination Project

GJF EDITORIAL BOARD
Yee Won Chong, Will Cordery, Dolores Garay, Priscilla Hung, Yasmeen Perez, Megan Peterson, Randall Quan, Stephanie Roth

For subscription inquiries, to request permission to reprint *Journal* articles, and for advertising information, please contact: jennifer@grassrootsfundraising.org

GIFT STAFF
Jennifer Emiko Boyden
Communications Director
Ryan Li Dahlstrom
Movement Building Director
Laurene Francois
Training Director
Nan Jessup
Finance & Operations Director

GIFT BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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Adriana Rocha, Chair
Adwoa Spencer

GIFT: 1904 Franklin Street, Suite 705
Oakland, CA 94612

info@grassrootsfundraising.org
grassrootsfundraising.org

PHONE: 888.458.8588 (TOLL-FREE)
510.452.4520 (SF BAY AREA)
FAX: 510.452.2122

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Common Themes & Questions in the Field

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE it is already almost the end of 2014. We, like many of you, are hard at work on our year-end fundraising campaign. We're also amidst end-of-year evaluations, grant reporting and planning for 2015. It has been an exciting year at GIFT, with our

first-ever Money for Our Movements conference on the East Coast and a number of new training and organizational partnerships throughout the country. I think we're all looking forward to some time off for rest, reflection and rejuvenation at the end of the year.

This issue builds off dynamic discussions started at this year's conference and trainings, which represent many common questions and quandaries social justice fundraisers are grappling with. How do we strengthen our fundraising teams and engage our boards in fundraising? How can we grow relationships with major donors over time as well as develop responsive and creative funding models that benefit our communities? And perhaps most timely, how do we make the most of our end-of-year fundraising campaigns?

The first article, written by Kim Klein and Stephanie Roth, builds off the debate at Money for Our Movements about the usefulness of boards and whether or not we should do away with boards all together. This article will leave you with more tools for recruiting and selecting new board members while keeping your current board fully engaged and accountable. Next, Tanya Mote shares tips for building authentic relationships with major donors over the course of the year—something that is sure to be helpful for next year's fundraising plan. We then hear from Gabriel Foster at the Trans Justice Funding Project about their model, philosophy and vision for community-led social justice philanthropy. Last, Avi Cummings and Ari Wohlfeiler share tips and strategies for your end of year campaign.

We hope you can utilize some of these tips for your fundraising this year and next. And as always, please be in touch if you have ideas for future articles you would like to see here.

Ryan Li

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All Aboard: Boards That Work

By Kim Klein & Stephanie Roth

KIM RECENTLY MET A NEW AND WONDERFUL CLIENT that does great advocacy work on public education. The organization was interested in having her do a training for their entire board on how to ask for money in person. She met with the executive director, the chair of the fundraising committee and two other long time board members. She asked them how much fundraising the board members did now.

The chair of the fundraising committee, Laura, sighed. “Some of us heard you last year at a conference, and you suggested starting with something that is not scary and everyone can easily do. So we started with thank you calls. Every board member was to make five thank you calls in July. We gave them a script, the donor information and a timeline. But we were the only ones who made the calls.”

Kim asked, “So what happened?”

“I called everyone to remind them, and they just said they hadn’t gotten to it,” replied Laura.

“And what is the consequence for that behavior?” asked Kim.

There was a moment of stunned silence. “Consequence?” the ED finally squeaked. “It is not as if you can fire them.”

“Exactly,” chimed in another board member. “They are donating their time. But we are hoping that your training will inspire them to actually do some asking.” She smiled brightly.

At this year’s Money for Our Movements conference, the debate was whether boards have outlived their usefulness or whether they are still useful and important (see sidebar on next page for the full resolution).

The debaters were a talented group of people who, among all of them, have held all the roles that most nonprofit organizations have available: three are or were executive directors, all are or have been board members, two have been development directors, and two are now consultants. The debate was dynamic and thought-provoking.

We were very pleased that both sides focused on a key point of boards, one which is often disregarded or forgotten: boards allow people most affected by or invested in an issue to play a leadership role in addressing that issue and, thus, create better solutions to pressing social issues than would otherwise be the case. Grassroots fundraising consultants, with us among them, have placed a great deal of emphasis

on the board's role in fundraising. What we were not always clear about is that fundraising is not the chief priority of the board, and that, while all board members need to participate in fundraising, they should not be chosen simply for their own access to money or ability to raise money. In retrospect, we see how we inadvertently contributed to the mythology that organizations must find rich people who care about their issues, who will give lots of money and raise even more money from their rich friends. When this does not happen, the staff throw their hands up in despair and resign themselves to a board that doesn't work.

In this article, we will build on our belief that a board of directors should be a tool of democracy. Far from needing to be assigned to the dustbin of history, the board actually needs to be reclaimed as an essential feature of a healthy organization. Starting with this premise, our focus would be to build a robust and enthusiastic team of people who feel accountable to each other, are strong partners with staff, and want to do their best work (including fundraising).

This is all well and good, you may be saying as you read this, but how do you really turn your board into this dynamic team? Below are five ideas we think could be useful in trying to address many common board challenges.

1. The board is the board—and a team.

The distinction between a working board, policy board, fundraising board, and any other kind of board is false. All boards should be doing work that includes governance and oversight, as well as more hands-on activities such as fundraising and promoting the organization to their own networks. Don't try to solve the problems you are having with the board by calling it something that implies that it is a body with little or no responsibility to be active and engaged.

