# Client Board Members: A Good Idea or Another LSC Requirement?"

*By Julie Reiskin, Executive Director, Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, and Board Member, Legal Services Corporation*[1]

Let's face it — a board is one of those necessary evils — we have to have them to run a nonprofit organization. Any gathering of beleaguered nonprofit directors can easily degrade into a "board member horror story" contest. All of the "best practice" documents in the nonprofit arena talk about the various responsibilities a board member should have — everything from fiduciary oversight, to governance, to assuring that organization remain loyal to its mission. Can a group of volunteer board members actually accomplish these goals? Can they do it without driving a good executive director to drink? Can this work even if some government regulation requires you have "clients" on the board? The answer is yes — but only if you have the right board members. In fact, one cannot have the "right" board members if none of them represent the people you serve.

Many War on Poverty programs and subsequent federally funded programs that aim at mitigating historic oppression have a requirement to have intended beneficiaries on the board. Independent Living Centers, organizations that have been funded to help to people with disabilities avoid institutions and integrate into the community are required by federal regulation to have 51% of the board comprised of people with disabilities. Federal regulations also require the boards to have financial expertise — interesting when dealing with the poorest demographic in the country. Most domestic violence services organizations were originally set up by survivors of domestic abuse, the same with sexual assault crisis services. Substance abuse treatment has long used a peer model — Alcoholics Anonymous is the most famous model, a program that does not use formal organizations or paid service providers but is predicated on the alcoholic being the only one that can help another alcoholic. Of course, a self help program for alcoholics is not the same as the provision of high quality legal services — the point is the model of constituent or client-led services is nothing new. Federally qualified health centers (FQHC), another war on poverty program, has the same requirement that their board has 51% clients (or patients). Because of the way this has been implemented the FQHCs have enjoyed immense popularity.[2] These clinics even have rate protections and have special rate formulas.[3]

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These clinics which are all over the place have always had board members that truly represent the community. This means there is no low income or medically underserved community that does not have a group of citizens that have a sworn duty of loyalty, care and obedience to the mission of their local federally qualified health center. This includes patients that benefit, as well as a host of other community leaders. The community leaders learn from the low income patients and vice versa. Together they unite in a mission to provide quality health care for the underserved of their respective communities. They all bring different things to the board. The banker may know his or her way around the balance sheet, but the client representative can talk about how to encourage clients to come in for primary care (as opposed to using the emergency room). The common bond of the center keeps them

all working together. It is not a Democratic or Republican issue — it is a community issue. You will be hard pressed to find a member of Congress that has not toured their local FQHC. They cut ribbons when there are new buildings — but they will not tolerate cutting funding because the Congresspeople see these centers as essential parts of their communities and essential components of a health care system.

This is my dream for legal services organizations and it starts with your boards. In addition to fiduciary duties, oversight of the mission and strategic plan and even the evaluation of us executive directors, our boards have a super important role — when we support them to carry it out. They are our ambassadors in the community.

While a bad board can do much worse than give their executive director a migraine, a good board can help an ED achieve his or her goals, and propel the organization to their next step in the growth cycle.[4] A good board really is an essential building block for any nonprofit. The real magic happens when there is a diverse board with members that really want to be there, who are invested in the organization, willing and able to form a true partnership with the ED. In order to keep our eyes on the prize and stay focused on the mission, a significant part of this body must include the intended beneficiaries.

So — how do you go about getting the right client board members, keeping them and helping them fulfill their potential for the benefit of the organization, and the whole movement for access to justice?

For any board member you need someone with the right fit. Just as you (hopefully) do for hiring, you should figure out:

- what characteristics do your highest performing board members possess (even the ones in your fantasies)?
- what characteristics do your lowest performing (or most irritating) board members possess?

Then you identify each and create the profile(s) and characteristics of the board members you need. All boards should have diversity! This means diversity in the traditional sense of race, class, gender, orientation, but also diversity of skill, opinion, and background. Clients have skills, opinions and backgrounds you will not find elsewhere.

OK — onto the steps: Over a couple decades of running a constituent-led nonprofit and helping other nonprofits involve clients in a real and meaningful way, I have discovered the following steps help. Progress — not perfection — is required, so do not despair if you feel you cannot implement everything immediately.

