

# Grassroots Fundraising Journal

A vibrant, stylized illustration in a folk-art style. It features two figures in profile, facing right. The figure in the foreground is a woman with dark skin, wearing a yellow and red patterned garment. Behind her is a man with lighter skin, wearing a blue shirt, holding a megaphone. A large, bright yellow sun with a textured surface is in the background. The entire scene is set against a background of swirling blue and orange patterns.

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#### On Our Cover

This piece by Favianna Rodriguez (favianna.com) depicts two people working in collaboration, moving intently toward the future. The

characters have their hands extended, a gesture to display openness and community building. The river symbolically alludes to both challenges and resiliency.

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## Leading With Our Hearts

**WELCOME TO THE SUMMER ISSUE** of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*! We're excited to share these inspiring stories of groups mobilizing resources and building people power in low-income communities and communities of color. To start us off, Laresha Franks shares how Community Coalition uses "Race Retreats" to have honest conversations about race and to work through staff members' hesitancy to ask their Black and Latinx constituents to contribute financially. Laresha explains how these retreats laid the groundwork for launching their membership program, with staff becoming more effective organizers and fundraisers. Sheena Brown follows with an insightful piece on how Color Of Change has been able to grow its membership base and establish itself as the largest online civil rights platform in the nation. We close out the issue with refreshing fundraising success stories shared by Karen Topakian. Based on the recent *Fundraising Bright Spots* report, Karen details some of the key elements of these organizations' successes and provides practical tips for overcoming organizational reluctance to grassroots fundraising.

Grassroots fundraising challenges us to lead with our hearts as we strive to authentically connect with our members, supporters and donors. For me, this is one of the most powerful gifts of being a fundraiser. In these times of heightened political struggle and growing attacks on our communities, we must remember that our work of fundraising and mobilizing resources is ultimately about loving our people. It is about showing solidarity for those on the frontlines of today's growing movements for justice. It is about reclaiming our collective power to sustain the work we know is necessary to get us free.

This year's Allied Media Conference (AMC) held special significance for me as I began my June 15<sup>th</sup> journey to Detroit with a heavy heart still reeling from the murder of 49 queer and trans people on Latinx night at Pulse in Orlando. As a mixed race, queer woman of color, my friends and I have spent many nights dancing at similar clubs, cherishing those rare spaces. As sadness and a sense of helplessness threatened to overwhelm me, I put on my headphones, closed my eyes, and allowed myself to settle in the familiar feeling of "coming home" to the AMC.

Over the past several years, I have come to trust the AMC community to hold space for us to come together to mourn, heal, dream, build, celebrate and dance as we envision and innovate towards our collective liberation. It is the place I return to year after year to re-energize and deepen my work and organizing, as well as build new connections with movement builders across the country. This year's conference was no exception. I was honored to once again collaborate with Tanya Mote of Su Teatro in Denver to coordinate the third "Resourcing & Sustaining Our Movements" track where we explored the question of how we can fund, resource and sustain work and movements in ways that energize us, strengthen our organizing, and build community.

We were excited to experience a new depth to the track with sessions such as, "Can the Revolution be Funded?," "12 Recommendation for Detroit Funders," and "When GoFundMe Doesn't Cut It," exploring new and reimagined models for giving and philanthropy—models that put the people first. We offered well-received core sessions on the nuts and bolts of grassroots fundraising, major donors, worker cooperatives, and peer-to-peer sharing economies in addition to others. We look forward to continuing these and other critical conversations at Money for Our Movements!

*Capital*





Community Organizer Gilbert Johnson speaks with a South Los Angeles resident about Community Coalition and its programs.

# Navigating Race & Class Dynamics in Fundraising

By Laresha Franks

**THE LEADING TAGLINE ON COMMUNITY COALITION'S** website is: "Change cannot happen with closed mouths, idle hands, and empty pockets." It is a quote by Cheryl Young, one of the organization's resident leaders. Cheryl truly believes that if she is going to see the positive changes she desires in her community, it will be done by lifting her voice and contributing her time, talent and treasures towards community development efforts fighting for those changes. Her dedication has been instrumental in the transformative change Community Coalition has achieved.

Established in 1990, Community Coalition's mission is to transform the social and economic conditions in South Los Angeles that foster addiction, crime, violence and poverty by building a community institution that involves thousands in creating, influencing and changing public policy. Community Coalition is

a grassroots institution that employs community outreach, issue education, and leadership development to introduce South Los Angeles residents to civic engagement opportunities that lead to positive and tangible changes in the community. The organization has centered on several recurrent issue areas including: public education, foster and kinship care reform, criminal justice, and neighborhood transformation. Over the last 25 years, Community Coalition has grown from a small volunteer-based staff with no operating budget to 35 full-time staff and a nearly \$5 million operating budget.

Community Coalition's current fundraising strategy is a different take on the traditional annual giving program that many of us employ. The strategy is deeply rooted in the socio-political grassroots work it has developed over the past 25 years: membership.

In establishing a membership program, the organization has also undergone a practice of understanding how race and class dynamics contribute to social decision-making. This practice not only prepares staff for their work as community organizers, but also helps them become better fundraisers.

South Los Angeles, where Community Coalition was founded and is still headquartered, was hard hit by mass deindustrialization

## **UNDERSTANDING HOW RACE AND CLASS DYNAMICS CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL DECISION-MAKING NOT ONLY PREPARES STAFF FOR THEIR WORK AS COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS, BUT ALSO HELPS THEM BECOME BETTER FUNDRAISERS.**

in the 1960s, leading to an abrupt onset of high unemployment and poverty for a community that was at the time predominantly African American. Unfortunately, by the 1980s, South Los Angeles was also subjected to a large influx of crack-cocaine. The effects of the drug were so detrimental to the families living there and the physical make-up and health of the community that the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (now known as Community Coalition) was formed in an effort to counter-attack the deterioration of a once thriving community.

What may not be apparent from our mission statement above is that when we refer to “transforming...South Los Angeles,” we are referring to the lives of African American and Latinx (Black and Brown) residents who make up 94 percent of the total population of South Los Angeles. Community Coalition believes in uniting these two groups as they share many of the same struggles, values and vision for the South Los Angeles community. Community Coalition has developed a nuanced understanding of the differences and similarities that Black and Brown communities experience in terms of racism and classism, which allows us to educate and mobilize a collective group that is fighting for the same universal changes in the community.

