

MARC A. PITMAN

21 WAYS

FOR BOARD MEMBERS TO ENGAGE
WITH THEIR NONPROFIT'S FUNDRAISING



21 Ways for Board Members to Engage with Their Nonprofit's Fundraising

**by Marc A. Pitman
The Fundraising Coach**

WWW.FUNDRAISINGCOACH.COM

Boards and board members regularly hire me to help them learn nonprofit fundraising. They're recruited to a board but have no idea how to fundraise. And their nonprofit's are often so busy doing good, they don't realize the board members aren't clear on what "helping with fundraising" means. Do you know what? I'd be glad to coach you one-on-one. But here are 21 very practical ways for you to jump in.

The most exciting part? (Yes, fundraising *is* exciting!) The most exciting part of this list is *you* get to get involved in ways that seem natural for you.

As a board member, you have gifts and talents that your nonprofit thought would significantly help it move its mission forward. But sometimes it's hard to connect the dots from your talent and experience to your nonprofit's needs. As a fundraising coach, I see board members regularly undervalue their importance and the positive impact their actions can make for their nonprofit.

Here are some ways you can engage that would delight your nonprofit's Executive Director (ED) or CEO!

1. Give regular gifts

Seriously, in addition to being helpful at board meetings, the #1 thing you as board member can do is make a financial gift to your nonprofit. Many nonprofits expect board members to give \$1000 a year. That's just \$84/month—basically a cable bill or a cell phone bill.

But all nonprofits need 100% giving from their

board. Think of it this way: what if you were approached for a gift by a nonprofit and find out that only 70% of the board give? Wouldn't you wonder what was wrong at the nonprofit? Wouldn't you wonder what they knew that you didn't know?

People approached by your nonprofit will feel the same.

Making your own gift will help make fundraising easier for your nonprofit's leaders...without you even having to ask your friends for a gift!

Before you read more, go to the nonprofit's website and make a gift. Or check with your financial advisor about the possibility of making a gift of stock. There's an article about why at: <http://fundraisingcoach.com/free-articles/are-you-paying-taxes-on-your-charitable-giving/>

2. Talk to people about the nonprofit

One of the biggest mistakes board members make is undervaluing their experience. They think they need to know all sorts of statistics and facts about the nonprofit before they talk to people about it.

You don't. You've made a decision to invest your limited time and hard-earned money to a cause. Just tell your story. *People will be interested in that.* More than you realize.

The best part of telling your story? You'll get the facts straight because it's your story! Your story,

as imperfect as you feel it is, will help people learn about your nonprofit. Your friends expect the nonprofit's employees to say nice things about their organization. They are paid to. But you aren't. So your story has an authority that employees' stories don't.

Please, don't undervalue your authority. Share your story with people you know. (Nonprofit employees, you can make this process easier by using storytelling tools like this one: <http://fundraisingcoach.com/free-articles/the-rule-of-threes-for-non-profits/>)

3. Introduce people to the ED or CEO

As a board member, you probably realize that you need to do some aspect of fundraising. And you probably feel a mixture of guilt for not doing it and relief that you haven't been assigned to any prospects yet.

Here is one of the most powerful things you can do that will help fundraising and marketing without requiring you to risk your reputation: *introduce people to your nonprofit's ED or CEO.*

All too often, nonprofits simply need help getting in front of new people. You know some of those people who your nonprofit needs help getting in front of.

So, take out a piece of paper, or use the margins on this page, and list 6-10 people you know well enough to email or call who could significantly impact your nonprofit. "Impact" is an elastic

term. It can be in giving money or giving media exposure or providing authoritative advice about some aspect of the nonprofit's strategic plan.

All you need to say in your email or on the phone is something like:

"Hi [person's name]. This is [your name]. In our last board meeting of [nonprofit's name], I realized we're working on some things that might interest you. Would you have 20 minutes to meet with our Executive Director?"

If they ask about money, you could say something like:

"Oh! Ha! I wasn't planning on having her ask you for money this time! I wanted you both to meet since I think you have a lot in common."

The only thing better than making that call, is your going with the ED to the meeting. You won't really have to say much if you don't want to. But your presence in the room will make it much easier for the ED to connect with the person you're introducing her to.

4. Write letters to the editor

Another way to introduce people to your nonprofit is to write a brief letter to the editor. This is especially powerful in communities with a local newspaper.