1. Find the right clients. Sitting on a board is not for everyone. You do not want clients on the board that will just sit there and not say anything — and you do not want someone that will say yes just because that is what you want to hear — then not show up. You do not want someone with a negative agenda but you might want someone that cares enough to fill out a survey — that cares enough to tell you what is not working especially if they give a suggestion for improvement. There are places beyond your legal aid organization where you can find good client board members, including but not limited to:
    a. Other war on poverty organizations — the local FQHC may have a board member terming off.
    b. Other civil rights organizations — check out your local disability organizations because the disability community is used to the concept of client board members.
    c. Veteran organizations — they too are used to being on boards of veteran organizations.
    d. Domestic violence programs.
    e. Foundations may even help; increasingly they are now asking the question of grantees and expecting client engagement. They can recommend committee members and may have grantees that can help you do this. A local foundation in Colorado has actually recruited a group of us to act as consultants for their other grantees that want to increase their client/resident engagement. They pay for our time as necessary technical assistance. This may be happening in other parts of the country.

2. Onboarding is as important for a new board member as it is for a new staff member. Take the time to go over the history of the organization, make sure the new board member understands the culture, the values and the current plan. This does not mean you expect a new board member to not question anything — but it does mean that they need to know to what mission they are promising a duty of loyalty to. Make sure that they are given essential documents and helped to understand their importance if this is their first board. Pair them up with a buddy. Essential

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documents must include:
   a. Recent reports
   b. Past minutes
   c. Budget and financials
   d. 990 (and always give this reference so new board members can understand the importance of this document)
   e. Strategic plan
   f. Organizational brochures
   g. A grant application and report

3. Due diligence — someone should never be plunked onto a board. We have a tradition at our organization where the board chair and director have a lunch with every prospective board member. We get to know him or her — and the potential member gets to know us. Then they watch a board meeting to see if this is really what they want.

4. The board chair needs to help — when someone joins a board they often do not know the others. People with privilege who are used to being on boards, used to being visible will be more comfortable speaking up, introducing themselves, etc., than those who are more used to being invisible. Nothing turns off a new board member like not knowing anyone's name or what is going on. A board chair that values client involvement is really important.

5. Training: Clients may need some additional training. This might include:
   a. Roberts Rules (if you use this in your meeting)
   b. Reading a budget, balance sheet, P&L, etc.
   c. Regulations that govern what you do if relevant.
   d. Overview on nonprofits and what is a 990 (The IRS actually has some good training materials as does BoardSource)
   e. Role of board members (as opposed to staff)

…a good board can help an ED achieve his or her goals, and propel the organization to their next step in the growth cycle

6. Board orientation — just do it. I know this is one of those things that is easy for a busy ED to put off (and off and off and off) but it is really worth the investment. Trust me…it is more time in the long run when we do not put the time into it. This is a good time for you to get a sense of how the new or potential board member communicates so you can be effective. This is not advice only for client board members, but for all board members. A good orientation should cover what programs you operate, eligibility requirements, organizational history, organizational culture, review of current strategic plan, and all organizational policies, including by-laws.

7. Retention: A few easy tips to retain board members, including client board members — again easier said than done but can be done with discipline, and a good calendar system:
   a. Make sure you do introductions at each meeting or have name plates.
   b. Send material a week ahead of time — and do not assume all members will come with their electronic packet on their tablets.
   c. Acronym free zone (challenge for me).
   d. Outline what is a decision item versus FYI. New board members sometimes think everything needs approval. Also, boards differ, some do approve financial reports, and others just approve the budget and receive financials.
   e. If you are a Legal Services Corporation-funded board and have a mandatory 2/3 bar members and 1/3 client members, set up a process where people can be mentored. It does not have to be formal, it could involve pairing people up to work on a project together.
   f. Use the board members — all of them, but do not feel like you have to make up stuff to do. If a board member is not doing much in an assignment, try switching things around.
      i. Client board members often shine at special events. Give them small speaking roles. They often have event

planning experience. They may also have connections to unique local vendors that often provide better quality at a lower price — the development director's dream volunteer.

ii. They also are often great at being a representative of your organization on other organization boards and committees (if the work is more appropriate for a board member than a staff member). Client board members can be your networking arm particularly with:
    1. Foundation events
    2. Foundation site visits
    3. Conferences and trainings where your visibility is important (and those where they can learn more about your work)
    4. Open houses of other organizations.
    5. Coalition meetings where your organization may be a coalition partner.

iii. Client board members should be used to help with satisfaction surveys. They can help design the questions, test the survey, call former clients, and even administer surveys.

g. Check in regularly. We should do this with all of our board members. We do the obligatory survey and we should do that level of evaluation. However we should also check in with each board member at least once a year to ask how it is going — to make sure you are meeting their need for information, and to get their perception of the efficacy of the board and the organization. If they have feedback it really will work so much better if you can listen, without being defensive. (You can feel defensive if you want… just do not show it and get over it sooner rather than later).

