Nsight from NCDS

National Community Development Services

Ideas and wisdom from the professionals at NCDS.

Four Lessons from Forty Years of Fundraising

2017 marks our 40th year of raising money for community and economic development organizations. In the course of conducting over 700 campaigns in communities of all sizes across the U.S. we've seen many changes. We've also seen a handful of core principles of success validated year after year and campaign after campaign. ***Four things we've learned from successful campaigns, effective organizations, and dynamic communities***:

1. **It's not only about money**

The most successful fundraising campaigns focus on the outcomes and impacts that will be enabled through implementation of strategic initiatives and projects. The idea of simply "funding an organization" will rarely compel supporters to make capacity level financial commitments. The key is to sell robust and innovative plans and strategies that will create economic growth and prosperity for local stakeholders. By showing prospective investors the bottom-line benefits to their industries and companies, you transform fundraising from "asking for money" to "presenting an opportunity to generate significant return on investment." This is the secret to securing six and seven-figure pledges, and to achieving multi-million dollar campaign goals.

2. **Think long-term**

Meaningful economic development and community transformation take time. Paid professionals and volunteer leaders who understand this and communicate it to their constituents create an environment for organizational sustainability and continued fundraising success. Long term commitment and focus, delivered through 4/5- year strategic initiatives aligned with current needs and opportunities, is an approach adopted by many successful communities. We have several client communities for which we have conducted four or more campaigns over the course of twenty or more years, where the tens of millions of dollars raised has been effectively spent on a progression of strategic growth initiatives. As a result of their progress, they maintain and expand their "asking rights" for funding future projects and programs.

3. **Top leaders will engage**

Many organizations struggle to attract and retain top business and civic leaders to their boards. We have found that busy, in demand leaders who may not have the time or interest for "organizational governance" will enthusiastically endorse and lead a multi-year strategic initiative with defined objectives and goals. We have also seen that "leaders follow their money." So if you can make a compelling case that merits a capacity level investment, you will also likely attract that decision maker to help persuade others to participate. Moreover, the implementation of the plan will benefit from engagement and oversight of these leaders.

4. **Investors are different than members and sponsors**

As mentioned above, investors are "buying" outcomes – not a menu of benefits. Treat them accordingly. Regular updates on the program's progress; analyses of the macro and micro impacts; opportunities to participate and assist in program delivery; and select "insider" perks will ensure pledge fulfillment. Sound investor relations will also enable future campaign success.