



Student Affairs Fundraising and External Relations Knowledge Community

SHAPING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS FUNDRAISING

Jason L. Meriwether

Vice Chancellor Enrollment Management & Student Affairs
Indiana University Southeast

Leadership



Fundraising is a means of effectively maintaining and implementing new student affairs services. External funds are necessary due to scarcity of resources, decreases in federal and state funding, rising student costs, and increased expectation for delivering outcomes (Arminio, Clinton, & Harpster, 2010; De Sawal & Maxwell, 2014; Miller, 2010; Morgan & Policello, 2010). Morgan and Policello (2010) explained, “Student affairs organizations must deal with the reality that if offering high-quality and innovative programs for students is a priority, then

identifying and soliciting outside funding sources is essential” (p. 9). Accordingly, this article offers tools to advance student affairs fundraising strategies.

Strategy and Training

Sargeant (2001) discussed two approaches to raise funds, first noting transactional approaches as a means to meet immediate organizational needs without a robust strategy. In contrast, the strategic approach is framed within the context of an organizational plan designed

to maintain donor relationships through long-term and sustained fundraising (Sargeant, 2001). To effectuate a lasting model, increase capacity to deliver programs, and improve service quality, student affairs fundraising requires more than one-time transactions. Preparing well-developed materials to demonstrate needs and delineate a measurable strategic plan is critical (Petty, 2008). For student affairs organizations, strategy-based fundraising is more apt to meet long-term needs and create lasting donor relationships.

Student affairs professionals and campus collaborators must therefore engage in substantive training. Arminio et al. (2010) advised all student affairs organizational members to participate in training. Advancement professionals can benefit from training that offers more familiarity with the value of student affairs services and clarity of student needs (Arminio et al., 2010). Including all stakeholders in training can help establish priorities and define roles within the fundraising process.

Preparing to Make the Ask

Before soliciting donations, professionals must undertake a rigorous assessment of student needs within the context of the university's mission and values, and the student affairs strategic plan. Miller (2010) postulated:

Those responsible must research the needs of students and of the division of student affairs and determine what new programs or program expansions, services for students, building or other capital projects, or educational initiatives might appeal to prospective donors. (p. 5)

Petty (2008) discussed donor interest in understanding the scope of programming and the measurable impact of their gifts. Student affairs professionals should anticipate donor needs by providing pertinent information such as student needs, program and service designs, methods to ask questions, and expected frequency of outcomes reporting. Such proactive communication can enhance donor relationships (Petty, 2008).

Collaboration with the university's advancement office is essential to gift prospecting. Such a partnership allows synchronized messaging and reduction of communication overlap (Arminio et al., 2010; Miller, 2010). By working in tandem with advancement colleagues, student affairs fundraisers can adequately prepare to mitigate challenges and provide sufficient information to meet donor expectations during cultivation and when requesting funds.

Restricting Gifts to Student Affairs

Since some gifts may be restricted for student affairs programs, Petty (2008) suggested reviewing conditions with stakeholders as "the organization's accounting/business operation will also need to ensure that funds are

treated as restricted and are accounted for separately from unrestricted and general operating funds" (p. 50). According to De Sawal and Maxwell (2014), foundation officers may place greater priority on other campus campaigns. Direct collaboration may prevent such a challenge. For example, the vice president for student affairs or appropriate designee should be involved in discussions about restricted gifts. Such involvement can help fundraisers mitigate challenges outside the division, such as foundation rules, business practices, or political factors that are retrograde to student affairs fundraising.

Pursuing Grant Writing

Securing grants is a viable resource in student affairs fundraising. However, professionals interested in grant writing may face early career limitations. Describing perceptions of grant writing among recent graduates and their supervisors, Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, and Molina (2009) found that "both parties saw this area as being unimportant to their current job" (p. 110). Still, there is value in pursuing grant writing to supplement reduced resources (Arminio et al., 2010; Cuyjet et al., 2009; De Sawal & Maxwell, 2014; Morgan & Policello, 2010). Seeking grant awards is also an opportunity for faculty collaboration. Arminio et al. (2010) suggested greater likelihood of securing funding through student affairs and academic affairs collaboration. Expounding on grant writing, Cuyjet et al. (2009) noted:

In the changing context of higher education, student affairs professionals are now expected, or soon will be expected, to seek grants for the purpose of funding campus programs, especially educational programs addressing campus issues, such as alcohol and drug abuse, sex education, and crime prevention, to name just a few areas. (p. 112)

Curate Future Donors in Current Students and Young Alumni

Arminio et al. (2010) explained that it is valuable "for students to be educated about their obligation to support the institution beyond their graduation and throughout their lifetime" (p. 40). De Sawal and Maxwell (2014) described value in engaging students by teaching direct and indirect giving models, which can yield alumni donors. Former members and leaders of student organizations or student employees are viable fundraising prospects as alumni (Morgan & Policello, 2010). De Sawal and Maxwell (2014) advised:

Keeping track of how former students were involved while they were attending the institution provides the initial connection in developing the donor relationship for a possible gift. Encouraging alumni to volunteer at events and programs is another way to engage and market future initiatives. (p. 49)

Gift Management and Gratitude

Proper stewardship of gifts can yield a positive and trust-filled relationship with donors (Pettey, 2008). Pettey (2008) described the need for a centralized filing system, information sharing, project implementation strategy, and communication plan with the donor or granting agency. Pettey (2008) postulated, “Regular reporting back to the contributors should be scheduled. This can take many forms, including phone calls, customized stewardship reports, and an annual donor report for all supporters” (p. 112).

Tangible expression of appreciation is valuable to sustaining fundraising relationships. Pettey (2008) explained the value of expressing donor gratitude, noting:

They deserve the right to be thanked, be it a post card, receipt, letter, telephone call, or email message. Being thanked is less about the form than the act itself. . . . How soon the donor receives it can make all the difference in building a respectful and trusting relationship for the future with each donor. (p. 20)

Conclusion

Fundraising in student affairs requires the same level of strategy and resource support as any other student service initiative. To make a meaningful and lasting impact, a fundraising model that is rooted in trust, transparency, and accountability can lead to success in yielding gifts and, most important, enhanced opportunities for student perpetuity.

References

- Arminio, J., Clinton, L. F., & Harpster, G. (2010). Fundraising for student affairs at comprehensive institutions. In T. E. Miller (Ed.), *Advancement work in student affairs: The challenges and strategies* [Special issue] (New Directions for Student Services, No. 130, pp. 31–45). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cuyjet, M.J., Longwell-Grice, R., & Molina, E. (2009). Perceptions of new student affairs professionals and their supervisors regarding the application of competencies learned in preparation programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(1), 104-119
- De Sawal, D. M., & Maxwell, D. (2014). Fundraising and philanthropy in college unions. In T. Yakaboski & D. M. De Sawal (Eds.), *The state of the college union: Contemporary issues and trends* [Special issue] (New Directions for Student Services, No. 145, pp. 49–55). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, T. E. (2010). The context for development work in student affairs. In T. E. Miller (Ed.), *Advancement work in student affairs: The challenges and strategies* [Special issue] (New Directions for Student Services, No. 130, pp. 3–8). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, M. F., & Policello, S. M. (2010). Getting started in student affairs development. In T. E. Miller (Ed.), *Advancement work in student affairs: The challenges and strategies* [Special issue] (New Directions for Student Services, No. 130, pp. 9–18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pettey, J. G. (2008). *Ethical fundraising: A guide for nonprofit boards and fundraisers*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Sargeant, A. (2001). Using donor lifetime value to inform fundraising strategy. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 12(1), 25–38.