In addition, the board is an organized body of individuals who must work together as a team. Once you figure out what, or who, is missing, you then need to figure out whether the board candidates you are considering are team players. Here are some questions to ask them and some answers to watch out for:

Question: What other groups are you a part of? (Not just organizations, but book groups, basketball teams, bridge clubs, etc.). What do you like about being on a team, and what frustrates you the most?

2014 Money for Our Movements Debate Resolution

Whereas:

- The voluntary Board of Directors as the governance structure for nonprofit organizations was codified in the 1950s and 60s to govern the small number of existing nonprofits, 50,000 to 250,000, which were mostly run by volunteers;
- Today the nonprofit sector encompasses 1.7 million nonprofits and represents a much larger sector (10% of the workforce, 4% of the GDP and a \$1.5 trillion industry);
- At the time the law was codified, many families could live on one income, freeing up a second family member to volunteer;
- Today most families need at least two incomes to survive, and many other families are headed by one person;
- The primary complaint of both board and staff about their organizations is the failure of board members to exercise fiduciary oversight and leverage adequate resources to address community needs;
- Both board members and staff rarely find the board/staff relationship worthwhile;
- Common sense dictates that the idea that busy and uncompensated volunteers should oversee the increasingly complex workings of professionally staffed nonprofits, and that the volunteers should carry the responsibility of hiring (or firing) leaders of these organizations is fraught with problems;
- The health and well being of social justice nonprofits is not served by the current structure and our ability to build movements for change is often hindered by the brakes put to our work by well-meaning but overcommitted and untrained board members;
- The existing structure is untenable and is hindering our ability to create radical, long lasting change;

Therefore be it resolved that:

- The current structure of the Board of Directors be recognized as a historic relic and be dissolved;
- Fiduciary responsibilities for nonprofits be carried out by paid organizational leadership.

Answer: Someone who says, “I can’t stand going over and over things,” is probably not a team player, whereas someone who says, “I like knowing how I am a part of a bigger effort,” probably is. Someone who says, “My pet peeve is people who always arrive late,” is likely more of a team player than someone who says, “I don’t want to spend a lot of time in meetings.”

THERE SHOULD ALWAYS BE A WAITING LIST OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO GET ON THE BOARD BECAUSE IT IS KNOWN TO BE A REWARDING AND ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE.

Question: What would you do if you had agreed to take on a task and then couldn’t get it done?

Answer: Someone who says, “I’d call the chair or the staff and tell them right away,” is going to be a better board member than someone who says, “I always do what I say” (which can’t be true).

Question: What would you do if someone on your committee didn’t complete a task he or she had taken on?

Answer: Someone who says, “I’d talk to them about it and figure out how to get it done,” would probably be a better board member than someone who says, “I’d just do it myself” (who might be a great volunteer).

Learn to listen for clues about whether people want to be and enjoy being on a team. If they do, chances are they are also people who do what they say, are willing help others, know the importance of delegating and letting other team members do their work, and take pride in the accomplishments of the whole group.

By seeing your board as a team, you can imagine how, metaphorically, you are going to get them ready to go out on the field. The metaphor that is usually in place, on the other hand, is that the board is in the bleachers—they are the audience for the executive director or sometimes for each other. They are a great cheering squad. But in a team, the players know their places and their relationships to the other players. They know if they don’t do a good job, the entire team may lose the game. They practice (when is the last time your board had a practice session built into the board meeting?), and they seek to improve their skills. They value working together.

2. Serving on a board should be fun.

There should always be a waiting list of people who want to

get on the board because it is known to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience. This point often raises a lot of eyebrows. Are we trying to say that board meetings shouldn’t be serious? That they are some kind of entertainment? Not at all. But being on the board should bring joy to board members’ lives. After a good board meeting, members should be repeating things they heard to their friends and be eager to invite

friends, neighbors and family to organizational events and gatherings. They should be forwarding the newsletter or posting it on Facebook, wanting their communities to learn about, and get excited about, the organization’s work.

In creating an agenda for a fun board meeting, identify the big questions facing the organization and the issue(s) you work on. How would your work benefit from a robust discussion and debate about them? Both board and staff members should leave feeling like their knowledge about the issue deepened during the board meeting. Ask each board member: What did you hear about our issue since the last time we got together? How many people did you talk to about our work? Every board member will be asked to speak at least once, even if that means getting the board into smaller groups.

Take care of the board—if the meetings are right after work, provide substantial, healthy snacks or even dinner for the members. Make sure board members don’t have to pay for dinner that might be served at the meeting. Otherwise, those who come to meetings pay more than those who don’t. Make everyone feel welcome. Consider starting with a simple question as an icebreaker: What did you want to be when you were a child? Share the story behind or the meaning of your first name. What is one thing on your bucket list?

Every organization can make their meetings more interesting, which can often mean just making them more interactive. If you want your board members to engage donors and engage their friends in your work, you need to give them ideas of how that works by engaging them during the meetings.

3. Board members provide community/constituent perspectives.

Board members bring valuable perspectives to the organization’s work, helping all of us understand the issues more deeply, in part because a good number of them should be engaged with and affected by the issues in their daily lives. Social service agencies, in particular, will often push back on

WE HAVE ALSO SEEN BOARDS WHERE THE BOARD MEMBERS OPERATED AS IF THEY WERE ON A TV LAW DRAMA IN THE PART OF THE PROSECUTOR, AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WAS A HOSTILE WITNESS.

A Short Case Study of a Fun Board

Kim worked with the executive director of a nationally renowned theater who said that he and the board chair made an agreement that they were going to make the board meetings events that people looked forward to and remembered afterwards. Board members came from several states for a two-day meeting three times a year. When Kim started working with them, they could barely get a quorum. Staff never wanted to come to the meetings, and the goal was always to end the meetings early.