I know all of this is easier said than done. None of us (or at least no one I know) does this perfectly all of the time. But if we aim to engage in these best practices, they become increasingly ingrained in how we work with our boards. Boards are not the only place where clients can help but as the governing body it is the most important, and should be the first place to start. While integrating a new element of diversity into any group is never easy...it is absolutely worth it in terms of the long term health of your organization.

1 Julie Reiskin is the only non-attorney member of the Legal Services Corporation Board, and is the Executive Director of the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition — an organization with an absolutely amazing Board of Directors!!! Julie may be reached at *jreiskin@ccdconline.org.*

2 http://www.saveourchcs.org/client/FY15-16%20Federal%20Investment-%20Infographic.pdf

3 http://nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PPS-One-Pager-2016.pdf

4 http://sustainablenonprofits.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Nonprofit-Life-Cycle-Stages.pdf

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# Building Individual Giving Through Donor Modeling

*By Lisa R. Verges, Development Director*[1]
*Community Legal Services of Philadelphia*

Whether your individual giving program is just beginning or is developing toward maturity, you can use information you already have to find your most promising prospects and build your base of individual donors, thereby improving long-term revenue growth and stability. Learn how to create your unique, dynamic donor model so you can shift your individual giving into higher gear. Based on the people who care the most about your organization, you can identify characteristics of your most likely future donors, which will help you to search for them in a focused way.

*Note*: To create donor models, you need a fundraising database or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. It doesn't need to be expensive or complicated. If you don't have one yet, check with organizations similar to yours for recommendations on this critical element of infrastructure.

## What Is a Donor Model?

A donor model is the array of characteristics shared by your most loyal and generous donors, the people you want to replicate. You can use your donor model in prospect identification and rating (I&R) sessions, where your core staff and volunteer leadership determine whom your available solicitors could ask for gifts, and how best to be successful. (There is plentiful information about how to conduct these sessions if you search those terms.) Participating in I&R sessions also engages people who love your organization, deepening your relationship with them. Your donor model is unique to your organization and it will show your I&R team that the next group of donors you could secure will be people who are more or less like them, as opposed to being unattainable, high-profile people (there's always someone who suggests soliciting someone like Bill Gates or Bruce Springsteen). Your donor model is like a picture on a puzzle box lid, showing you what you are trying to build.

## Fundraising Challenges in Legal Aid

In legal aid, you may face certain challenges to identifying qualified prospects. First, your board may not fundraise much, or at all, if that was not expected of them when they joined. Second, you may not have fundraising staff, so development will be someone's (your?) major extra duty. Finally, awareness of legal services is low outside the legal community, so most prospects are attorneys because they are the ones who know your work. Given these limits, building an individual giving program must include carving out board and staff effort to support fundraising and, equally as important, effective communication about your work, starting with the people closest to you and working outward through your donors' networks.

### *Definition of an Individual Donor*

In this illustration, an *individual* is someone who has control over a giving decision, whether that gift comes from a law firm, business, family foundation, donor advised fund, or personal account. All of those gifts flow from personal relationships, so you can use the same techniques to solicit all of them. Here are some tips, tailored for legal services, for using your limited resources strategically.

### *Why Do People Give to Legal Aid?*

In my experience, the strongest legal services donors have both a personal experience with the mission (e.g., former staff, intern, pro bono or co-counsel), and a current relationship with a staff member or volunteer leader whom they admire. People must understand your work before supporting it. Reaching outside your circle requires sustained communications with prospect populations before legal aid can be

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offered as a natural charitable cause. Lawyers are markedly more skeptical than most other people,[2] so expect to invest significantly in making your prospects familiar and comfortable with your work. You can use educational events, social media, email, and print to move people up this curve as a long-term strategy, but for the short term, count on one-on-one personal networking by board, key staff, and engaged donors.

### *Growing Your Donor Base*

Your donor base grows when you acquire more givers than you lose through attrition. It takes more effort and expense to acquire new donors than to renew those who have given in the last couple of years, so make sure you are doing everything you reasonably can do to move your retention number up as high as possible. Increasing your number of annual donors gives you more revenue from smaller gifts and increases your chances of raising some significant gifts as a subset of those more modest donors responds to upgrade requests. If you have some regular annual donors, use your data to assess your donor retention rate and create a donor model.

