

Telling It Like It Is

If you're finding it harder than ever to raise money for your organization, you're not alone. Times are tough, and nonprofits everywhere are feeling the pinch.

The Philanthropic Giving Index (PGI), published by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, has fallen to unprecedented lows. According to Eugene Tempel, executive director of the Center, "Challenging times continue for nonprofit fundraisers in large part because of the poor economic circumstances affecting the country. Fundraisers are being hard pressed to diversify funding sources to support important initiatives and to be ever more efficient in the work they do."

OK, you knew that already. The question is, what can you do about it? In spite of this gloomy news, some nonprofits are doing well in these trying times. (We know – we've seen them!) What's their secret? In most cases, they're challenging themselves to return to basics – fundamentals of good development work that are easy to overlook in better times.

Here are five suggestions to help you make the most of your development program:

(1) Review your case for support.

A case for support is a prospectus for investment – it should make it clear why a donor should support your organization. Is yours compelling? Will it inspire donors to action? Is it up-to-date, reflecting your organization's current top priorities as outlined in your strategic plan? If not, you ought to strongly consider writing a new one. Organizations that can clearly articulate their case may find that these difficult times create a sense of urgency that may actually work to their advantage.

(2) Recommit to stewardship.

Are you taking care of those who take care of you: past and current donors and volunteers? Are you thanking and recognizing them in ways that are meaningful to

them? Many nonprofits spend a lot more time soliciting individuals than in providing good stewardship. If this describes your organization, rethink your priorities.

(3) Audit your development program to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and plan next steps.

Without a clear sense of what is working and what is not, it is difficult to plan for better results. If you don't have the time, resources or objectivity to conduct a thorough analysis of your program yourself, consider hiring counsel. Both the process and planning will prove invaluable.

(4) Know and celebrate your champions.

As they say, go for the low-hanging fruit! Reacquaint yourself with current and past donors, board members and volunteers. History tells us that these are your best future prospects. Don't forget former board members and volunteers who have helped grow and shape your organization.

(5) Focus on your major gift program.

In times like these when your budget is tight, plan to spend most of your time where the payback is greatest. *Giving USA 2003*, released in July by the AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy, cited a recent national study that found that the average amount raised per \$1 spent was \$24 for major gift programs, contrasted with \$10 for direct mail and \$3.20 for special events. Where would you rather spend *your* budget?

Today's tough times require digging deeper and thinking smarter, as you work hard to build genuine and meaningful relationships between individuals and your organization.

Your work is more important now than ever.

Capitalize on these tough times to better hone your messages and programs, making sure you focus on the BIG picture: mission and impact.

Did You Know?

As some of you may have heard, Susan Ahearn's husband was recently named to a new position in Seattle. While he has left Cincinnati to start his new job, Susan plans to stay here through 2003 while their younger daughter navigates her last year of high school.

Although we do not anticipate opening a Seattle office of TWA, Susan will continue to be affiliated with the firm after her move.

Be assured that the service and expertise you have come to appreciate from Talbot Wolf Ahearn will not change. We look forward to continuing to work with our many friends and colleagues in the Greater Cincinnati area and to continuing our strategic expansion into other regions as well.

Call us: 513-772-6887! We'd be delighted to help you grow your fundraising development program.

advancements

Welcome to the latest issue of *advancements*, the newsletter of Talbot Wolf Ahearn. In this issue, we address the harsh reality of raising money in tough times and offer suggestions for making the most of this opportunity to set your organization apart from the pack.

For more, please visit our website: www.talbotwolfahearn.com.

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