So often, letters to the editor are either negative or political. A letter praising the work of a local nonprofit can be a breath of fresh air.

Be sure to look for the “editorial guidelines” or the rules the paper has set up for letters to the editor. And try to be specific.

This isn’t effective (and isn’t likely to get printed):

“XYZ nonprofit is awesome. The leaders are cool.”

This is effective and more likely to get printed:

“XYZ nonprofit’s work in last Friday’s spay/neuter drive was amazingly inspiring to watch because of [specific reasons]. This organization is helping our community be better at [some value the community shares].”

Whether or not you read this space in the paper, people in your community do. And it helps shape public perception.

Best of all? It’s free.

Letters to the editor are more common during building projects or capital campaigns or program changes. But they can also be noteworthy if they’re simply highlighting a specific part of the nonprofit’s ordinary work.

Would you take a moment to write a letter now?

5. Ask questions

Asking questions is one of the scariest things for most board members. You agreed to be on the nonprofit’s board, but you’re not an expert in their area. Here’s a secret: *they need you to ask*

questions until you understand.

To start, if you are on the board and you still don't understand, how in the world will a donor who's not on the board understand? Your questions will help the nonprofit staff learn to tell their story without all the "insider" language of acronyms and technical terms.

Also, if you are on the board, you are responsible for governance decisions. You need to feel comfortable with these decisions. Trust the leaders and committees, and make sure you understand.

This isn't to say that you need to be suspicious or second-guessing. That isn't necessary, and it's rarely helpful. But asking questions so you understand can help ensure that everyone makes better decisions. And it makes it easier to fundraise. Your donor prospects may have similar questions. Your asking helps the others on the board and on the nonprofit's staff have a chance to develop clear answers to fundraising questions donors may ask.

6. Be ready to suggest new board members

Every board will eventually need new members. As a board member yourself, you're in the best position to identify new board member prospects.

As you're spending time at board meetings, challenge yourself to figure out who else should be at the table. What skill-sets are needed? What

areas of expertise? What connections? Keep a running list.

Then, when vacancies arise, you'll be able to suggest some names to the board chair.

7. Learn your asking style

You probably didn't get on your board because you love asking for money. But as a board member, you should be active in some level of fundraising. Often the board chair or nonprofit staff will suggest extroverted ways to do fundraising—giving you a list of names to call or requiring you to sell tickets to a gala.

You may be well-suited for the tasks you are given. But what do you do if you're not? Most suffer in silence. They feel guilty not doing what is asked but never "get around" to making the calls.

Did you know there are at least four different profiles for asking? That's right. You may not be comfortable calling someone, especially since you're not entirely sure what you'd say and how you'd respond to their questions. It turns out, some people are great at writing a personal letter with the ask. This helps them organize their thoughts so they are prepared in future conversations with the donor prospect.

You really can be an effective fundraiser just the way you are. To find out your asking style for free, go to <http://AskingStyleProfile.com/>.

8. Send thank you cards to donors

One of the easiest ways to get involved with fundraising, and one of the most fun, is saying “thank you” to donors. You can use your own cards or cards from the nonprofit. The message is simply:

Dear [donor's name]: As a board member of [nonprofit's name], I want to say “thanks.” Your support of [nonprofits name] is [tangible impact—changing lives/saving pets/giving kids education/feeding people]. We couldn't do it without you. Thanks!
[Your name]

Just a couple personal and heartfelt lines of thanks. This has tremendous impact on your nonprofit’s ability to “retain” donors—to have donors who make repeat gifts. A recent Chronicle of Philanthropy article reported that charities that had this kind of thank you for donors were more likely to meet their fundraising goals last year than nonprofits that didn't. (Read it at: <http://bit.ly/1417Atj>)

Your thank you's are significantly helping your nonprofit hit their goals.

9. Make thank you calls to donors

Where thank you notes are powerful, thank you *calls* can be pure gold. Few people get a call simply saying “Thank you.” Ask your staff for the phone numbers of 5-10 people who've recently made a gift. Since chances are great that you'll get a voice mail, these will probably go quickly. You can use the same lines as you use for the

“send thank you notes to donors” action.

For three more phone calling tips, watch the short video at:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/phone-tips/>

10. Sign fundraising letters

Another easy way for you to support your nonprofit’s fundraising effort is to sign fundraising letters. Every time your nonprofit sends out letters, you could offer to either sign them if they are sent over your name.

