



TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO IN 2019 TO INCREASE FUNDING

By Meredith McBurney
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Dear Legal Aid Executive Directors,

Whether we are true resolution-makers or not, I think we all start the New Year with renewed commitments to do some things better than we did the year before. And, one of the things that could be included is doing a better job of leading the effort to increase funding for your program. So, for this *MIE Journal*, we offer ten steps, some of which will not even seem like “fundraising,” that will help you move in the right direction for more funding in 2019.



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help you move in the right direction for more funding in 2019.

1. Rewrite your elevator speech.

Remove sentences like “we provide civil legal services to those below 125% of poverty...” As I type those words I can imagine people’s eyes glazing over. Use a story of a client that is a good example of how your program changes people’s lives. Talk about the human aspects, not the legal technicalities. Visit the Voices for Civil Justice website, <https://voicesforciviljustice.org/>, for ideas and inspiration.

1a. Practice and use that new elevator speech!

I have watched staff and volunteer leaders improve their elevator speech, only to revert to their old standby when they get nervous upon coming face-to-face with a potential major donor. So, practice your thirty second speech until you are comfortable with it and can share it with ease. Also, make sure that your new elevator speech replaces the tired phrases that are on your program website and in your promotional materials.

2. Make a list of fundraising activities that are relatively non-threatening. Here are some ideas:

- Call donors and thank them for their gift.
- Identify people who might be good prospects.

- Ask a donor to host a house party.
- Organize a donor appreciation event.
- Bring a prospect to an event.
- Develop a collaborative relationship with another organization.
- Make your own gift.

2a. Do at least one of the above fundraising activities yourself; encourage a board member to do one.

3. Spend more time with your board members. Some facts:

- Some years back, BoardSource suggested that an executive director should spend about 30% of his/her time on board meetings and related activities.
- A 2007 MIE Survey indicated that legal aid executive directors spend 10-25% of their time on board work. (Do you think this percent has gone up in the past decade?)
- “There is a direct correlation between the amount of time an executive director puts into working with the board and how strong that board is.” (Margaret Linnane)

Keep reading for some suggestions of how you might increase your board work time most productively!

4. Get to know your board members as individuals, rather than thinking about them as “the board.”

If you are not already acquainted with your board members as individuals with different strengths and weaknesses, now is a perfect time to get to know at least some of them better. Start meeting with members individually, ask them questions, learn what matters to them. Find specific roles for each of them, focusing on their strengths.

4a. Start with your board chair, and take him/her to breakfast, lunch, coffee, something.

If you have not had an in-depth conversation with

your board chair recently, do it now. Discuss your goals for the year, and see what he/she hopes to accomplish during the term. Strategize about issues, concerns. Ask for advice.

4b. Take other key board members to breakfast, lunch, coffee, something.

Start with the strongest members with whom you do not have regular contact. Do some research beforehand so you have some thoughts about where to start a conversation. Have ideas about what you would like them to do, but before asking, learn what is most important to them about legal aid, if they feel their skills and knowledge are being used effectively, what else they might like to do to help the organization.

If you are uncomfortable having these conversations one-on-one, especially with board members you do not know well, consider inviting someone else to join you — another board member can help make the initial stages of the conversation go easier.

5. Recruit at least one stellar new board member.

- What skills/talents do you want to add to create a stronger board? (You will have a better idea about this if you have done some of #4.)
- Who can help you identify good candidates with the skills you need?
- Who among your current board members and/or close associates can help you recruit that stellar candidate?
- When you are recruiting, make sure you let the potential new board member know why you are recruiting him/her.

6. Effectively orient the stellar new board member.

Hopefully, you have already acknowledged why you have recruited him/her (see #5).

- What information do you need to share during orientation, so that this new member can be most effective?
- What else do you want to learn about this person as you bring him/her on?

7. Take action with “dead wood” on your board.

Are all/most of your current board members actively involved? For those that are less active, do they play a particularly important role in key situations? If not, think about making some changes. We often allow seats to be filled by people who are no longer contributing because it is uncomfortable to raise the issue, but too many inactive people tends to lower the energy of all of

your board members. If you take time to have a conversation, you may reinvigorate the member, and/or they may easily move into a role with the organization that better suits what they are currently able to contribute.

8. Develop/expand your personal cultivation list.

Who, beyond board members, should you meet with in 2019? The managing partner of largest law firm? The donor who made a leadership gift last week? The key people your development director has identified? If you do not have a personal cultivation list, now is a great time to start one!

9. Review your board meeting agenda “template;” revise as needed.

- Are members engaged?
- Do most attend meetings?
- Do meetings start and end on time?
- Do board members actually run/participate in the meeting, or are they mostly listening to staff making reports?
- Is there a consent agenda for routine items?
- Do you send out regular reports in advance so board meeting time can focus on issues of real importance that benefit from face-to-face meetings?
- Is there a presentation/discussion during the meeting that makes your board members go home thinking about what a valuable organization they are part of?

10. Other ideas?!

- Carve out time on your schedule to do steps 1–9. Make your own gift at a leadership level.
- Give to and volunteer for (on the board or a board committee) another non-profit. Changing your role will give you an entirely different perspective on why the volunteer leaders in *your* organization behave as they do.

What other ideas do you have? We'd love to hear from you; e-mail *Meredith* at meredithmcburney@msn.com.

- 1 Meredith McBurney, a consultant since 1997, specializes in resource development for legal aid and other advocacy organizations. In addition to providing in-depth consulting for individual programs, she is the resource development consultant to MIE and has been the resource development consultant to the ABA's Resource Center for Access to Justice Initiatives. She began her legal aid career as the Administrator for Colorado Rural Legal Services. From 1981 to 1997, she served as the executive director for Colorado's IOLTA program and the Legal Aid Foundation of Colorado, Colorado's statewide fundraising organization. Meredith may be reached at meredithmcburney@msn.com.