### *Retaining Donors*

It is important to know how many donors you keep — and lose — every year, so you know how many new donors you have to find in order to maintain or grow. Research shows that the average nonprofit loses 81% of donors after their first gifts, and the probability of a donor making five consecutive gifts is only 10–15%.[3] Retention figures can be disappointing to face, but can help you to make a case for investing in communications that keep donors coming back, rather than emphasizing chasing new donors.

To find your retention rate, analyze activity over twenty-four months. Select everyone you define as an individual donor giving in the first twelve-month period, such as calendar 2015, and determine how many of them gave again in the ensuing year. Divide the Year 2 total by the Year 1 donor count: this is your retention rate, a primary indicator of the health of your individual giving program. The average nonprofit donor retention rate is about 40%,[4] so if you had 100 donors in 2015, you ought to see at least forty of them return in 2016. Carry this rate forward just four more years and your original 100 donors will be down to just three — so, finding more donors is always part of your development activity. If you could increase your donor retention to 50%, over the same five years you would receive about thirty more gifts from the same 100 donors. Determining the right communications to keep donors in the fold is to your advantage. I have observed that a mature legal services program can retain about 60% of its annual donors.

## Creating Your Donor Model

One of my guiding principles in fundraising is that your next donor is going to look more similar to, rather than different from, your last donor. Knowing the common traits among your core supporters will tell you what kind of people you are seeking as prospects.

Form your model using your best donors so you can find more people who are like them. The following suggestions are flexible and you may decide to adjust them based on patterns that you observe when you start working with the data. I believe that there is an organic element to this process and it helps to be open to what emerges rather than using a set checklist. Let your data speak to you. I like to look at the data from a variety of angles to get a feel for the group's commonalities.

### *Selecting Your Most Loyal Donors*

To find your best donors, begin with everyone you consider to be an individual donor. Set aside staff member giving to avoid skewing your model; they have a different motivation to give. Next, select people with strong giving frequency, e.g., those who have given in three of the last five years. This loyalty test filters out tribute gifts; people whose first gift is in someone's memory, or in honor of a special occasion, almost never give again. Don't invest much in trying to retain those donors unless they have a solid connection to you.

### *Understanding Your Base*

**Connection**: How are your best donors related to your organization? If you can identify what ties them to you, look for your next donors in that same group. Did they work or volunteer for you? If this information is in people's heads but not in your database, capture it using codes on the donor records so you can query it going forward.

**Constituency**: Is virtually every donor an attorney? If not, that's interesting, and promising — who else is in the mix? Are they past non-lawyer staff? Friends and family of staff? Vendors? If the donors are all attorneys, the advantage is that your acquisition messaging

can be tailored just for people in the legal community. If the base is more diverse, the advantage is that you have more places to look for donors.

**Age range**: How old are they? You may not have many birth dates recorded, but college graduation years are a sound proxy for being about 22 years old and it is easy data to obtain for attorneys through their firm bios or LinkedIn. Track this in your database if you are not doing so already; every time you are looking at profiles, add college and law school names and class years to their records. This will help you to find connections when it is time for a personal solicitation. Age will guide you about who their peers are, and also tell you where you want to begin to grow. If you find a tight band of ages, look for a reason. Are all your leading donors the friends of a charismatic leader of your organization? If so, you are exposed for sharp falloff when the leader departs (either from the organization or this earth). Protect yourself by finding one or more solicitors who can join that strong leader and secure donors of other ages. If your donor age range is not especially tight, your next step is to identify the youngest age where you begin to see a critical mass of donors. Seek donors who are a few years younger; if most of your best donors are, say, 55–75, target people in their early fifties; you could spread your resources too thin trying to reach and convert people who are 25–55 years old. Work your way incrementally toward younger ages until you meet diminishing returns on your efforts.

**Giving behavior**: What is your best donors' typical pattern of giving? Look at amount of first gift, frequency of giving, number of gifts on record, peak activity, and time between first and most recent gift. This will guide you about appropriate amounts to request for acquisition solicitations, how long you can expect to keep your donors, and when and how often you might send appeals. If your donors cluster at year-end, plan on a series of appeals in the fall to make the most of this preference. If there is no set season for giving, try two appeal series in the spring and fall. In my experience, a series of requests a few weeks apart will be well worth the effort; soliciting just once a year does not give donors enough reminders to give, and will permit an unnecessarily high rate of attrition to occur.

**Balance of the sexes**: Do you have a fairly even ratio of male and female donors? If your legal community is well balanced between men and women but your donor base is not, look into your communications, and consider how you want to build your list going forward in order to involve people your organization may have overlooked.