As an organization, we must continuously prepare ourselves for conversations about race and class dynamics with South Los Angeles residents as the starting point in moving towards social action. In undergoing this process, we have also institutionalized an organization-wide donor cultivation strategy through organizational membership.

## **Organizing in Black & Brown Communities**

South Los Angeles, once a predominantly African American community, is now 64 percent Latinx and 30 percent Black. The shift in the make up of the community during the 1980s and 1990s fueled racial tensions between the two groups as each attempted to cope with high unemployment, economic stagnation, and growing violence and crime. What was happening in the South Los Angeles

community at the time was not the result of the community’s changing demographics, but systemic issues occurring across the nation that were disproportionately affecting Black and Brown people.

The founders of Community Coalition developed a deep understanding of what was occurring in South Los Angeles at the time by studying the historical social and economic impact of structural racism on African Americans and Latinxs in the U.S. They also took it a step further by ensuring that every staff person (whether serving in a direct community organizing role or not) was equipped with the tools to deepen their understanding of theoretical and historical frameworks of race. Integrating the organization’s racial analysis, each staff person is encouraged to articulate their personal experiences and views on race and racism and talk openly about race in their day-to-day work with community residents and supporters.

In addition to regular staff meeting discussions, the organization instituted biennial “Race Retreats” to facilitate this educational and reflective process. These retreats help prepare Community Coalition staff for conversations that often come up when trying to understand residents’ perspectives on current community concerns. They also help staff engage residents in a dialogue that moves them to understand the shared struggles and values of their Black and Brown neighbors. This is a necessary step in order to inspire residents to take collective action on larger structural issues (e.g., poor educational resources, lack of access to health and mental health services, over-policing, mass incarceration, etc.) that are the root causes of their individual concerns.

## **A New Fundraising Strategy in Black & Brown Communities**

In the 25 years that Community Coalition has been organizing in South Los Angeles, we have developed a robust group of activists who have engaged with us in a variety of ways including donating, volunteering, organizing, and participating in our programs or campaigns. Our base of community activists share Community Coalition’s values and can be counted on to take basic action when called upon. In recent years, the organization has





Outreach Worker Terio Ruiz poses with Community Coalition members at the membership table stationed in a local park in South Los Angeles.

undergone several processes to identify ways to maximize the activism of people who come into contact with us. For years, the organization has attempted to ramp up its individual fundraising efforts by coming up with unique cultivation opportunities and events that connect Community Coalition's values to the values of South Los Angeles residents and supporters, demonstrating why their contributions are an important part of Community Coalition's movement for social justice.

While this approach was helpful in our fundraising initially, we desired something more that highlighted the real significance of each contribution towards the movement to transform South Los Angeles. The organization began looking at different organizations implementing successful fundraising campaigns, as well as various revenue generating models being implemented worldwide. In 2014, we determined that instituting a membership model would not only assist fundraising efforts, but would also deepen the commitment of our South Los Angeles constituencies and supporters to the organization's values and strategic vision for South Los Angeles.

Making the decision to implement a formal membership program was not an easy one. Developing a membership fee schedule and instituting it in communities in which we historically had not asked to consistently donate financially was challenging.

One of the Community Coalition's main hesitations to implementing a membership model was the reality that poor and working class people of color lack adequate resources to independently sustain or enhance their quality of life—a direct result of discriminatory public policy. Indeed, the Community Coalition is always reminding local decision makers that the people of South Los Angeles have historically lacked the full resources needed to survive and thrive. But, now we were looking to ask those same community members to make the commitment to “give up” their hard earned resources to build and grow this movement to improve their community. This was a major framework adjustment for Community Coalition staff to embrace.

Experiences shared during Race Retreats revealed that many staff members grew up in poor households where money was a very sensitive and generally avoided topic of conversation. As organizers, we had also come to understand that many of the resi-

dents we work with were currently living in similar situations, and were tackling issues of food insecurity, poor health and lack of adequate health insurance, and high housing costs. How could we, then, ask these same residents to incur another expense? As an organization, we had always made provisions to help the community, whether it was providing free transportation to events or food at community meetings. Why would our residents now, in a sense, pay for these resources?

Many staff members simply refused to believe the membership program would be embraced by the community. Furthermore, many felt it was quite audacious of the organization to place such a burden upon our community leaders and residents.

The staff's reaction to the proposed membership program highlighted a need to revisit the assumptions regarding race and class that came up in *Race Retreats*, and adjust the retreat in a fundraising for social and racial justice context.

### Building Internal Support for Membership

The organization's development department took the lead on structuring a series of trainings on grassroots fundraising, which included providing educational materials for the staff and developing discussion questions. This allowed us to establish another space for our staff to raise their concerns about membership, identify common themes raised amongst the staff, and provide clarity around our collective assumption that poor and working class people living in South Los Angeles do not have the capacity to give.

The grassroots fundraising section took place over several days and was structured so that the staff would again share their personal experiences (i.e., "Share your first experience with money: Was it good or bad?") and reflect on provided readings to better understand the historical and current socio-economic experiences of South Los Angeles residents. But this time the staff would also be provided with assignments to put what they had learned into practice. These assignments included practicing an "ask," identifying individuals to practice their pitch with, and then coming back to the group and sharing their experiences.

Education is the first step in moving someone to action. Here are some examples of the educational tools we use and what we've learned from them:

- Highlights from *Giving USA* (2014): This report reveals that 72 percent of all 2014 giving came from individuals. Contributions were primarily made to causes involving deeply shared values and beliefs (religion: 32 percent) or to issue areas that Community Coalition was currently engaging residents in: 12 percent for education, 12 percent for human services, eight percent for health, seven percent for public-society benefit, and five percent for arts, culture and humanities.

