

# How can I engage my board of trustees in fundraising?

This download was featured in =mc's fundraising tips & tools e-newsletter (July 2008) in the section *On the Consultant's Couch*, where readers write in with a work-related problem. In this download, =mc fundraising consultant Ann-Marie helps a reader tackle a common challenge with boards...

## The challenge...

I joined a small-medium children's charity as head of individual giving 6 months ago. My primary task is to revitalise our major donor fundraising programme.

In my last job, I did something similar, with the support of the trustees - however, I'm struggling to carry this success into my current role. I don't have a lot of direct contact with our board, and when I do see or speak to them, they don't seem very interested or engaged. How can I make them see how influential their role is in getting the big gifts we need?

## Ann-Marie says...

We work with lots of fundraisers who I know will relate to the challenges that you are facing. Here are a few pointers that will help you succeed:

### **Do you and your Trustees *really* know what the money is for and the difference it will make?**

Too often, charities want to secure the support of major donors – but they can't actually explain to donors the impact their gifts will have. It's not good enough to stress what you need (too often money) – major donors usually want to be part of *something* that they can make happen. And that goes for the Board too – to get buy in from them you must explain the impact they can be part of.

### **How much do you need and by when?**

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Your fundraising target and timeframe will determine the size of gifts that you will need to secure. You will need bigger gifts to successfully achieve a target of £30 million in 3 years, than you will if your target is £300,000 per annum. Until you are clear on the size and scale of your ambition, you can't establish the range of gifts and numbers of prospects you need – and how the Board can help

### **Are they the right people?**

Once you have clarified what your fundraising proposition is, and the size and scale of your ambition – you need to be confident that your current board of trustees are the *right* people to make it happen.

Remember, boards are often not recruited with a specific fundraising remit. Your organisation needs lots of different skills sets (in addition to fundraising) on the board to operate. Are your trustees well connected to prospective donors, and are they willing and able to help you in this way? Be sure that they are the right people to help you – before you spend time and energy convincing them why they should.

### **Does it have to be the board?**

If your board is not bulging with budding major donor fundraisers (and most aren't), you can still succeed, you just need to find some fans who are willing to help you to fundraise. Many charities find that their best connected people are very busy – and therefore unwilling to join any official boards/committees – but they are happy to work with you individually to raise money for a cause that they feel passionately about. Look to groups of people who might be able to help – existing donors, advisers, high profile people, celebrities associated with your cause who could lead you to connections worth exploring.

### **What can you do?**

Major donor fundraising through a board of trustees, or senior level volunteers is just one route to raising major gifts. Staff can and should also be able to play an important role. You could enhance your major donor activity by developing a staff led major donor programme – this involves pro-actively cultivating your lower level donors who do

*something* that indicates a special interest in you, and a capacity to support you at a higher level. I suggest that you pay special attention to donors who make donations:

- significantly higher than your average level of donation
- at seemingly strange times
- cumulatively high gifts
- occasionally larger gifts

As you will know, it takes time to develop a major donor fundraising programme – so I suggest that you don't put all your eggs in to one basket. Pro-actively seek additional routes to major donors whilst you explore the true potential of your trustees.

Finally, when you do get the right group of people on board – be clear about what you are asking them to do. In my experience, few boards will do what you expect of them when left to their own devices.

## **Need more help?**

To find out how =mc can help with your fundraising, contact **Ann-Marie Kelly** on **+44 (0) 20 7978 1516** or email [a.kelly@managementcentre.co.uk](mailto:a.kelly@managementcentre.co.uk).

**We hope you found this download useful and enjoyable.**

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