**Geography**: Where do your donors live? Identify the most likely home ZIP codes so you understand where your best donors are circulating. When you conduct your prospect identification sessions, these are the neighbors your donors might identify and be able to reach through their personal networks. Consider these communities for prospecting events hosted by your most connected Board members and donors.

You may discover other ways you want to view your data after you manipulate it for a while. Note the patterns you see. Plan to refresh your model periodically, and observe whether those patterns have changed.

Make sure that your database can capture the important data points in code tables, because you will rely on them as you add prospects and donors.

After you have worked with your donor model and are ready to describe the profile of your best donors, and before conducting an I&R session, gather a small group of key board and staff members for a conversation. Share the names of the core donors and ask the group to identify and articulate the values they think these donors share with your mission. You may be aware of those values, but listen to how your volunteer leaders articulate them. This can give you a messaging advantage so that you are positioning your organization's mission using the language that resonates best with your donors and prospects.

Now that you have your list of best donors, a profile description of your next donors, and some organic language to describe their motivation to give, you are ready to conduct your I&R session. When your I&R team learns who is already supporting you, they can focus on replicating those donors by tapping their personal networks of communication.

## Finding Your First Donors: Start-Up Tips

If you are just beginning, build a bare-bones model using data from any individuals giving to your organization, for any reason. What are their relationships to you, and what actions stimulated those gifts? This is your beginning donor model. Your next step is to start working with your board as you advance a culture of philanthropy in your organization.

### *Begin with the Board*

Any donors you have serve as an example — an inspiration — for your board to begin to personally give and get. Before you can effectively secure donors from beyond the board, the board members must become donors. The amounts are not important when you are starting out, but participation is: seek a goal

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of 100%. Give the group time to reach that mark; it is unlikely to happen in the first year if members were elected with no stated expectation that they would give. Developing a fundraising board is a long-term project that is at the heart of creating an organizational culture of philanthropy. Have your board president ask the donors on the board to meet one-on-one with members who have not yet given, and ask for their support. After those gifts come in, use that data and go through the donor model process outlined above. Your donor model will be based on your board donors.

### *Successful Solicitors*

Bear in mind that the people who care most passionately about the organization are in the best position to connect face-to-face with prospective donors. If you are fundraising staff, you can effectively organize and analyze donors, support and coordinate the development of prospects, and educate and prepare your board and executive director to solicit. In the end, board members and executive directors are the most influential solicitors.

1 Lisa Verges joined Community Legal Services as Director of Development in 2012. She entered the nonprofit fundraising world as a college student over thirty years ago and never left. A graduate of University of Virginia, Lisa has centered her work around individual giving and board development; in addition to legal services, she has held fundraising roles in health care, higher education, and youth organizations, primarily in the Philadelphia area. Lisa may be reached at *lverges@clsphila.org.*

2 "Herding Cats: The Lawyer Personality Revealed," Dr. Larry Hildebrand. 2014 National MIE Fundraising Conference: Fill Your Development Toolbox handout.

3 AFP Fundraising Effectiveness Project, http://afpfep.org/

4 Bloomerang, "A Guide to Donor Retention," https://bloomerang.co/retention


# It's More Than Just the Numbers: Creating a Robust Resource Development Plan

*By Jennifer K. Pelton,[1] CFRE, Public Justice Center, Inc., and Linda K. Beeman,[2] MBA, GPC, Aurora Grants and Consulting*

The development plan is a crucial tool that helps staff and board members channel energy and resources to both diversify income sources and feed external communications. It is most successful when tied to the specific organization's strategic and programmatic goals, tailored to fit available skill sets and resources, and in alignment with the overall mission. In short, one size does not fit all.


*Jennifer K. Pelton* (L)*; Linda K. Beeman* (R).

The planning process should be a collaborative effort involving professional fundraising staff, executive leadership and governing board members. If a volunteer fundraising committee exists, input from its members is also helpful.

Any plan for generating revenue should be considered as carefully as how that revenue will be spent. It is good practice to simultaneously create and adopt both the organization's annual budget and its development plan.

Development plans are meant to be dynamic. Progress toward goals is evaluated and adjusted throughout the fundraising cycle. If something falls short, there are options for recovery. A good plan has structure but also the flexibility to absorb opportunities that present themselves.

The following twenty-one points were conceived to guide organizations through the process of creating a development plan. The first seven points are designed to match your organization's capacity and philanthropic culture with its vision. The next seven points are guidelines for choosing specific methods and considering what resources are actually available. The final seven points are designed to measure progress and plan next steps.