To begin to address the problem, they sent out an evaluation after every meeting, which asked: What did you learn? What would have made the meeting better? What did you hear that you would want to share with someone else? They reported the results of the evaluations to the board right after they were compiled, and the next meeting reflected what they had learned. Once board members realized this was actually a serious undertaking, they began to suggest big changes in the meetings. For example, a board member asked if the casting director could give a lecture on how he went about finding the right actors. The casting director then took it a step further and asked board members to read scripts for various parts and told them what kind of play or what kind of part he would imagine them playing well. Not every member read a script, but the engagement was palpable. So at least once a year as part of the meeting, the casting director, the stage manager, the costume manager or someone else involved in the actual production comes to the board meeting and helps the board get a deeper understanding of what they do. As much as possible, they do it by involving the board in the process.

this: “We serve people who are homeless, suffer from mental illness or are survivors of child abuse. They can’t be on the board.” If you expand your vision of who your constituency is, you will have no shortage of suitable candidates. Children who were abused become adults. Some of them would make great board members. People with mental health challenges can, and do, serve on boards, but so can their family members, neighbors and therapists. Our lives are interconnected, and our boards should reflect that.

We should think it is as odd for a social service agency to not have constituents on the board as it would be for a humane society board to mostly be comprised of people who don’t have rescued animals as pets. Implementing this assumption takes time and thought, particularly if the composition of the board has moved away from the constituency, or if the “constituency” is not that obvious (i.e., Who are the constituents of a think tank? Of a public health advocacy group?). We will explore this topic in more depth in a future article.

4. A board should ask questions.

Asking questions during a board meeting (and at other times) should be encouraged, rather than seen as being unreasonably critical or disloyal.

Questions are part and parcel of being a team player. However, too often the team spirit is dampened because the executive director sees the board as inherently adversarial. Legitimate questions about spending, program direction and staffing are received by the executive director as a challenge to their authority and judgment. We have also seen boards where the board members operated as if they were on a TV law drama in the part of the prosecutor, and the executive director was a hostile witness. If that is the atmosphere of your board meetings, consider getting an outside facilitator who can help everyone learn to both ask questions in a supportive way and receive questions as gifts rather than arrows. This process will build greater trust between board and staff.

5. Board members have to be accountable.

Accountability arises naturally from the desire to be the best member of the team you can be. People who prefer to work alone can be very effective volunteers, but they are not good board members. And, obviously, people who consistently don’t step up and work may be very nice, but are not suited to being on a board.

MOST OF US COULD BENEFIT FROM LEARNING HEALTHIER WAYS OF DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES AND EVEN OUTRIGHT CONFLICT.

The story we started with is all about accountability. But where does accountability begin?

In the story that opens the article, board members were given a task. The task seems reasonable, so apparently they didn't object to it. But clearly they didn't actually want to do it. They were not at all involved in the decision to take on the task, so they didn't end up doing it. Furthermore, they knew nothing would happen to them for not doing it.

On this board, and so many like it, it is clear you can be on the board without doing anything. Consequently, those board members who do their work may feel beleaguered, let down, martyred, resentful, resigned, tired or some combination of all of these. Soon the board is tacitly divided into camps: those who do what they say, those who sometimes do what they say, those who never do what they say, and those who never say they will do anything. The staff, particularly the executive director, works with those members who are reliable, ignores the rest, and takes on more and more work herself, particularly fundraising.

Now let's retell the story that opens the article from the point of view of a team.

All board members in this organization make their own gift. The members of the fundraising committee called them individually and thanked them. At this meeting, the chair announced that the organization has 100 percent giving from the board and gave the total amount. A few moments were given over to clapping. Several people mentioned the thank you calls.

The chair then explained to the board members that she and the other members of the committee wanted to help everyone fulfill their other fundraising commitment to help raise money from their networks. She shared her own story of being nervous about asking and how she was moving past that by asking people she knew cared about the cause. She led a discussion of ways people had been involved in fundraising before and what they thought about it. Most had little experience, but some funny stories emerged of selling Girl Scout cookies or chocolate. Several people admitted that they usually just bought everything they were supposed to sell. The chair asked whether people might be interested in calling donors to thank them. She described the evidence that thank you calls, even if just a message on voicemail, leads to increased giving. After a short discussion, the chair went around the room to see which board members would be willing to take this on. All agreed to do this task.

The day after the deadline for making the thank you calls, the board chair called the fundraising committee chair to thank her for the leadership she had shown on this. "You set such a good example, and sharing your own story about being nervous really helped me." All but two people completed the task.

Ownership, encouragement, and breaking the task down into smaller pieces all meant that the task was accomplished.

But what about the two board members who did not complete their calls and at the next board meeting, acted like nothing had happened? Accountability is relatively easy when we see it positively. This means letting people know they did a good job, praising them in front of their peers, and thanking them privately. We usually don't do this enough and would benefit greatly from making it part of board practice. Positive accountability might solve 80 percent of the problems you've been having.

As for the remaining 20 percent: people who simply don't do what they say they will do or don't offer to do anything remain a problem. When we have to talk to someone about not doing what they say, we move to the root of the problem of accountability: our deep reluctance to say hard things to each other. If we were to name the training we would want all boards (and staff) to have, it would be, "From Conflict Avoidance to Conflict Resolution." Most of us could benefit



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from learning healthier ways of dealing with differences and even outright conflict. At a practical level, this training would empower board members to sanction each other and even ask the most problematic people to leave. Contrary to popular opinion, you can “fire” board members.

