



Catalysts for Growth

By Tuti B. Scott with Jennifer Pope Baker

While working towards serving more people in need, there is usually a desire by an organization to be able to do more. What if we could give more grants, create more effective change in public policy, and/or deliver more frequent research data to a broader audience? There is probably not a nonprofit that has not asked these questions at least once in the past year and is saying this even more during this quarter. Recently at a Women's Funding Network training session of leaders in the movement, conversations arose around growing a fund and what factors are components that may be key to this growth that can be considered by funds of any focus or size.

In an informal session at a Women's Funding Network training workshop with both authors present, we came to the realization that simpatico factors had resulted in the significant growth of both our organizations, the Women's Sports Foundation and the Women's Fund of Central Indiana, over a five year period. While the Women's Sports Foundation is a sole entity in charge of raising all of its operating dollars and the Women's Fund of Central of Indiana is housed and supported within the structure of a community foundation, there are many similarities worth sharing.

The following is a summary of factors which may be helpful to review when considering how to address the next stage of growth and sustainability for an organization.

1. Board and Donor Leadership – Typically, in the founding or early stages of an organization, the Board may be comprised of people representing segments served by the fund or foundation. During these stages of the life cycle of the Women's Sports Foundation and the Women's Fund of Central Indiana, an outside consultant worked with the leadership to do an assessment and make recommendations for expanding leadership to reflect a focus on resource development rather than segment delivery. Key categories of new volunteer leaders who could offer the organization needed resource skill sets were: (1) such as experts (law, strategic planning, branding, finance, etc.), (2) connectors to financial stability (driven by the person's circles of influence), and (3) visible celebrities (credible names in business, politics, sports, art, etc). Within the existing structure of each Board, where ideally all members are actively bringing forth their time, talent and treasures to the organization, it was critical to have a numerical goal for each old and new representation category with an emphasis on the largest segment being connectors to financial stability.

A strong and respected Board Chair is critical to success during this process. A visionary, passionate person who can articulate the need for change and demonstrate her own giving publicly to the Board will provide critical leadership through the process. Prioritizing that each member make the fund one of their top three charities during their Board service with respect

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to giving and getting resources is important as well. Understanding the restructuring of the Board will take 3-5 years is important to acknowledge with a much needed core group of leaders in development and strategic planning being the most important first roles to fill.

A clear nominating process was defined to include multiple board members interviewing new prospects. During the interview, expectations and guidelines for service were clearly outlined and explained in an open exchange of values, roles, timing, and expectations. Written correspondence better defining the role of resource building was provided after the interviews. In addition, a year end self evaluation was implemented where each board member stated their own work and effectiveness. Within the context of building leadership, a continual focus on succession planning for key Board leadership positions is important. Encouraging a mentor / mentee relationship with new and veteran Board members as well as considering a formalized Chair elect and Past Chair position allows for transition of institutional knowledge and more.

Within this structure, the Board Chair and Chair of the Governance/Nominating Committee acted as the Captains of the Board team where they applauded and encouraged their teammates to serve at their highest capacity and identify expert, resource and celebrity peers. The Coaches, the Executive Director and Chief Development Staff member, offered ongoing additional feedback to the Captains. In addition, the organizations added public celebrations at which outstanding Board leaders and donors were honored in front of their peers.

In both case studies, Board leadership came from a steady group of donors who were continually asked to provide counsel or work on committees or events. Based on this performance and their courage to act on their passion for the mission, further conversation were held with prospects and Board members to urge their commitment to a potential 6 year term. The term of Board service for both organizations was three years with a maximum of two terms. Fully 90% of the Board members of each organization completed these maximum terms. Committee work was engaging and energizing and moved at a pace to restrain it from becoming bureaucratic.

Major donors to the funds were repeatedly asked to identify who they knew who would be a good connector and ambassador for the organization's cause. Who else would share their passion for the work? Fundraising was defined broadly as friend-raising and included a range of activities from calling donors to thank them for their gifts, hosting house parties or tables at events, reviewing lists, to writing letters of introduction. Each Board member played a role in some form of fundraising and was thanked often for their time and energy.

2. Brand Credibility – Expanding the bandwidth of who knows the organization and how its work and identity is publicly presented (branding) is key to the success of an organization at any stage. Within the scale of asking for substantial gifts, on and off line materials need to reflect

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the pride that the staff and volunteers feel and speak of the mission. A potential Board leader or donor leader will look first to their experience of the 'brand'. The range of this engagement includes the energy from the event they attend, the tone of the person answering the phone, what the web site invites them to do, to the stories in the annual report and their emotional impact on the new donor or member. The organization needs to exhibit great care, creativity and excellent communication skills at all of these interfaces with the public.

Another characteristic of the respective Boards of these two organizations was the willingness of members to share constructive criticism. Whenever there is any incongruent feeling or observation, a strong donor leader felt obligated and comfortable informing staff with their feedback. This exchange is critical for an organization's growth. Staff and Board need to value the input that donors provide, be brave enough to ask for it, and acknowledge and share this input as appropriate. The people who take the time to offer ideas and spend time reading and observing are often the best 'donor cabinet' members or Board members. They want to invest their time in an organization that reflects the qualities of excellence that they associate themselves and their businesses.

3. Substantiated and Consistent Case Statement - A story and understanding of shared values is key to any presentation to a donor that invites large gifts. If the donor does not value equity in the employment arena, a story of economic justice probably will not resonate. Understanding and having an array of stories to share is key to matching a donor's passions with the work you are doing. Personalizing the story with a setting and a person served provides an emotional connection to the work of the organization. Ideally, the experience to create is having a donor participate in a grant program as either an evaluator or site visit attendee or meets and speaks with people affected by their gift. Finally, a succinct presentation of facts to outline the case and the need for support is critical. Repeating these facts and showcasing the images and stories of the girls and women served in materials, events, and solicitations are keys to sustaining donations and upgrading gifts.

4. Staff Leadership and Investing in Talent - In both case studies, staff was supported by the Board leadership and management. Capacity building was discussed on an ongoing basis with key investments funded by Board members or donor leaders who agreed with the need for enhanced technology or more or better staff to continue to engage with and build the pipeline of supporters and leaders. There was a willingness to support programs and projects that were clearly defined as leadership building. For example, there was an internship program for 50 women per year and a year long leadership training program in philanthropy that were identified as priority projects. Staff retention was also identified as critical to organizational growth. Having a staff member with tenure of 10 or more years in a development position is incredibly effective as donors need time to build trust. Knowing and working with a consistent

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and predictable 'face' of the organization insures solid relationship building and a comfort level in the process of asking for and responding to requests for resources.

In summary, people invest in the business of change and hope. Providing a model and framework that represents your organization as a leader in business thinking and outcomes is important. Remembering that the bottom lines are the girls and women and social change work you are undertaking, is important for all members of the team- Board, staff and donors - to keep front of mind throughout the transformation and growth of your fund.

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