- *Playbook for Progressives: 16 Qualities of the Successful Organizer*: Chapter 10, The Fundraiser, by Eric Mann. Mr. Mann helps readers understand that "the revolution is not free." In this chapter, he retells a powerful story of Cesar Chavez in his days organizing farmworkers, whom he had deemed the poorest of the poor. Mr. Chavez would go door-to-door and explain to workers that the dues for the United Farm Workers Union were \$15 a year. One worker told Chavez that he was very poor, and asked if his dues could be reduced to \$5. Mr. Chavez's response to this man was, "Do you want one-third of your liberation? If you have money for [other non-essential items] you must have money for the union— if you believe in it... What do you want to do?"

Mr. Mann closes the chapter by stating, "Historically, a successful movement requires most of its donors (not most of its money) to come from the working classes."

This example revealed a critical point to Community Coalition staff: By denying residents a choice (by not asking them) to contribute their dollars towards the movement, we were essentially disempowering them and taking away an opportunity for them to invest in improving their community. In most "Fundraising 101" training spaces, we learn the guaranteed way a fundraising campaign or appeal will fail is simply by not asking in the first place.

Our training sessions were successful in helping the staff see that their aversion to the membership program was more based on their own fears, experiences and relationships with money than the actual giving capacity of South Los Angeles residents. The sessions also helped the staff understand that giving is not just an act of being kind—but it can also be viewed as taking a proactive stance to promote and protect your values. For us, our membership program represents a community coming together to promote and protect the shared values of all South Los Angeles residents. By employing membership, we were giving our residents another means of demonstrating their leadership and commitment. We were strengthening a real grassroots movement for social justice in South Los Angeles.

Within a matter of six months—from announcement to full implementation—Community Coalition had fully adopted membership as an organizational practice and was implementing recruitment programs throughout all of its program and administrative component areas.

However, to get the point of rolling-out of membership, collective management (executive and staff directors) leadership had to come to the decision that membership was the right choice for the organization. To develop appropriate membership levels, various managers met with the organization's community leaders and ally organizations to craft a membership program that met the specific needs of the community. Our membership program





V.P. of Policy Karren Lane speaks with South Los Angeles activists at a press conference to address violence in the community.

hosts different annual giving levels (\$30 to \$240) and also provides individuals with the option of making monthly payments as low as \$5 per month. While “swag” items are provided at the different levels, our members also enjoy exclusive “members-only” events that include cultural activities that expand their understanding and participation in social activism.

The membership program’s messaging was also developed collectively by management, line staff and residents. It was decided that if our membership program was going to be successful, we needed to have our community leaders as the face of the program and recruitment efforts. Who better to speak to our South Los Angeles constituency than Black or Brown community members who have already made the commitment? These leaders were seen as uniting the community and being an active part of transforming their community for the better. Employing this approach has also allowed resident leaders to take as much, if not more, ownership over being a member of Community Coalition than staff, motivating everyone to recruit more family members, friends and neighbors to become active members in the organization.

As one of our long-time resident leaders has stated, “I am invested. I have lived in this community for over 30 years, and I have seen the positive changes in this community. I know that my dollars will make a difference.”

To date, every Community Coalition staff person has become a dues paying member. Our Relative Caregivers (grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren and who are involved in our foster care reform program and campaign work) are our greatest contributors to membership. We discovered that our youth leaders tend to be the best membership recruiters. Many of our long-time donors were thrilled with the idea of Community Coalition establishing a membership program and increased their giving in the year the roll-out took place. As an organization, our goal is to recruit 15,000 dues paying members to the South Los Angeles movement by 2020. With every campaign victory our membership base increases, and we are well on our way to seeing to achieving our goal.



## Reflections on Our Approach

Centering race in Community Coalition's analysis and internal work played an important role in being able to successfully launch our membership program, which is actively building the power of Black and Brown people in South Los Angeles. We realize that not every nonprofit organization is in a position to engage in something like a "Race Retreat," or to take such a proactive and direct approach to addressing the manifestations of racism and classism in carrying out the day-to-day responsibilities of the organization.

What can be taken from Community Coalition's experience is that complex racial and class dynamics are always playing out, whether we choose to take the time to talk about them or not—including in organizations engaging in grassroots leadership development and social justice fundraising work. Wherever and whenever possible, staff and management should engage in honest conversations to help understand how their beliefs and their identities impact the way that they fundraise. A champion to lead the effort for the organization is an absolute must, preferably someone in a management or decision-making role. Finally, understanding the perspectives of different stakeholder groups

will also help the organization develop a comprehensive plan on how to support more positive discussions about race and class.

For organizations looking to move towards a membership program, these strategies may be helpful:

- Educate staff and constituents on the current fundraising landscape;
- Revisit social justice values and elevate the role of fundraising in the process; and
- Identify fundraising strategies that best fit with organizational priorities and capacities.

For Community Coalition, these efforts were much more successful when put in the context of perceptions of race and class. We live in a highly racialized society. It is important we not shy away from these conversations in our work but view them as potential ways to strengthen our organization's capacity to fundraise. ■

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Laresha Franks is a development specialist at the Community Coalition, and is a recent graduate of the Fundraising Academy for Communities of Color.