At the deeper level of our understanding of boards as a tool for democracy and a way to give community members a voice, conflict resolution skills help people use their voice. Many of us have been silenced in various ways our whole lives, and we don’t speak up in a group. Some of us have only gotten our way by bullying, shouting and intimidating others. Learning how to be honest in a kind way—to be clear in a way that is supportive and encouraging—is crucial. Learning how to really listen to each other, not assuming you know what someone is going to say before they even open their mouth, is just as important. Learning to help one another work hard and effectively for our team is an adventure in itself, which can sometimes even lead to the realization that being on this team might not be right for us. Learning conflict resolution skills increases the likelihood that board meetings will be meaningful, helps guarantee that board members are accountable, and allows people to take ownership of tasks.

We hope that many of us bring the debate resolution from the Money for Our Movements conference back into our own boardrooms. It should inspire conversations that lead to a lot of productive changes. The tips in this article will hopefully help the people who come down solidly on the “con” side of the resolution realize that we can have the boards we want and need. Like fundraising, it takes work to succeed. But, also like fundraising, it is worth it. ■

Kim Klein and Stephanie Roth are the publisher and editor emeritas of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*.

Looking for more good info on boards?

Check out these and other articles in the GFJ archive:

- **The Seasonal Board: Shorter Commitments Create Greater Involvement** by Jill Vialet, v23 n6
- **They Said They Would Raise Money—Now What?** by Andy Robinson, v27 n4
- **Cheering Them On: How to Encourage Board Members to Make Their Major Donor Asks** by Ben Gregory, v27 n5

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Building Authenticity in Major Donor Relationships

By Tanya Mote

WHEN I WAS A GREEN FUNDRAISER just learning how to work with donors, some of my mentors were pushing me to “move up” habitual donors to the major donor category. I really had no idea how to approach a major donor prospect. I wrote some letters asking for meetings and had some half-hearted, very awkward conversations with donors that basically went nowhere.

A few years later, Su Teatro, the organization where I work, was launching its first capital campaign. I had more grassroots fundraising experience by then, but still, I was no expert. My executive director and I put together a committee, and our volunteers started to identify their version of prospects—people with the “capacity,” but not necessarily the commitment or the contact with the organization that is essential to the major donor relationship. While in the end a few of these prospects ended up making major gifts, for the most part, this strategy was a bust.

Then, as we continued our campaign, an amazing thing happened. People within our community—folks who had been long

time and thoroughly engaged supporters started to step up with large gifts. In most cases, we didn’t even know that these donors were capable of making larger commitments. The response we saw was textbook grassroots fundraising: it is always our most loyal and engaged supporters that give the most and the most often.

At this point, I realized that major donor fundraising is the product of organic relationships that are built over time. As inexperienced fundraisers, we attempt to “follow the steps” to successful grassroots fundraising. While fundraising is reliable in its concrete and formulaic aspects, it is also the result of genuine and authentic relationships with real human beings. I began to reflect deeply on some of the lessons I had internalized, applying them more intentionally to my work. What follows are some of the best practices I have learned in the process.

Always Say Thank You

We all know this is the cardinal rule of grassroots fundraising. The

THE MORE DONORS SEE THAT YOU ARE RESPONSIVE TO THEIR NEEDS, THE MORE DEEPLY THEY WILL ENGAGE WITH THE ORGANIZATION.

point is the acknowledgement itself, which should be scrawled by a real human being on a note card. The thank you note doesn't have to be long or fancy, but it needs to be in quick response to the gift—within 48 hours when possible. In this crazy, fast, automated, too busy world we live in, the small, meaningful gestures that require some of our precious time really mean a lot. The thank you note is an expression of friendship, gratitude and caring in a world gone mad.

But it's not just the note itself. It is what comes after the note. Often times, donors will respond to a thank you note with a gesture, and it is very important that you pay attention when your donors extend themselves to you. Which brings me to my next point.

Be Present

Your goal is to build relationships with the members of your community, and you aren't going to be successful if you are on autopilot. It isn't rocket science, but when someone reaches out to you, you have to listen to what they say and know how to respond. When someone gives you a cue that they want to be more engaged—for example, they ask you about volunteering, or how to get their child into the classes your organization offers—it is important that you follow up. When someone takes the time on the phone or in person to share a personal story, you need to be present for the conversation, to really listen and to care.

In my early days of fundraising, I was deeply affected by an editorial that Kim Klein wrote called “Clean Up Your Language!” It was about how fundraisers often use objectifying language to describe the cultivation of donors, such as, “I’m going to hit her up” or, “I went in for the kill.” As Klein cautions, this crass attitude degrades the work of fundraising and violates the integrity of the genuine relationships you are building with donors. You cannot be a good fundraiser if you are not interested in building truly caring, multifaceted and nuanced relationships with your donors as whole people (within the appropriate social boundaries, of course). If you build your relationship day in and day out with your donors and listen to the encouragement and feedback that they provide to you, you will never have to worry about making the mistake of treating donors like ATMs.

Another aspect of being present is the age-old practice of treating donors as they want to be treated. That means taking them off of your call list if they ask you to only contact them by mail, following up in three months if this is what they have requested,

or not soliciting them again until next year if that is their preference. A certain level of commitment to record keeping—and the infrastructure to do so—is a necessary aspect of honoring donor requests. Make sure you have an adequate database in place, the staff to maintain it, and systems that remind you when donor follow up is needed.

It goes without saying, but bears repeating, that everyone who walks through your door should receive hospitable treatment and excellent service at all times. In particular, your donors (regardless of giving level) and volunteers, who have gone out of their way to demonstrate their investment in the work you do, merit interest, not just by the development staff, but by all members of the organization. All staff members should take the time to get to know them.

