

A culture of philanthropy encourages giving from all prospective donors. It leads to donor satisfaction, retention and an overall stronger connection. This is good for fundraising, but even more than that it is great for the mission of the organization and those it serves.

**"A culture of philanthropy means fundraising** is viewed and valued as a mission-aligned program of the organization."<sup>1</sup> A philanthropic culture allows staff and volunteers to see the connection between services and giving. These people then personally tie the two together to carry out the overall mission.

*Now that we have established the importance of having a culture of philanthropy, the million dollar question is, how do you create one?*

The success of the fundraising team often precedes the success of the organization. However, "nonprofit fundraising is under-resourced, misunderstood, delegated solely to development staff, and poorly integrated into strategic programmatic planning."<sup>1</sup> In other words, to improve the success of the organization, the development function needs to integrate with the strategic planning of the entire organization. The plan should account for growing this culture of philanthropy.

Culture begins internally, which includes the board, the executive team, staff and volunteers. Culture then projects outwardly to grateful clients and other supporters.

**Board members** should have "giving" and "role of asking" incorporated into job descriptions. They also should be made aware of these responsibilities in orientation sessions. Regular board training sessions on fundraising are beneficial to keep members up-to-date. One-hundred percent giving by the board is crucial for all members to encourage by example to actively participate in fundraising.

**Executive teams**, which actively engage and make sure fund development is understood and respected as a program, model the culture of philanthropy in the workplace. This includes providing the development office the staff and budget needed to build a strong philanthropic culture. As leaders of the organization, it also means being fundraisers themselves. As with the board, 100 percent giving by the executive team is very important to show staff that they believe and support the mission of the organization.

**New staff and volunteer** orientation sessions should include a segment where their role in fundraising is explained as well. This could be as simple as letting them know how the department they're in has been affected by donations and for them not to ignore comments from families who say they want

to thank the organization in a meaningful way. Let them know how to direct inquiries like this to the development office.

Also, allow these groups to be involved with and lead creative and fun campaign strategies. Keep them updated on the impact gifts have had, specifically in the areas in which they work, so they can connect the dots between fundraising and how it affects their department. Amperage worked with a hospital where an affable custodian was the first boy and second baby born there some 60 years ago. When he made his own gift to its capital campaign, his close connection was publicized and celebrated internally by all staff.

Let your board, volunteer and staff members know the impact of their donations. This allows everyone to stay connected to fundraising.

Every staff member's evaluation should include a discussion on his or her role in helping with fundraising to keep it top of mind. This will encourage staff to direct prospects to the development office. This also encourages a regular increase in giving and participation by all audiences, and a better understanding of the mission by prospects.

**Connect with grateful clients** in meaningful ways to cultivate them into donors. Send regular newsletters to keep them updated on what is happening in the organization. Invite them to serve on committees and attend special events. Consider targeted asks that tie into the services they use and the needs your organization has in those areas.

Philanthropic successes should be **celebrated** to showcase model behaviors, recognize those embracing the culture and remind all audiences of the true mission of the organization.

A specific example of an organization's philanthropic culture resulting in a major donation occurred at East Tennessee Children's Hospital in Knoxville. Carlton Long, vice president of development and community services, received a \$40,000 check from an unknown donor. When he called to thank the woman, he realized what a vital role the billing clerk in the billing office had played in order for the foundation to receive the donation.

The donor's nephew had been treated for cancer at the hospital and the family was very impressed and thankful for the quality treatment he received. She was taking care of his bills and was surprised the hospital was not going to receive more money for its excellent care. She contacted the billing office and asked if she could pay for her nephew's charges. The clerk told her the hospital could not accept any more for services, but then directed her to the hospital foundation, where her donation would go toward helping others in similar situations as her nephew.<sup>2</sup>

Had a philanthropic culture not been established, this donor may have been turned away altogether.

A human service agency working with Amperage on its capital campaign experienced the benefits of a culture of philanthropy as well. One of the organization’s volunteers, a young adult in college, won a school contest. The prize was \$4,000 to his charity of choice. He chose the organization’s campaign, and the organization’s executive director was able to speak to his class to publicly thank the volunteer and educate others on the mission as an added benefit.

In short, a culture of altruism is one where giving permeates everything an organization does. Once a philanthropic culture is developed, it is in the best interest of the organization to nurture and maintain the culture for the continued success of the organization.

REFERENCES:

- 1 Bernstein, Leyna, “What’s a Culture of Philanthropy and How Can I Get One?” Leadership Matters, April 2, 2013
- 2 Williams, Karla, “Nurturing a Culture of Philanthropy,” Healthcare Philanthropy, July 14, 2012

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