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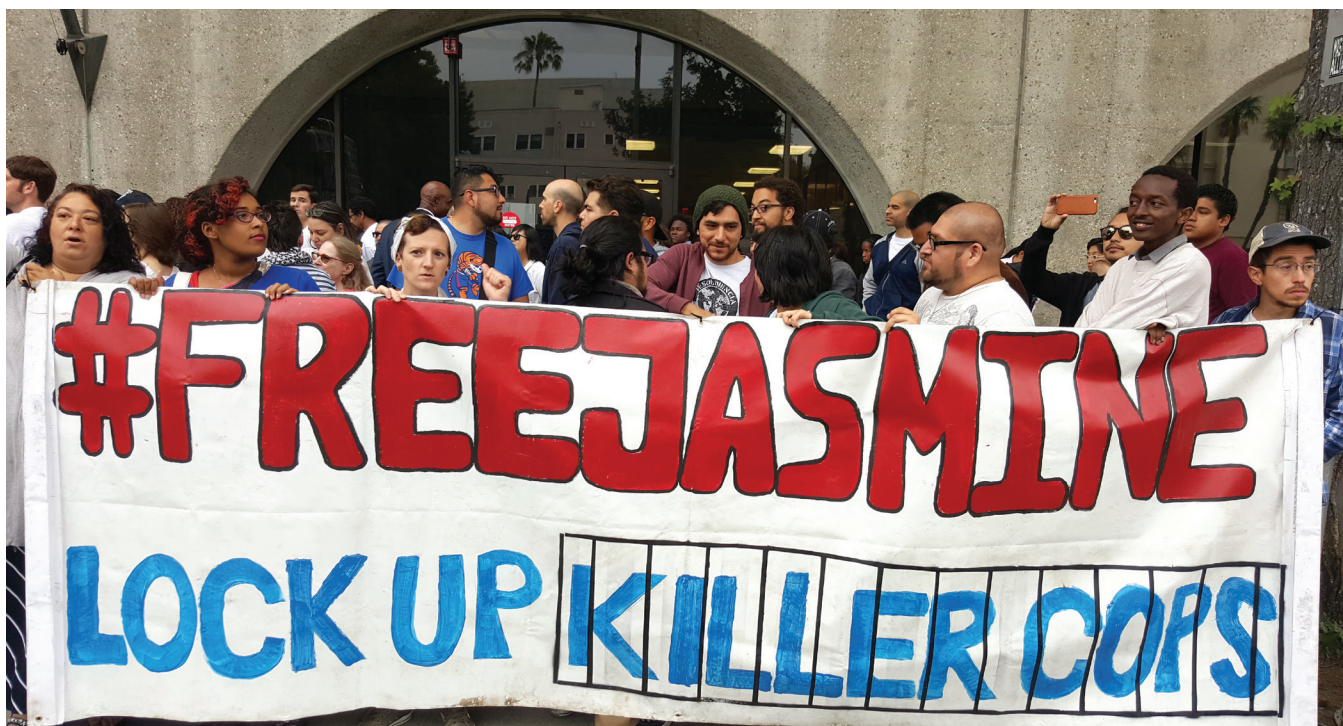
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Color Of Change delivers nearly 80,000 petitions in front of Pasadena Courthouse calling on Judge Elaine Lu to free Jasmine Richards.

# Strengthening Black America's Political Voice Through Online Campaigns & Fundraising

By Sheena Brown

**COLOR OF CHANGE KNOWS THAT BY BRINGING PEOPLE** together around targeted and strategic actions, we can create real and lasting change in the fight for racial and social justice.

Our work targets the symptoms and manifestations of racial injustice, and seeks to shift public opinion and policy, both through broad-based educational campaigns with our 501(c)(3) and campaigns targeting politicians and policy makers with our 501(c)(4).

Our strategies include digital organizing and public education efforts; a robust social media presence designed to expand both the impact and reach of our work; and broad-based educational campaigns. By ensuring that the voices of those most impacted by racial and social injustice are front and center, Color Of Change is building greater political power for Black people that can be sustained for generations to come.

Color Of Change was created in 2005 by a single email in a historic moment of crisis for the United States. Co-founders James Rucker and Van Jones launched the organization in the

aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when entire Black communities were abandoned by local, state and federal officials. People in crisis were treated as criminals instead of victims. Our co-founders realized that there was no national organization that was equipped to quickly and creatively lift up the voices of Black people in moments of crisis, particularly by using online platforms. Post-Katrina, Color Of Change was a major catalyst in raising the national consciousness about the life-and-death consequences of the invisibility of Black people and the silencing of our voices.

Our work is unified around a common purpose: elevating and amplifying the voices of Black people and our allies so that those in power understand that we will hold them accountable on policies and actions that impact our families, communities and lives.

## Member Engagement

Today, Color Of Change has over one million members, making it the largest online civil rights organization in the nation. Color Of Change mobilizes the power of its members and allies—through



social media, online activism, and grassroots organizing—to demand accountability and equity from political, corporate and other decision-makers.

There is a particular context to how and why our membership has grown over the years. We see spikes in membership during “flashpoint” occurrences of racial injustice. Be it when Trayvon Martin’s killer went free, when Mike Brown was gunned down in the streets of Ferguson, or the horrifying massacre of nine Black individuals at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, our members come to us to learn what they can do to make a difference.

Year	Percentage of member growth from prior year	Number of actions taken
2013	+3.8%	1,432,758
2014	+37%	1,939,497
2015	+12.5%	2,406,018

Color Of Change has developed a continuum of strategies and tactics to carry out its work at the intersection of civic engagement, economic justice, racial justice, and criminal justice including:

- **Rapid Response Engagement.** Using our online capacities to conduct rapid response campaigning, Color Of Change identifies and amplifies moments for galvanizing online and offline action. We connect multiple moments to create persuasive narratives and leverage specific truth-telling moments to shift critical momentum.
- **Social Pressure Engagement.** For example, in the aftermath of Walter Scott’s murder, a donation drive was started on Indiegogo to raise money for Officer Michael Slager. Five fundraising pages had been created and initially, Indiegogo refused to take them down. Outraged, thousands of Color Of Change members flooded the Indiegogo Facebook page with comments demanding that they remove these disturbing and hurtful fundraisers from their platform, which enabled Officer Slager to profit from killing an unarmed Black man. Our members were victorious when Indiegogo quickly took down the fundraising pages.
- **People-Focused Media.** Because of our online organizing efforts and proximity to the media echo chamber, we are uniquely situated to push stories, issues and moments to the forefront of the media conversation. Color Of Change aims to lead with storytelling by developing people-focused media, spotlighting authentic, individual stories of Black folks—often Black women—across the nation to make our issues and our members impossible to ignore.

- **OrganizeFor.org.** Our distributive organizing platform is employed as a tactic to grow membership and spark greater participation by enabling local partners to turn their members into campaign leaders, and equipping Color Of Change members to recruit and mobilize their networks. The impact of this platform may include driving a neglected issue into the public discourse and keeping it there, or forcing key players to meet with organizers and answer questions they would otherwise ignore.

- **Represent.ColorOfChange.org.** The hub for all of our media accountability work, this site challenges media producers in entertainment, advertising and the news to take responsibility for their dehumanizing portrayals of the Black community.