Being present also means being willing to hear critical feedback by responding with maturity and a desire to problem solve. The more donors see that you are responsive to their needs, the more deeply they will engage with the organization.

Be a Movement Builder

There is a lot of learning that happens between the day you show up at work, willing to put your belief in the mission of your organization ahead of your fears of fundraising, and the day when you confidently slip into the chair next to a major donor ready to make the ask (unless you are just extremely gifted with people and fundraising—and I’m sure some of you are). In a perfect world, your major donor relationship is the product of thoughtful and mindful cultivation that you have invested in over a period of years. If you are not intimately aware of your donor's commitment to the work and capacity to give, it may be too soon for the major ask. The major donor ask is a natural outgrowth of a comfortable relationship that you have been building over time.

Of course, you can't arrive at this perfect scenario until you truly overcome your fear of fundraising (or other issues with money). Like many grassroots fundraisers, I found the advice of the late Vicki Quatmann (“Organizing and Fundraising: Sisters in the Struggle,” v23, n5 of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*) very helpful in this respect. Quatmann argues that just like good organizing, fundraising is an invitation to our members to each think deeply about their level of commitment to the work and mission of the organization. Asking for money gives our supporters an opportunity to think about what they care about. Whether

we like it or not, what we are willing to spend money on, says a lot about our priorities. Sometimes we don't realize that our spending is out of line with our values until someone points it out to us.

You will not be successful at fundraising if you are not willing to ask for money (another truism of grassroots fundraising). As we all know, hearing "no" a lot is a big part of fundraising. They don't call it prospecting for nothing. It is your job to find those right people—the ones who care about the work as much as you do. Not everyone has the privilege of working for a movement building organization, but people take great satisfaction in paying for the work that they cannot do themselves.

Think of yourself and the members of your community standing shoulder-to-shoulder to accomplish a mission to which you are all equally committed. At the end of the day, true social change is always bottom up. We are the ones who will make the change we are waiting for—but first, we must assemble the people who care about the work as much as we do and are willing to invest in it. When you start to realize that fundraising really is movement building, the power of the process will start to dissipate your fear and help you build authentic donor relationships that

will ultimately translate into an engaged, stable and sustainable foundation for your important social justice mission. ■

Tanya Mote is the associate director of Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center in Denver, CO.

Check out the *Journal* archive for more articles to help you build authentic relationships with donors, including:

- Committed for the Long Haul: Tips on Successfully Stewarding Your Mid-Level Donors by Will Cordery, v31 n3
- Nurturing Relationships Today and for Years to Come by Kevin Johnson, v29 n5
- Mom Was Right...Write That Thank You Note! By Nancy Otto, v26 n1

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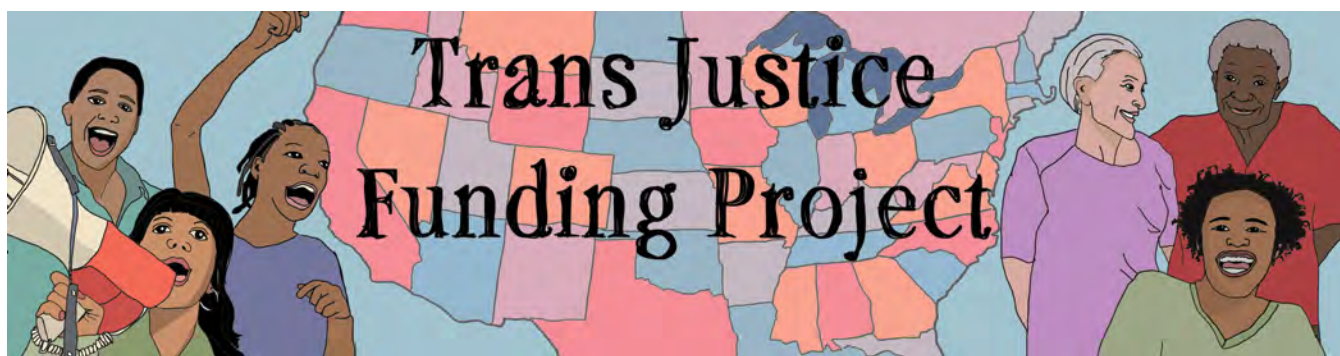
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Funding a Movement

By Gabriel Foster

IN JULY, *Rolling Stone* published an article called “The Transgender Crucible,” which featured trans activist CeCe McDonald. The author writes:

“Given the swift political advances of the transgender movement, paired with its new pop-culture visibility, you’d be forgiven for believing that to be gender-nonconforming today is to be accepted, celebrated... But the appearance of tolerance belies the most basic day-to-day reality: No community living in America today is as openly terrorized as transgender women, especially trans women of color.”

In the same article, New York activist Miasha Forbes states, “Every day a trans person says, ‘I may die today.’” She continues, “You ready yourself for war each day. Leaving the house on a typical day, a trans woman prepares herself to endure indignities unimaginable to most of us: to be pelted by rocks, called slurs or referred to not as ‘she’ or even ‘he,’ but rather as ‘it.’”

This article forced me to give pause as I too have been awestruck by a year full of trans visibility in the media, harshly contrasted by extreme violence, primarily targeting trans women of color. According to the Transgender Violence Tracking Portal (TVTP), an online effort that collects data on anti-transgender violence, trans people make up 1 to 1.5 percent of the world’s population but are about 400 times more likely to be assaulted or murdered than the rest of the population.

At the intersection of all the beauty we create as a community and the heartbreak we experience as a result of transphobia lives a vibrant movement. A movement born out of a legacy of refusal, resilience and love. A trans justice movement that is on the rise.