A personal letter from a board member can be a refreshing addition to a nonprofit’s regular direct mail program. You won’t have to write the letter yourself. The staff will be glad to draft a letter for you. It’s best if you can actually sign them, but as many nonprofits use mail houses, they may just ask you to sign on white paper so they can scan an image to insert on the letter.

11. Notes on fundraising letters

You could even offer to write a brief note on the letters going to people you know. These notes help make the fundraising letter more effective. People see the letter and then see your note and realize that this isn’t just some mass produced appeal. It’s really for them.

Here are three additional things to consider:

- **Use blue ink:** Using blue ink helps make your note stand out from the black ink of the letter.

- **Write it at the top:** When most of us think of writing a quick note, we think of writing it in the margin or down at the bottom of the letter. But the most viewed part of the letter is the top. And there is already a lot of white-space there, plenty to write a brief note. Your few lines may help the donor actually read the nonprofit's fundraising appeal.
- **Consider writing on a post-it note:** In the direct mail business, a note like a post-it note is called a "lift note." These have been proven to increase response to fundraising appeals. (Read chapter 10, starting on page 50, in the book *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive* by Robert Cialdini's team. <http://amzn.to/16BQJ4M>)

Your note needn't be long. It can be something as simple as:

This is an important cause. I hope you'll join me in supporting it.
[Your first name]

That's all!

12. Develop your own nonprofit story

Too often, board members equate fundraising success with a need to memorize some sort of "schpeal" and all the nonprofit's facts and figures.

Not true.

The most persuasive thing you can do is develop your own story. I call this developing “your [insert your nonprofit’s name] story.” The beauty of your own story is that:

- People inherently believe stories, and
- You won’t forget your story!

In a time when we’re assaulted by 3,000 – 5,000 ads a day, people will find hearing your own story refreshingly authentic. So use yours well!

13. Film a 30—60 second video about why you love your nonprofit

People love video. The second largest search engine in the world is YouTube. Chances are, your nonprofit could use more videos expressing support for them. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, most of us have a video camera right in our pockets!

A simple, quick video can be powerful. You could share what impresses you the most about the nonprofit or why you’re thrilled to volunteer for it. You could even use your “nonprofit story.”

Thanks to YouTube, people are comfortable with amateur video, so you don’t need to be professional.

In fact, you could even record a few of them with different people at your next board meeting. For examples of this type of video, taken right after a seminar with all the noise and clinking in the background, look at the testimonial at:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/storytelling/>

There's no need to explicitly say, "This is why I donate..." or "Please make a gift..." Just be yourself.

14. Share your nonprofit's blog posts and Facebook updates

If the thought of talking about your nonprofit to your friends feels a bit forward right now, there is a more passive thing that will still help them.

Whenever your nonprofit shares an update on social media, or a blog post, like it and share it yourself.

Social media sites like Facebook measure how much interaction each update gets. The more an update is liked, shared, and commented on, the more Facebook thinks it will be interesting to others. As the update gets more interaction, it puts it into other people's feeds, getting your nonprofit's news in front of more eyes.

I could get geekier about this but, I'll stop here. My book *Nonprofit Social Media* goes into much more detail. You can find that at:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/nonprofit-social-media/>

15. Set up a Google alert for your nonprofit's name

Another geeky thing you can do that will tangentially help your nonprofit raise money is using Google Alerts.

<http://www.google.com/alerts>

Google Alerts scour the web for any reference you ask it to. You simply type your nonprofit's name in the appropriate box, tell them where to email it, and they'll let you know whenever the nonprofit's name comes up in the news or in blogs.

It can also be helpful to set up alerts with your CEO's or Executive Director's name, as well as other key employees.

Then, as Google delivers results, you can share them with the nonprofit. Most of the references will be generated by the nonprofit itself. But, occasionally, there will be references that the staff aren't aware of but should be.

16. Volunteer at events

We've gotten to the sixteenth idea without mentioning events! Clearly, one of the easiest ways to help your nonprofit with fundraising is to volunteer at events.

Events give all sorts of ways to get involved:

- Selling tickets (many find it easier to sell something than to ask for a gift)
- Helping with promotional activities like putting up posters
- Ushering
- Making food
- Working at a table

If your nonprofit is having an event, offer to help.