- **Moments to Movements.** We connect multiple moments to create compelling and persuasive narratives, deepening our members’ understanding of issues, political dynamics, and the ability of everyday people to make long-term impact through sustained activism.

We employ a ladder of engagement to leverage the full capacity of our members (see Figure 1 on next page).

### Online Fundraising Success

Our online fundraising efforts are led and carried out through our campaigns team. The goals and strategies for our online fundraising are an important part of our email campaign work. This member-focused strategy is based on analytics that tell a different, yet important, story about how members engage and what inspires their giving. Our development department is gaining the necessary capacity needed to weave in more traditional cultivation and stewardship programs for our members. This dual approach both provides members with a framing for what action is needed, and aims to increase their longer term support of the organization—deepening their connection from supporting one-off campaigns to supporting long-term organizational sustainability.

Similarly, our development team is set up to piggy-back on the engagement momentum that our members experience. We want our campaigns team to remain focused on building and running hard-hitting, successful campaigns. Therefore, the development team brings that deeper layer of strategy and infrastructure to support member engagement through a more focused and intentional cultivation strategy. The development team can do the important work of building out what we call a “ladder of giving.” Many of the asks coming through our campaigns are targeted at the \$3 to \$15 level, allowing our development team to review donor engagement, learn what’s important to donors, and build a deeper connection that often motivates increases in donation amounts.

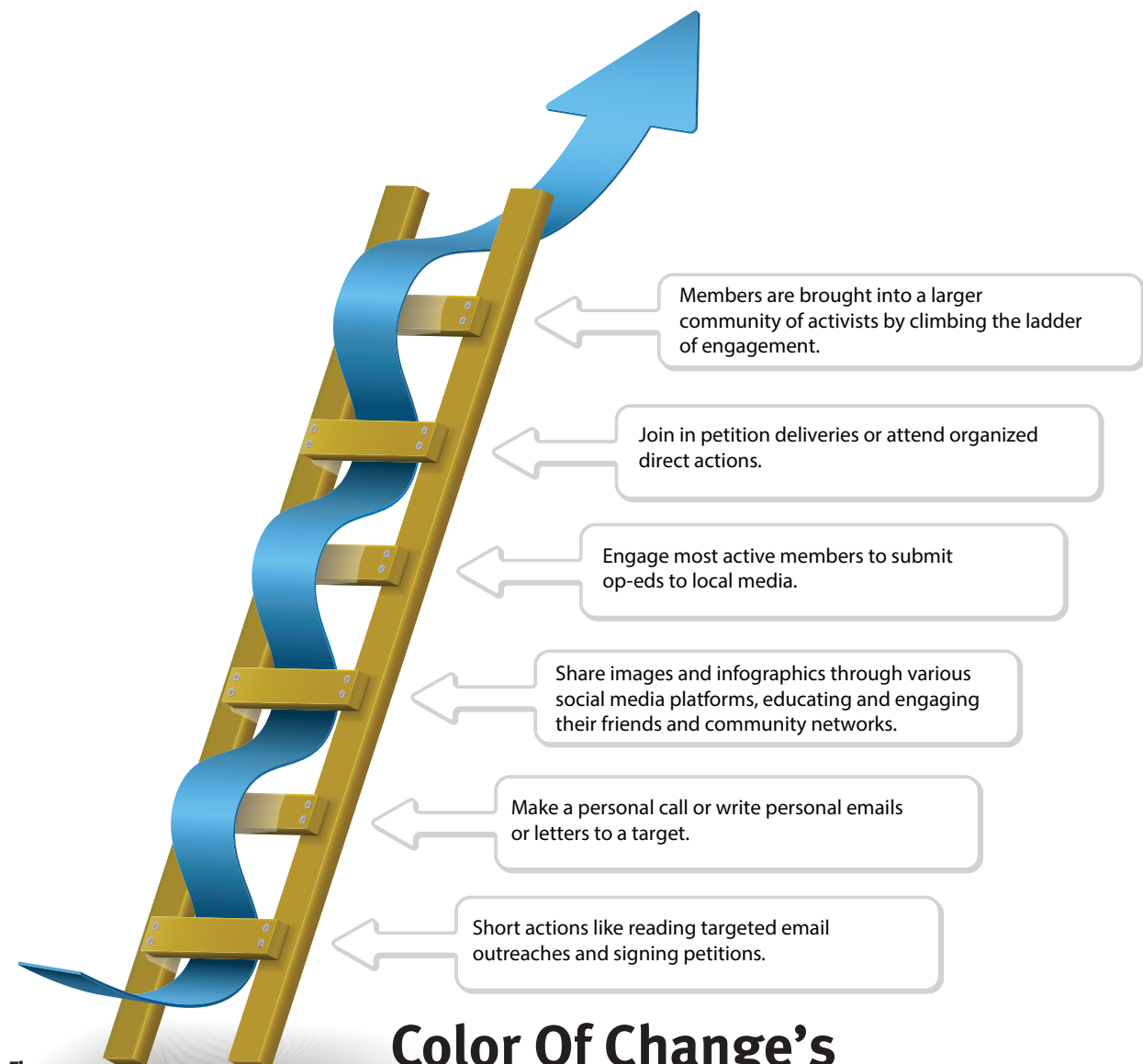


Figure 1

## Color Of Change's Ladder of Engagement

In many instances, a donor's support grows beyond contributing to a few one-off campaigns each year to providing deeper core support that allows the work of the organization to flourish. That said, we are working on launching an events program to support our ability for more direct interactions between staff and members so that we can learn from each other. We are looking to hold two events this fall in NYC and the Bay Area, focusing on members who show consistent engagement through taking action or making donations.

In recent years, Color Of Change has exceeded our online fundraising goals. Nonetheless, we are certain that these achievements came as a result of many prior years of learning about our members, experimenting to find the right message, and recalibrating our strategies to engage folks more deeply. We still have a lot to learn, and could be doing a lot more if we had additional staff capacity. But we feel confident that we are on the right track to getting there.