Trans Justice: A Movement

In the 2013 Trans Justice Funding Project (TJFP) report, Nico Amador beautifully articulates, “Thanks to the brave work of many elders in our community who fought the early battles for recognition, trans people are now more visible, and resources are multiplying. This is not to say that the experience of many trans groups and individuals isn’t still one of isolation and vulnerabil-

ity, but the national picture of leadership on trans issues that we saw through the applications to the TJFP affirms that things are changing: a movement has begun.”

TJFP sees trans justice as a movement that works to mobilize trans and allied communities into action around pressing issues like access to education, employment, health care, incarceration, immigration, disability rights, policy reform, racial and economic justice, art and culture, and coalition building within trans communities. On the simplest level, it is based out of the right to self-determine our gender and gender expression, free from all forms of interpersonal and state violence and oppression.

Community-Led Funding

“I was blown away by the opportunity to be apart of the process, and to have had a small but important role in helping to determine which groups were able to get funding this year. But more important, I was inspired by the breadth, beauty and brilliance of the trans community.”

~2014 TJFP Panelist, Andrea Jenkins

The Trans Justice Funding Project is a community-led funding initiative supporting grassroots trans justice groups run by and for trans people. From the beginning, it has been crucial for us to distribute funds through a community led process. We are well aware of the power that funders hold over what organizations have to do, and what issues they have to prioritize, to keep themselves afloat. Rooted in the traditions of social justice philanthropy, TJFP’s mission is to invest in trans communities making decisions by and for ourselves.

Since 2013, TJFP has brought together 12 brilliant trans and gender nonconforming leaders from both small towns and urban hubs throughout the country to serve on our national panel to convene and lead our grantmaking. In two grant cycles (2013 and 2014), this team of predominantly people of color activists has given 90 grants and distributed over \$200,000 to grassroots groups and projects across the country through a simple, two-page

application process. By bring together a multiracial, intergenerational and cross-class group, representing a variety of experiences and abilities, we strive to challenge the dynamic of how funding decisions have traditionally been made, learning and unlearning what it means to do philanthropy differently.

With a staff of only two part-time employees (as of July 2014), this has not been an easy endeavor to pull off. But it has been an unbelievably rewarding one. It is incredibly gratifying and humbling to see funding discussions and decisions being led by those most affected.

Pooling Our Resources

Recently at our two-person staff meeting in a coffee shop in Brooklyn, TJFP co-founder and staff member Karen Pittelman said, “The money we distribute belongs to the community, and our job is to share it.” This ideal has driven our approach to philanthropy since the beginning. When we began fundraising in our first year, we thought we would primarily be leveraging donations from wealthier donors. But as soon as we announced the project, people from all backgrounds—including trans, queer and allied communities—embraced the TJFP. In the span of just a few months, we received a total of 79 donations, and 54 of these—68 percent—were under \$50. While we would not have met our fundraising goal without a number of major gifts in the \$2,000 to \$10,000 range, our base of support was broad, allowing us to distribute over \$50,000 to 22 groups.

We are still crunching numbers this year in preparation for our upcoming 2014 report, but what is clear is that the 2014 cycle brought in an abundance of new donors and even more gifts. I attribute the increase in donors and gifts in part to consistent outreach efforts made by TJFP panelists, more visibility via our Indiegogo campaign, growing social media presence, and word of mouth.

Our donors are trans people and our allies; parents, friends, lovers, partners, and coworkers; people living in and outside of the U.S.; the low income and the wealthy; and TJFP grantees, applicants, panelists, facilitators and staff. This year, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), a 501(c)(3) social justice organization dedicated to advancing the equality of transgender people, also made a generous gift to TJFP. When was the last time you heard of an organization making a donation to a foundation? That was certainly a first for us. I don’t think it was a fluke that we raised \$150,000 this year—three times what we were able to distribute in our first year. I believe this to be a recognition of a severe lack of funding for trans justice work. It also sends a clear message that trans leadership and trans lives matter.

A New Funding Model

In 2014, TJFP incorporated as a small business—a limited liability company (LLC), one of the simpler forms a business can take. By forming an LLC, we were able to open a Trans Justice Funding Project bank account where we can receive and distribute donations.

With this account, we have been able to write checks directly to unincorporated, non-501(c)(3) groups. Even though this has created more administrative work on our end, it has also allowed us to avoid some of the restrictions of the non-profit industrial complex.

People often ask if this means donations to TJFP will be tax deductible. The answer is no. We will owe taxes as well, just like any other small business. However, since we will be re-distributing all our “profits,” our tax burden will be small. And since most people don’t itemize their deductions anyway, whether or not their gift is tax-deductible will have a limited impact on our base of supporters. We still have our donor-advised fund at Tides, a nonprofit foundation, so anyone who prefers to claim a tax deduction for their gift can still do so for the time being. We hope to phase out the donor-advised fund eventually, but because this is model may be unfamiliar to many supporters, we recognize that this may take some time. In the meantime, we don’t want to undermine our central goal to move as much money as possible to trans justice work.

As an LLC, we opened our bank account at North Carolina-based Self Help Credit Union. Their mission is “to create and protect ownership and economic opportunity for all, especially people of color, women, rural residents, and low-wealth families and communities.” By having our account at this type of progressive financial institution, we are ensuring that everyone’s dollars will be supporting important work even before that money makes its way to our grantees.

Trans Justice Warriors

“This is what we hope and strive for everyday: those small wins and cultural shifts where beliefs of hate and ignorance and systems of oppression are dismantled, leading to a larger goal of liberation for all.”

