

What's a board to do? | MajorGiftsMT.com

WE WANT THE BOARD to help Major Gifts development work. But what are they supposed to do? There is the slightly cynical observation ... the role of the Board is to “give, get or get off.” But there is a bit more to it than that. The Board creates the context for a Major Gifts development effort. Seeing as Major Gifts development is a strategic function, the Board must be involved at some level. In all things the Board of a non profit organization – whether it be a college, university, hospital or local humane society – is there to act on behalf of the community that is being served. We want the Board to be fully invested in everything their non profit does. If the non profit wishes to go to a community and solicit large gifts, the Board must give its blessing. In effect authorize it. And in so doing understand why these requests for large gifts are going to help the non profit better serve the community. Board members should be able to articulate the case both for the organization itself and for the Major Gifts effort. When the CEO, a staff member or non-board volunteer approaches a donor and asks for a large gift, this is being done in the name of the Board.

If one assumes that the Board is fully engaged as described above, it is not unreasonable to expect that Board members will be involved. Open doors when needed. Identify people who could be interested in the Major Gifts program. Endorse the efforts of the non profit both in program and fund development at every opportunity. Board members do have to give but not uniformly. Board financial support is in proportion to their capacity and unique circumstances. A non profit that launches any kind of Major Gifts effort – special gifts campaign, capital campaign, endowment campaign – must enjoy the financial support of the Board. They are the models. They should represent the very best response that can be expected from the community.

Here are some specific things the board can/should do:

1. Evaluate and affirm the case for the non profit they represent.
2. Evaluate and affirm the fund raising case.
3. Review the way in which the non profit represents itself to the community.
4. Ask the CEO to provide information on best practices.

5. If Moves Management is being employed as the system for advancing the relationship with the prospective donor, ask for information and training on the way in which this non profit is implementing it.
6. Review and affirm fund raising policies and procedures.
7. Look for opportunities to advocate for the non profit (presentation to service club).
8. Evaluate the list of individuals the non profit is considering for solicitation.
9. Help discover new names of persons who can be approached by participating in a peer review process.
10. Be prepared and willing to help the non profit with approaches to individuals whom the board member knows including persons they consider to be friends.
11. Participate in actual field development work usually by accompanying the CEO, a senior staff member, a fund raising volunteer or another Board member on a development call.
12. Cooperate fully with professionals advising leadership on the Major Gifts process (Board members acting outside the regular Board process are not acting on the Board's behalf but as a volunteer under the direction of the CEO and/or his/her staff).
13. Celebrate success and affirm the contributions of all involved.

Like all persons involved in the fund raising enterprise, it is important that Board members understand that no matter how they are helping, it is the non profit and its aspirations and vision for the future that is doing the asking. It is true that people give to people. But what they give goes to the non profit. If they say yes, they are saying yes to the non profit. If they say no, they are saying no to the non profit. In short, it's not about the person doing the asking. Either response by the prospective donor is acceptable because it is that person's philanthropy. The folks doing the asking are facilitators. Our job is to help people gain an understanding of the opportunity to have an impact in a special way. To give themselves, as donor, a little bit of immortality in a way that no business enterprise ever can. It doesn't take a named building to give this kind of experience to the donor. There are many things that motivate a gift. Among them is the belief that through their gift the donor is making a difference, changing lives, making the world a better place. Philanthropy makes that possible. Giving makes that possible. Asking makes that possible.

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