Change in Online (Member) Fundraising Revenue 2013 - 2015	
2013	-41%
2014	+224%
2015	+54%

## Team Fundraising Strategy

One of our core operating strengths as an organization is that we have clearly defined SMART (Specific, Measurable, Aspirational, Realistic and Time-bound) goals across the organization. The executive, development and campaigns team all have specific goals attributed to fundraising. The campaigns team uses data and analytics on member actions to inform their goals and strategies. They focus on those important low-dollar donations that come in as a result of a hard-hitting campaign. Our campaigns team is broken down into smaller issue-focused teams (criminal justice, economic justice, media accountability, etc.). Each issue team is responsible for reaching a certain fundraising target, and each member of the campaigns team has individual goals. Each set of goals is assessed on a monthly basis, and appropriate adjustments are made as needed to ensure individuals and teams stay on track to meet these goals.

The executive and development teams are focused on bringing in major donations and grants from individuals and institutional partners. Similarly, their goals are clearly defined, and they assess progress on a monthly basis.

## Lessons Learned

### Connect to hearts & minds.

Our members make donations when they understand our strategy and can clearly see how their donation is going to have a collective impact on an important issue. We have learned over the years that we need to educate our members not just on the issue we are trying to address, but also on how their donations help us to be successful.

A powerful example of this was a campaign we led around the tragic death of Sandra Bland in 2015. Essentially, we were learning from folks close to the Waller County, Texas criminal justice system that her death pointed to a deep-seated problem of corruption and racial bias that Attorney General Loretta Lynch is responsible for addressing. This type of “good ol’ boys” culture exists in counties across the country and has long served as a way to ensure Black families and victims of state and interpersonal violence are denied justice.

We were able to build a good relationship with Sandra’s family, and they supported our desire to invite our members to donate to our campaign. More than 3,000 Color Of Change members re-

sponded to our campaign<sup>1</sup> and donated approximately \$73,000 in three days to fund a journalistic investigation into the policies and practices of Waller County officials. Part of the investigation’s findings was published in the Huffington Post<sup>2</sup>. Our members received a clear message from us not only about the atrocities surrounding Sandra Bland’s death, but how we could take collective action to create tangible change in Waller County.

### The right messenger matters.

Sometimes, the issues we run campaigns on are not highly visible in the press, which can make it more challenging to engage our members. For instance, it was difficult in the beginning to get people to see what was at stake and stand with us on the issue of net neutrality. During a critical time in our campaign, we needed our members engaged and taking action. We partnered with #BlackLivesMatter Co-founder Alicia Garza to help raise the visibility of the FBI’s surveillance of Black activists on the internet.<sup>3</sup> Alicia’s high profile as an activist and public figure helped raise awareness of the issue and articulate the level of severity of this issue as a human rights violation. Our members got it and responded by contributing over \$42,416 in just a few days to support our work on this important issue.

### Pitch clear asks.

Our most successful fundraising asks come when we make very specific asks of our members. Our members look to us to help them manage their political lives. When we send an email out asking them to take action, it is important that we clearly lay out the crisis or opportunity and we are clear about how the action we are asking them to take connects to a solution. When we do this well their engagement soars. For example, in response to Glenn Beck spreading dangerous lies about Black people on his Fox News show, we let our members know that his contract was up in a month. In response, 285,000 members took action, putting pressure on Fox News to fire him, which they did.

## Major Donor Strategy

As we continue to learn and improve our online fundraising strategies, we are working hard to build out our major donor program. Right now, we are defining major donors as individuals who make at least a one-time donation of \$1,000 within a calendar year.

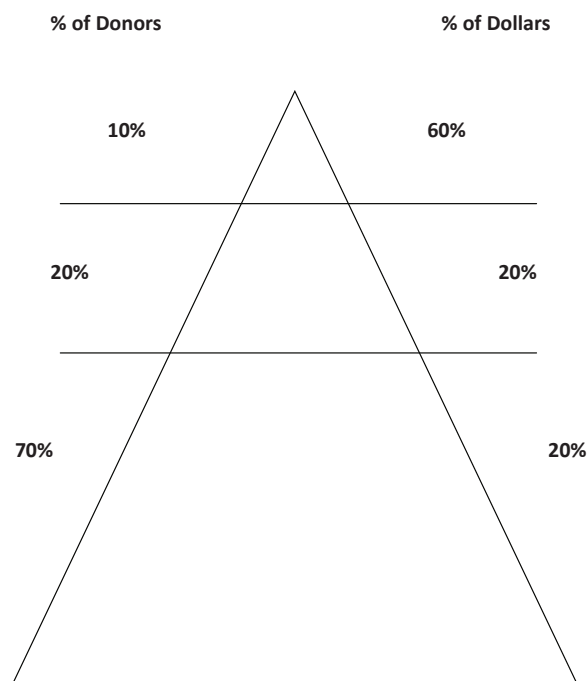
<sup>1</sup> Visit [bit.ly/1CSmOIQ](http://bit.ly/1CSmOIQ) to view the campaign page, screenshot on next page.

<sup>2</sup> See [huff.to/29Wm5um](http://huff.to/29Wm5um) to read the article.

<sup>3</sup> Read more about the campaign at [bit.ly/1LcvXwf](http://bit.ly/1LcvXwf), screenshot on next page.

## The Donor Pyramid

For a healthy individual donor base



**Figure 2: What “shape” is your donor base?**

A base with no mid-level donors might be an hourglass. A base with no high-level donors might be a trapezoid. A base with no small-dollar donors might be a truncated triangle. Determine your “shape” and figure out next steps to get it closer to the pyramid above.

Landing on the right definition of a major donor for our organization required thoughtful considerations. Some organizations have robust donor programs that represent depth at many levels of a donor pyramid (see Figure 2 above). The base of our pyramid was plentiful with those who give between \$50 to \$250 per year. The top tier of our pyramid represented a handful of individual donors who were making contributions over \$10,000.

In prior years, Color Of Change has lacked the staff capacity to dive more deeply into a major donor campaign as it takes significant focus and intention. Today, we are setting out to do just that. We aim to learn more about those \$100 donors and understand if they have the capacity to make substantially larger donations one day. We expect that over time we will be able to bring more donors into a higher tier of giving. For now, the executive, development and campaigns teams are employing an all hands on deck approach to our overall fundraising efforts.