~2014 Grantee, Adrien Lawyer, Executive Director
Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico

In 2013 and 2014, TJFP applicants and grantees identified the following trans justice priorities: public education, youth organizing, racial justice, support groups, and health and wellness services. Other priorities such as cultural work, reproductive justice, policy change, prison abolition and homelessness were also named.

For the 2013 funding cycle, we accepted applications from organizations regardless of how big they were. In 2014, we decided to refocus by awarding grants only to groups with budgets of \$250,000 or less. Even with this notable change, we still received over 100 applications, allowing us the opportunity to fund some of the most grassroots, innovative and under-resourced groups across the country.

Since we began, we have funded vibrant and courageous organizations like Casa Ruby, BreakOUT!, Montana Two-Spirit Society, Trans Latin@s, the National Native Transgender Network, the Stay Project, and Black and Pink. We have also been able to learn more about and support up and coming groups and projects like the Cicada Collective, the Trans Women of

Color Collective (TWOCC), the Queer Detainee Empowerment Project, SICK (a performance, visual and video arts showcase featuring gender variant artists who are chronically ill), and MAJOR! (a documentary film featuring Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, a formerly incarcerated Black transgender elder and activist who has been fighting for the rights of trans women of color for over four decades).

More than the Money

Yes, TJFP is a funding initiative. As Karen Pittelman likes to say, “Part of our role is to give people the money and get out of the way.” But it has never been just about the money.

In addition to grantmaking, we strive to:

- leverage funding for trans justice organizations with budgets outside of our criteria (over \$250,000);
- encourage donors and potential donors to fund TJFP applicants and grantees directly (think matchmaking!);
- encourage and support other funders to find ways to fund unincorporated groups and projects;
- bring trans justice groups into funding conversations, uplifting their work, rather than co-opting or taking credit for it;
- support and provide social justice donor education;
- strongly encourage cisgender allies to actively engage in trans justice work;

- pay close attention to under-resourced areas and regions; and
- map trans justice work by adding applicants who meet our criteria to our trans justice directory—bolstering recognition and visibility to groups beyond our grantees.

As the trans justice movement continues to gain momentum, TJFP dreams of growing with it. As funders, we hope to be open to difficult questions, to deepen conversations, and continue trusting and supporting trans leadership. We see our position not to set an agenda for a movement, but rather to fund it, allowing the people on the front lines to be the true leaders.

Over and over I’ve thought about what my friend and colleague Reina Gossett said in recent a talk about trans women and incarceration. I’ll leave you with her powerful words: “We’re just now catching up to the greatness of Sylvia Rivera. It’s only last week new guidelines were announced regarding the issues of trans women being raped in prison that she talked about four decades ago. And this is simply the beginning. Why did it take so long? We know why. If Sylvia Rivera and other trans women revolutionaries weren’t exiled from the movement in 1973, imagine where we might be now.” ■

Gabriel Foster is the director of the Trans Justice Funding Project. Visit the website to learn more about applicants and grantees, the community-led funding panel, our structure, and how to support TJFP. transjusticefundingproject.org



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Almost There: Eight Strategies to Boost Your Year-End Fundraising Campaign

By Avi Cummings & Ari Wohlfeiler

This article is adapted from a workshop at the 2014 Money for Our Movements Conference.

WE DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU that as fundraisers we bust our asses all year long. The thought of it might bring you back to your late nights during last spring's event season or the ambitious sustainer project you kicked off this summer. But remember last December? Those end-of-year fundraising campaigns are our biggest projects of the year.

Year-end donations account for somewhere in the ballpark of 30 percent of grassroots income for most organizations.¹ This fundraising season accounts for an even more significant percent of our annual stress load. Between donor research, mailings, email campaigns, video campaigns, events, thank you letters, major donors and donor upgrades, it can be easy to let all the possibilities run us ragged.

But if we focus in on what we need and what works, we can strengthen our fundraising, not to mention our well-being, during the year-end season to sustain our urgent work toward racial, economic and gender justice.

Why Year-End Fundraising Matters

The spike in grassroots funding at the end of the year shows up in three ways: more individual donors give at the end of the year, more money is raised, and the same donors who give at any other time of year give more—an average of 36 percent more—in December.²

For better or worse, people's associations with the holiday season and the promise of tax returns create a culture of giving, and giving generously, at the end of the year.

These trends in year-end grassroots income don't apply, of course, to foundation funders. They also apply less to certain major donors, whose decision-making processes are relatively time-intensive and based on the quirks of their own administrative and financial calendars. The trends do apply to donors who have a self-aware, though sometimes casual, connection to our organizations, our work and our issues.

¹ salsalabs.com/endofyear

² salsalabs.com/endofyear

Competition among so many organizations during this time doesn't (yet) seem to be affecting overall income for each group. Because digital media and online fundraising allow organizations to reach such a wide base of current and potential supporters, one-time gifts have become more common. But donor retention can be harder as people get used to "response" giving and their attentions shift to other urgent and compelling campaigns. Our year-end fundraising campaigns show us how well we are doing at building relationships and loyalty with donors and tying our fundraising to the urgent political work it sustains.

There is no strict "start" to year-end fundraising season. Maybe it starts when you start scanning your lists for donor touches in August or when you send your fall newsletter in September. But there is a clear exponential curve that takes off somewhere around Thanksgiving and keeps moving up right through December 31st.

CAN YOU GET THE REST OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S LEADERSHIP, BOTH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS, TO TAKE EVEN 30 MINUTES CURLED UP WITH THE DONOR LIST?

By Thanksgiving, the fundamentals of your year-end campaign are already set: the size of your donor community, how well the donor community has been informed of your work and the impact of their giving over the course of the year, and the sheer limit to how many hours you and your fundraising team can pour into the final push. Other important variables—the state of the issue you're working on, for example—are also going to have a major impact on your year-end campaign.