You'll get to meet more people, help your cause, and often have fun.

17. Get fundraising training

Whether you are comfortable with it or not, fundraising is part of your job description as a board member. So get training. There are lots of seminars, webinars, and coaching to help you excel. The two I recommend most are:

- www.MovieMondaysVideos.com - free weekly videos
- www.CharityWebinars.com - free and paid webinars

Additionally, you could commit to reading one book on fundraising a year. Be careful, many fundraising books are far too complicated.

They're fine for nonprofit staff, but as a volunteer, you deserve something that is readable. I wrote one called *Ask Without Fear!* specifically for board members.

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/ask-without-fear/>

Another great, very easy to read book on fundraising is by Jerry Panas. It's simply called *Asking*. You can find it on Amazon here:

<http://amzn.to/14Cjr7C>

There are many other good books on storytelling, fundraising, and marketing. If you find a book you'd like to get for the entire board, ask the authors for a bulk discount.

Finally, if you're looking for a retreat with your

board, check out the “Ask Without Fear!” Board Retreat Party Pack at:
<http://BoardRetreatPacks.com/>

18. Memorize your nonprofit’s mission statement

Memorizing your nonprofit’s mission statement helps you with all aspects of governance. In fact, nonprofit’s that use name cards on tables at board meetings are increasingly putting the organization’s mission statement on the side of the card facing the board member.

This isn’t going to immediately help you raise money. But it will help ensure that the decisions you make around the board table are in the best interest of the nonprofit’s mission. And *that* will make it easier to fundraise!

19. Check in with ED monthly, offering to help with visits

Another way to help with fundraising, is to offer to go on visits with your CEO/ED or other staff. They’ll do the asking, but your presence in the room will help create an atmosphere that makes it easier for the donor to say “yes.”

Offering once is good. But the staff may forget. So put it on your calendar to send an email, or leave a voice mail reminding them of the offer. It’s even more helpful if you can offer some names of people who might be good to talk with.

20. Host a house party

A relatively low effort, high value way to help your nonprofit is by hosting a house party. Simply inviting people you know to your house to hear from the CEO/ED. These can be effective with or without an ask. It's like going on a visit with the CEO/ED, but rather than seeing just one person at a time, you both can see 12-14.

21. Ask for money!

Of course, any list like this would be incomplete without the most straightforward way to help your nonprofit's fundraising: ask for money!

The number one reason people give money to a charity is that they're asked. They expect to be asked by the staff. But being asked by a volunteer, a person who isn't paid by the nonprofit, is usually much more compelling!

So ask!

Summary

There are literally hundreds of ways you can help your nonprofit raise more money. This list of 21 ideas is a great place to start, but it's only a start. I challenge you to share these ideas with your entire board. Perhaps you could challenge each person to take on 2 of the 21! Can you imagine how much better your fundraising would be if each board member committed to doing at least two things on this list?

If you want more help, I have hundreds of free blog posts, tools, and articles at <http://FundraisingCoach.com/>. Also, feel free to email me at marc@fundraisingcoach.com.

If others on your board want this booklet for themselves, they can get it free at <http://fundraisingcoach.com/subscribe/>

A Note to Nonprofit CEOs, EDs, and Fundraising Staff

Originally published in 2013, this booklet has been helping board members around the world get engaged in fundraising. But what's surprised me the most is how nonprofit leaders and fundraisers have been using it!

After reading this, many nonprofit leaders are realizing a need to improve their own board's orientation. To help them jumpstart their orientation, many are simply handing board members a copy of this booklet! They're using it like a menu, saying:

"You've heard us ask board members to help in our fundraising. Here are 21 ways to do that. We're asking board members to choose just two of these tasks and do it for the next year. In addition to #1 of course! Which ones would be a good fit for you?"

This works in one-on-one conversations and in full board meetings. Knowing their choice helps you have substantive conversations throughout the year. And it helps you have "fundraising by board members" become hard-wired into your regular process.

I hope this book as helpful for you as it has been for so many nonprofits around the world. And please let me know how I can help. I'd love to explore coaching you or coming out to train your board. After one board training, a nonprofit saw a *40% increase* in their fundraising...the year after the housing crash! **Engaged board members can transform your fundraising, regardless of the economy!** You can read about that nonprofit at: <http://fundraisingcoach.com/case-studies/>

To your fundraising success,



marc@fundraisingcoach.com