It is an exciting time to be in a building out phase for the development team. Our members are engaged with what is happen-

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### Help support a private investigator #JusticeForSandy

It's been weeks since Sandra Bland died in police custody and we still don't know what led to her tragic death.

Waller County District Attorney Elton Mathis and Sheriff Glenn Smith have a history of discrimination and racism. Now, we must take matters into our own hands.

Will you chip in \$15 TODAY to hire a private investigator to investigate the Texas Department of Public Safety and Waller County Prosecutor and Sheriff? Waller county officials have a long history of discrimination and racism. We need someone on the ground as soon as possible in order to uncover patterns of discrimination and abuse against Black people in the area.

help us reach **\$75,000**  
to date **\$3,185** **\$71,240**

Your contribution will benefit ColorOfChange.

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### Defend Black activists and expose the FBI

The FBI, DHS and local police departments have been monitoring the social media accounts of activists like Alicia Garza, and have even tried to intimidate activists at public events.

This surveillance serves not only to keep tabs on activists, but also to deter them from pushing forward. Surveillance is a tool of fear. Peaceful protests, vigils, and community organizing should not be treated as national security threats by our government, and yet they are.

Will you help us stop this from happening? Let's expose the illegal surveillance practices of the FBI and DHS, using the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Normally the FOIA process is relatively inexpensive but - perhaps unsurprisingly - many journalists and groups have hit major financial roadblocks when it comes to uncovering the truth about movement surveillance. Ferguson, for example, is charging nearly 'ten times' a government employee's salary for FOIA requests. With your donation, we will have the financial resources needed to overcome these obstacles and expose the government sanctioned surveillance of our movement.

Chip in \$15 to fund our campaign to expose the FBI's surveillance of #BlackLivesMatter activists, organizers and protestors.

we did it! **\$35,000**  
to date **\$1,894** **\$42,416**

Your contribution will benefit ColorOfChange.

Color Of Change's #JusticeForSandy and Net Neutrality fundraising campaign pages.

ing in the Black community, particularly as the world watches us address the issues around community policing practices. As we continue to help our members effectively respond to injustice with action, we are developing opportunities to encourage their ongoing financial support. Color Of Change has a unique ability to see opportunities others may have missed and make the strategic moves we need to make, until justice is real.

We have a rich and deep grassroots donor environment that holds tons of potential. Every day our campaigns team is improving upon their fundraising skills as they learn more about what sparks our members' responsiveness. When I think about what success looks like in two to three years, Color Of Change has a robust events program in three to four cities; our major donor program represents 35 percent of our individual giving program; and, our base of grassroots donors make consistent annual contributions that represent 40-60 percent of our individual giving program. Wish us luck! ■

Sheena Brown serves as the development director at Color Of Change, leading the organization's efforts to strengthen its relationships with supporters and donors to secure the financial sustainability of the organization.





# Shifting Your Organization's Fundraising Mindset

By Karen Topakian

**KIM KLEIN OF KLEIN & ROTH CONSULTING** and Jeanne Bell, the CEO of CompassPoint, know fundraising inside and out. They know what works and what doesn't.

The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund also knew something about fundraising but wanted to know more to help their social change grantees. They started by commissioning CompassPoint to write a report about the fundraising issues plaguing nonprofits. Together, in 2013, they released *UnderDeveloped*, which identified several chronic fundraising challenges, including high levels of turnover and lengthy vacancies in development director positions,

a lack of basic fundraising systems, and inadequate attention to fund development among key board and staff leaders.

The report clearly hit a pain point, giving voice to widespread frustration about the next steps needed to address these endemic problems in nonprofit fundraising. In response, in 2014, the Fund engaged CompassPoint again and brought in Klein & Roth Consulting to create a report exploring methods and approaches to help organizations raise more resources for social change.

Jeanne and Kim recognized that some mid-level social change organizations had found a way to achieve breakthrough results in

individual fundraising, but many others hadn't. These two experts decided to look at these uniquely successful groups, not simply to adopt their strategies and tactics, but to better understand the conditions creating their fundraising success—their beliefs, values and organizational culture.

Within three to four months, eight people researched and interviewed 38 progressive organizations with limited budgets

## **[GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING] KEEPS US IN TOUCH WITH OUR ALLIES AND SUPPORTERS, SPREADS THE WORD OF OUR INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES SO THEY CAN BE REPLICATED, AND BRINGS TOGETHER PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY.**

and small staffs. The authors decided to focus on 16 social justice organizations that had not been caught in the vicious cycle outlined in *UnderDeveloped*. Instead, these groups possessed a deep philosophical commitment to engaging individual donors and had successfully done so for many years. This cadre of social change organizations formed the basis for the Haas, Jr. Fund's report released in April 2016 entitled, *Fundraising Bright Spots*.

The Bright Spots groups, stretching across the country, address various social justice issues including: helping homeless youth build healthy and fulfilling lives; organizing women at risk of and living with breast cancer; protecting immigrant rights and LGBTQ rights; supporting peace and justice efforts in the Middle East; creating new jobs and healthy communities in the South; protecting the environment; and bringing students and farmworkers together.

The report includes interviews with these organizations' donors, staff and board members who share the obstacles, struggles and setbacks they faced, along with the methods, mindsets and commitments that allowed them to achieve fundraising success with their individual donor programs.

While writing the report, Jeanne and Kim observed four overarching themes present among this cross-section of social change organizations:

1. **Fundraising is core to the organization's identity.** Fund development isn't a separate or supporting function; it's central to the work of social change.
2. **Fundraising is distributed broadly across staff, board and**

**volunteers.** The business of fund development doesn't just belong to the person who holds the job title; everyone across the organization has a part to play.

3. **Fundraising succeeds because of authentic relationships with donors.** Fund development is seen as more than a transaction; it is driven by and rooted in engaged, meaningful relationships with and among donors, staff, board and volunteers
4. **Fundraising is characterized by persistence, discipline and intentionality.** A systemic approach to fundraising is employed.

The authors noted an additional common theme among the five statewide, multi-issue advocacy groups featured in the report: They viewed organizing, building membership, and fundraising similarly.

The authors don't suggest that organizations seeking ways to start or improve their individual fundraising programs should treat this report as a blueprint, a map or a recipe. Instead, it's a study of promising practices and shifts in mindset about ways organizations approach development.