These questions might not be prioritized here in an order that follows your agency's planning process, therefore they have been organized into three distinct and interchangeable sections. Our attempt is to offer an approach that can be customized to fit each planning group's specific mission and organizational culture. Use them as guiding principles therefore, rather than gospel truths.

## Section One: Matching the Organization's Capacity and Philanthropic Culture to its Vision

In this section, the planning group is urged to first consider the environments in which the activities will occur, both external and internal. Excellent results are possible when action is grounded in a healthy philanthropic culture and activities are matched to the capacity of the people charged with raising funds.

### *1. What are our fundraising expectations and are they reasonable?*

Start with what you know and where your organization currently stands. Are you fundraising for the entire budget or just a portion of it? Where are funds coming from now?

Reputation matters, and it can affect your fundraising expectations. How is your organization positioned within the larger community, and how it is viewed (or not) by other providers, donors, current or potential clients? Are you known for exceptional service? An organization with an excellent reputation might benefit from "outside" endorsements from better known ally organizations or community leaders. Donors who are pleased with how you use their contributions are more likely to spread the word. Satisfied clients also make

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excellent spokespeople.

Alternatively, is your organization the "best kept secret in town?" If so, then your goal of attracting new support will rely first on your ability to expand awareness and demonstrate capability.

Think carefully about your organization's long-range goals. Are you planning to continue doing what you have always done, making minor tweaks to improve delivery of services? Or is your goal to be at the cutting edge, fostering innovation? What does the greater community need your organization to be, and how might you rise to the occasion? Although these are questions for leadership to explore during the strategic visioning stage, for the purpose of drafting a development plan it helps to understand where the organization fits now and where it might be heading. Development is not just about asking for money; it is about being in dialogue with donors. Knowing the desired arc of your organization might give you something interesting to include as you craft campaigns, write newsletter stories, and talk with those in a position to help.

*2. What is our organization's philanthropic culture?*

The organization that sees its donors as partners in the work it does is a step ahead of those that treat donor contributions as mere transactions. Consider how your organization engages with donors.

At a basic minimum, we suggest that you commit to welcoming every donor as being invaluable to the organization's mission, regardless of gift size. If you can achieve this, the donor loyalty you foster will likely reduce that dreaded attrition rate. You might also decide that donors who make gifts of a certain size ought to receive extra attention.

At the Public Justice Center, one aspect of philanthropic culture we are interested in understanding is how to expand sources of support that are appropriate to our geographic reach and mission. As a legal advocacy group combatting injustice on behalf of people living in poverty, the majority of those we serve are people of color. Over the past fifteen years, although we have deliberately expanded our development strategies to attract donors outside of elite foundations and the legal profession, the majority of our donors are still white. We are looking at our program strategies through the lens of race equity and, at the same time, thinking about how to garner support from a broader community that includes people of color and from a wider economic range. Additionally, we are striving to attract donors from multiple generations and geographic locations. We believe that the diversity of our donors makes us stronger and more capable of achieving — and reflecting — our mission.

*3. Is our development staff equipped to succeed?*

One of the most basic considerations of any plan is whether those assigned to execute it have the tools they need to be successful. First, determine which staff members are on the team. Do they have jobs that are reasonably apportioned or are they expected to perform miracles of the "loaves and fishes" sort? Also, are staff resources sufficient to support an expanded number of donors or gifts received? Increased gifts will certainly help the organization advance its mission. However, if the team is not equipped to record, track and steward those donations, success might be short-lived if donors end up redirecting their giving to other agencies where they feel more appreciated.

The executive director is responsible for the organization's financial health, and is often the best ambassador for its mission. Is your executive director accessible to donors, or is she tied to a desk, responsible for endless grant reports and administrative tasks? Can you reassign those tasks so the executive director has time to cultivate better relations with donors and partners?

Staff opportunities for advanced learning and skill-building should be built into the plan. While trial-by-fire experiences may sometimes be necessary, the organization is better served when its fundraisers, executive director included, learn best practices through workshops and peer interaction.

Finally, a word about restricted access to donors. Although sometimes there might be good reason for only one person being allowed to talk to "their" donors, we recommend that this be the exception rather than the rule. The risk you run by doing this is having donations disappear when the contact person leaves the board or job role. As stewards of the mission, our job is to inspire donors to connect to the organization, not to individual personalities.

*4. Is our board equipped to succeed?*

The same considerations apply to volunteer fundraisers as to staff. Are your volunteer solicitors adequately briefed and oriented on their fundraising role when recruited? Since we rely on their help to meet our goals, consider how to best support them.