And while there is no strict start date, now is a perfect time to kick things into gear.

We looked at the tactics that are working for us and the new tactics we have committed to trying this season in order to share a few with you. We hope they will help you head into 2015 with more power than ever for the urgent and transformative work you are raising money to sustain.

Year-End Fundraising Strategies

The strategies below aren't in a particular order of importance and certainly don't all take the same amount of preparation or commitment. But if we all just take up one or two of them,

we'll see increased income this December and strengthened donor relationships and giving potential over the long-haul.

Strategy 1: Get to know your list

Your database has a lot to teach you. Even if your list of current donors (donors who have given in the last 18 to 24 months) stretches into the thousands, there is still a lot to be learned and, more important, remembered by blocking out a couple hours on your calendar to pull up that active donor report and sift through the names.

Just by looking at the community of donors, all sorts of interesting ideas can pop up, some of them the most basic—and therefore the most useful. Remember that donor to whom you owe an email? Who is that person who has given \$50 on three seemingly disconnected occasions since July? Did you see that your friend-of-a-friend gave back in February?

It is even better when you are not alone in this task. Can you get the rest of your organization's leadership, both staff and volunteers, to take even 30 minutes curled up with the donor list?

Strategy 2: Segment your lists, and tailor your communications

Do you want your core members to receive the same message as one-time donors or loyal volunteers? Probably not. Once you figure out who's who in your database, start creating groups that are relevant to your organization's constituency, base and culture. Maybe groups based on loyalty (years of giving), amount, or type of giving (events, monthly sustainers or year-end donors) make the most sense for your organization. Maybe you create groups for core members and constituents and other groups for allies outside your constituency.

Different groups get different messages, but you don't have to reinvent the wheel for each one. It may be a slightly different opening paragraph or a specific story about a recent member-driven project that will appeal to one group over another. Creating relevant groups and tailoring our messaging help us keep our base connected and loyal to our work.

Strategy 3: Reach out to five people today

Neither of us has ever made it to January 1st without wishing we had reached out to some donor or another back in August. Sometimes it is a major donor we wish we had sent a paper copy of our annual report. Or maybe it's a personal contact we would feel better asking to renew their \$100 year-end gift if we had gotten around to just having a regular check in with them.

The point is: cultivation counts. In the year-end hustle, it can be hard to make the time for a casual phone call or a coffee date—the kinds of things that make a difference.

Strategy 4: Coordinate your political message and/or victory

What is the political message, accomplishment, campaign or project you want to amplify this season? Start talking to your program team in September to learn about what could be stories or victories in November or early December. Talk to your coworkers about timing a report, project launch, action or win to kick off the end-of-year fundraising season.

PEOPLE'S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE IS BEST ACTIVATED BY VISUAL MATERIAL, WHETHER PRINT OR ELECTRONIC. ULTIMATELY, THAT IS WHAT MOTIVATES GIVING.

Maybe the win depends on external factors your team can't control, so you may need to put a couple of options in your queue. Either way, start developing the messaging and collecting photographs (see the next section on visual content for more) so that your end-of-year fundraising campaign connects to the story that the rest of your organization is telling about your work.

Strategy 5: Prioritize visual content

What is the picture or photo in your December 31st email going to be? What about the cover image on your newsletter? Are you going with a brochure or a letter for your year-end mailing? Do you know a volunteer who could make a short video?

We have all gotten stuck scrambling for a photo when our coworkers are trying to get out of the office with their hats and coats on. Take photos early and often of your fabulous coworkers, members and volunteers in action.

Even for the donors who are hungriest for the juicy details of your work, the fact is that people's emotional response is best activated by visual material, whether print or electronic. Ultimately, that is what motivates giving.

Strategy 6: Use multichannel communications

Think about how much time people spend on social media and how much it helps to be reminded of something, even as you are scrolling through a news feed, to make you take action.

If each of your year-end letters and emails is paired with a post on social media, people will have that extra reminder of the work you're doing, an extra opportunity to hear a story from your organization, another chance to engage with the fundraising campaign (and share it), and an easy opportunity to give.

Strategy 7: Send more last minute emails

Online, 30 percent of all charitable gifts will be made after December 1st, and fully 10 percent of all annual giving will be made in the last three days of the year.³ Send an email on each day—December 29th, 30th and 31st. Keep them short and focused on getting people excited about joining a successful year-end fundraising campaign.

Some combination of generosity, procrastination, tax-deduction incentives, and the effect of being reminded of the critical work our organizations are doing is what pushes those late December donors to complete their final click.

Strategy 8: Think about the donor's experience

Think about the arc of your campaign from the moment you kick it off (publicly) in November until the thank you letter lands in their mailbox in January.

What do your donor groups need to be thinking on December 30th while they are skimming through your second-to-last email of the year and making a split second decision on how much to give? By then, they have received some kind of donor touch (a newsletter, a phone call, or both), seen something happen (the November action/report/win), received a letter in the mail, received a follow-up (phone, email, text, etc.), seen multiple emails and similar messages on social media, and been thanked for their most recent gift—so they're feeling good about giving.

You Can Do It

By focusing on the strategies that will help your team meet the organization's fundraising goals, you will be able to develop a sustainable plan, minimize your stress, and maximize giving. Your year-end campaign is going to be awesome. We just know it.

Avi Cummings is the development and communications director at Sylvia Rivera Law Project. Ari Wohlfeiler is the development director at Jewish Voice for Peace.

³ theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/12/charitable-donations-skyrocket-on-new-years-eve-because-tax-deductions/282743/

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