These 12 mindsets undergird the fundraising success of the 16 Bright Spots:

1. The decision to raise money from individuals—as well as the approaches used to do so—are steeped in existing organizational values and philosophy.
2. Being genuine about who you are and what you stand for as an organization is core to fundraising success.
3. Fundraising is a form of organizing and power-building, not merely a strategy for financing the organization's work.
4. Fundraising is not the purview of a select group of professionals, but a process, if well-supported, in which anyone can engage.
5. Development directors are organizational leaders focused on skills building, culture change, and systems development to support others in fundraising.
6. The conversation about fundraising goals and progress belongs everywhere, not contained in a single department or to a single team.
7. "Donor" is one aspect of many relationships that committed supporters forge with an organization.
8. Authentic relationships with donors are part of a larger organizational culture that values relational, rather than transactional, interactions with everyone.
9. High trust and accountability among staff and board members allow leaders to weather fundraising's inevitable ups and downs together.
10. More important than having a perfect system is working

whatever system you have with rigor and a commitment to continuous improvement.

11. Development and communications are inextricably linked; compelling communications are a powerful way to acquire, engage and retain donors.
12. The use of data is not just about having a donor database. It's also about surveying your donors, getting feedback from your fundraisers on what messages are resonating, and studying the performance of every fundraising campaign and event.

### Overcoming Reluctance

For organizations with deeply ingrained fear of fundraising or a reluctance to prioritize it, a mindset shift won't come easily. But for those donors, board and staff members who want to change their organization, here are five common scenarios of reluctance or uncertainty organizations find themselves in, and how Bright Spot groups and other organizations successfully addressed them:

**1. We don't have enough time to do more fundraising; we're already overloaded. We could write one grant and raise \$50K; it takes more effort and people to raise that amount from individuals.**

When Dean Spade, founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, put into practice the grassroots fundraising strategies he learned in a seminar led by Kim Klein and Stephanie Roth, he too questioned the use of his time. "Of course there's no doubt about it: Putting together mailings and events and maintaining relationships with individual donors is time-consuming work," said Spade who wrote about these experiences in the 2005 *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* article, "Getting it Right From the Start: Building a Grassroots Fundraising Program."

Spade continued, "At every stage, though, we have found that this work is directly in line with our mission and enhances our work beyond just fundraising. It keeps us in touch with our allies and supporters, it spreads the word of our innovative strategies so that they can be replicated, it brings together people in our community, which is still one defined by isolation."

**2. We don't know anyone who has money; we work with low-income people who don't have money to donate.**

The staff at the Coalition for Human Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), a 30-year-old immigrant rights organization, had heard this refrain a thousand times. But their development director, Beth Rayfield, reframed the issue of raising money from low-income people by saying, "You can't take their choice away. You are taking away someone's dignity if you don't ask them and give them the choice to say yes or no."

At a staff and volunteer fundraising training at Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA), a 26-year-old grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women with a double mission of promoting personal transformation and building community power for social and economic justice, Co-Executive Director Andrea Lee brought in a cartoon depicting a man who died because he asked for a contribution and the donor said no. The sheer ridiculousness of that scenario took away some of the fear of asking. According to Co-Executive Director Juana Flores, "Once we realized that we were actually doing a favor to the donor by providing them a way to give to a cause they cared about, that's when our minds started to shift."

### 3. People don't like to talk about money.

Often our society and culture eschew talking about money. It's not a surprise to hear that board members don't want to either. But Dean Spade of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project experienced some-

**ONCE WE REALIZED WE WERE ACTUALLY DOING A FAVOR TO THE DONOR BY PROVIDING THEM A WAY TO GIVE TO A CAUSE THEY CARED ABOUT, THAT'S WHEN OUR MINDS STARTED TO SHIFT.**

thing different. "I had come from communities of people barely scraping by who were always helping each other out and never afraid to talk about money, which is apparently taboo among upper-class people," explained Spade. "Now I could also see that seeking our support from our community matched our 'by and for' approach to the work, and would make us more accountable to the communities we serve." Dean's experience mirrors the MUA's co-directors' experience mentioned above.

### 4. Fundraising is the development director's job.

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) employs an impressive portfolio system in support of its major donor program. Fifty-seven portfolio managers made up of staff, board and volunteers together manage 600 major donor relationships, in addition to other roles they play within the organization. This approach spreads out the fundraising function throughout the organization.

The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) requires every staff member to engage in fundraising. Non-development staff know in advance that they will need to allot time to participate in two fundraising efforts per year: the gala and the membership drive. Staff members receive talking points, tracking sheets, trainings, one-on-ones, and all kinds of



other resources needed to engage. Plus they have regular check-ins and have developed a competitive game to track everyone's progress, offering prizes and recognition for the top three fundraisers. Though CHIRLA only involves staff in this effort, organizations could require board members to participate.

These two approaches shift the development director from sole fundraiser to coordinator, teacher, coach and inspirer

#### 5. We can't afford to hire a development person.

Like many senior staff members, Michelle Perez, director of administration & institutional giving at Community Voices Heard (CVH), knew her organization needed to diversify its funding base to remain stable. She also knew they weren't tapping into their base but didn't have the capacity to reach both donors and funders. In response, they hired an individual giving coordinator.

"Having this position may not pay off in the short-term and may not cover the salary, but it is extremely important for the long haul," said Michelle. "It may take several years for the return to exceed the investment. Help all your key stakeholders understand that."

### Making Your Campaigns Fly

This article along with the *Fundraising Bright Spots* report may raise questions or concerns previously voiced by fellow staff or board members in your organization, or it may surface new ones. Regardless, please note that the authors do not consider these findings a recipe for every organization to follow. Instead, consider them an inside view into the cultural conditions and circumstances under which these social change organizations achieved individual fundraising campaign successes. They learned what made these campaigns tick, what made them sing, and what made them fly.

Remember that overall, fundraising is about more than money. It takes more than one person and it demands more leadership and connection throughout an organization. ■

Karen Topakian, owner of Topakian Communications, is a writer, communications consultant, activist and frequent *Journal* contributor.



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