Does your organization invest in their success at raising money by supplying coordinators for committees, periodic refresher courses, adequate donor information and opportunities to practice their approach? Plan to track board member attendance and participation at meetings as well as recruitment/engagement of others, and to take appropriate action in order to prevent your board from growing "stale." Most importantly, encourage all of your board members to first be donors themselves. It is much easier to invite others to support a cause once a personal commitment has been made.

*5. Do our fundraising goals tie in to our organization's strategic plan and/or our program area's annual work plan?*

Effective fundraising plans are designed to help teams raise the money necessary to carry out the work of their organizations. Our "tier one" goal is to raise the money required to accomplish our basic program objectives. Our "tier two" or "stretch" goal gives us an opportunity to build a cushion, serve more clients, or otherwise achieve more than the basics. We like to incorporate these aspirations into our development plans.

The planning team will also need to consider what happens if goals are not met. Is the plan flexible enough to fill shortfalls by creating new opportunities? For example, if an event fails to generate the revenue budgeted, could the team mobilize around face-to-face donor solicitations?

*6. Will we spend money to raise money?*

It takes money to raise money. The planning team can build the perfect work plan ripe with lots of good ideas; but if the organization fails to allocate enough money to underwrite the prescribed efforts, the plan might fail before it launches. Make sure all activities have the necessary budgets allocated to them.

*7. What is the role of program staff and consumers in fundraising?*

The development plan includes roles for the people who deliver programs, as well as those who benefit from them. Each group has a unique perspective of the organization and has stories to tell that donors would appreciate. How will you invite these people to participate?

Do program staff members know that it is part of their work to help gather stories or report on victories won? Have you explained to them the value of their participation? Plan to "connect the dots" for staff and clients by reporting back on gifts resulting from their efforts.

**Section Two: Creating the Plan and Understanding What Resources We Have and Need**

If we understand the environment in which we are operating, we can construct the road we want to travel.

*8. What vehicles (strategies, methods) will we use to attract funds?*

Direct mail, special events, bequest campaigns, appeals to specific professional groups and so forth: each of these is a vehicle for encouraging gifts to support the mission. If your organization is new to fundraising, what might you realistically be equipped to manage? If your organization has been raising money for years, consider which methods worked well in previous years. Is it worthwhile to replicate a previously successful strategy? Also, consider whether the strategies you choose are in line with your organization's mission and the values you hold dear.

Some methods are effective year after year. Others need more time in between, because they require effort that outstrips your normal capacity.

Think too about which vehicles are appropriate for your mission. A wine tasting happy hour sends the wrong message if its purpose is to raise funds for an addiction recovery program. This is where a thoughtful discussion and even a gift acceptance policy can be helpful to planners.

*9. What supplemental activities could support or enhance our current fundraising strategies?*

Given the cyclical nature of fundraising, it is important to avoid the boring repetition of doing things the same way every time. Even with something that is working well, consider where experimentation is possible. Experiment with online giving: layer a new social media strategy over a typically successful year-end appeal to try out new messaging and timing. Expand the visibility of your mission: invite event attendees to take outreach materials to their doctor's office, church, or workplace. Boost your major gifts efforts: hand write an appeal note and mail it to your top twenty donors, along with the latest news article published about your organization.

*10. How will we lay out the work over a specific timeline?*

Frame the work across your fiscal year or business cycle. Are there points in the year that your

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organization needs more cash flow than others? Do you have to work around constraints such as workplace giving campaign blackout periods, or key personnel commitments such as an upcoming trial or planned parental leave?

Does your organization have any interesting opportunities on which to build new development efforts? Last fall, the Public Justice Center collaborated with the Homeless Persons Representation Project to host Matthew Desmond to speak about his new book *Evicted*. This helped us feature the housing crisis, our partnership, and the local work that is being done couched in the context of a book getting national attention.

*11. Have we built benchmarks into our timeline?*

Dynamic development plans require regular check points. When we measure cumulative progress, we have a better sense of what is working and what is not. This allows us to employ contingency plans if we need a mid-cycle correction or extra boost. Quantifiable data are helpful, but so are regular narrative notes that help qualify the effectiveness of your work.

*12. Who is assigned to do what?*

A truly effective development plan has a role for paid staff, board, volunteers and others to lend a hand. Note who will do what and pay close attention to how tasks are disbursed, making sure that each participant can handle the workload. Incorporate methods to ensure that people are clear on what they are expected to accomplish such as trainings or practice sessions for solicitors. If you are launching a new initiative or planning a major event, consider whether you have enough in-house staff or need to engage a consultant.

*13. What is the state of our donor list?*

Does your organization have a donor database? Is the data clean and current? Do you have the expertise to use this data well? If you answer yes to all of these, you could segment a direct mail appeal or target invitations for a small event in a particular zip code. You might have the information you need to "step up" major gift solicitations.

On the other hand, if your data are not trustworthy, then you probably need to keep things very simple. It is time to prioritize data management in the development plan.

Having clean data means more than just getting salutations and addresses right on letters to donors, although this is extremely important. Good data can also provide valuable information as you seek to deepen your engagement with donors.

*14. What other resources do we need in order to be successful?*

Your development plan should incorporate the funds needed to implement the strategies. Can you afford to try a new campaign or do you need to reduce expenses based on poor returns from the last one?

In addition to good data and volunteers equipped to succeed, necessary resources might also include strong mission-connected stories that you can tell to inspire and engage. If you dream about "someday" having a story bank, incorporate time to gather stories into the development plan.

## Section Three: Measuring Progress and Planning Next Steps

Your aim is to create a dynamic *and useful* development plan. Measuring progress not only helps demonstrate the importance of investing resources in development efforts today, but it also helps you make well-founded decisions for future development efforts.

*15. What are the tangible quantitative goals (basic and advanced) we want to measure? And what are the industry standards for an organization of our age, size and/or type?*

There are certainly basic data points to track: how many donors did we have at the start and how many do we have at the end? How many dollars did we raise? Did we have any press coverage?

Another number that we find interesting: how many clients did our organization serve because of the funds we raised? Did we move the needle?

As your development efforts become more sophisticated, and only if your data are up to snuff, you might begin to measure trends such as lapsed versus recaptured donors, upgraded or downgraded gifts or frequency of giving.

This is the nerdy side of fundraising and some of us can get lost in the data. Avoid the temptation to analyze until the cows come home. Focus instead on acquiring the information necessary to help make informed choices for building a robust development program.

*16. What are the qualitative benefits of our success/ progress?*

How do you explain the qualitative results of your efforts? This discussion can be as helpful as whether a specific program area is living up to expectations or needs to be adjusted. Are your volunteers or board members more engaged and participating in the fundraising efforts? Do more people know about your work? Did you help donors deepen their understanding of the importance of your work? Is your reputation improving?

Also consider the morale and/or burnout of staff and board. A good development plan, implemented by engaged people who are well-equipped, should reduce burnout and boost morale. This is a notable measurement given the high rates of staff turnover in nonprofit organizations, especially for fundraisers.

*17. Do we have a method for measuring progress/ benchmarks on a regular basis so we can adjust our plan as needed?*

If you don't achieve a certain result but some other good came from the effort, you might decide to try it again next year if you truly understand the "why." You also need to understand why one strategy falls short and another soars beyond expectations. When plans are designed around benchmarks or guideposts, strategies can be tweaked as needed. Measurements also help us understand whether experiments with new ideas are worthwhile or not. Lastly, we think it is good practice to measure as you go.

*18. Did we meet our goals?*

At the end of the day, the purpose is to attract the resources necessary to fulfill the organization's mission. Did you meet your minimum "must raise" goals? Also consider how you might better stretch your capacity to meet or exceed those goals the next time around.

If a campaign fell short, why? Be honest and look at all sides.

*19. How have we laid the building blocks for future efforts (subsequent plans)?*

Every plan can build on the success of the previous one. Consider how people were able to improve the way they talk about the mission, attract new support, and/ or try out new skills. As they became more confident, did the organization's capacity to attract and sustain funds improve? What other building blocks did you lay for future success? Now, how do you sustain this momentum?

*20. How did this development plan help the organization advance toward its strategic goals?*

Beyond the basics of raising necessary funds to implement your mission, consider how the work of the development plan advanced other strategic goals of the organization. If fundraising efforts exceeded expectations, did you increase the number of clients served? Did the mission brand get a boost with the launch of a new website? Did a strategic social media campaign result in more people becoming aware of issues that concern your organization?

*21. How did we grow the sustainability of the organization?*

Development planning goes beyond an organization's single fundraising cycle. At the Public Justice Center, our development team thinks about these questions: Did our efforts mirror our values? Did we contribute to the local/regional/national/international dialogue about justice? How did our success this year create opportunities for next year?

As we said at the outset, these are guidelines. Perhaps some of the questions are helpful and others ask for answers your organization is not yet ready to provide. Bottom line, development is not just about the numbers. Plans should reflect that this is opportunistic work and allow flexibility within a framework that encourages excellence.

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