



## **Embracing a Culture of Philanthropy: Why it matters**

Fundraising is ultimately about relationships. More than anything, a culture of philanthropy is an attitude that embraces relationship building. Once you build a community of believers, the money will follow.

Organizations that have adopted a culture of philanthropy have matured in their development efforts: They have evolved from a focus on money to a focus on building lasting relationships.

Here are some indicators that an organization has embraced a culture of philanthropy:

- Everyone understands the need to raise money and is willing to do what is necessary to support the effort, *regardless* of their role in the organization.
- Everyone behaves as the organization's ambassador- helping to identify new friends and partnerships whenever possible.
- Everyone can articulate a case for giving and how a gift will be used.
- Organizational processes are donor-centric - they are set up for the ease and comfort of donors, not staff.
- Visitors are welcomed in to program sites; dialogue is encouraged.
- The front desk personnel are welcoming – and have received adequate training to handle all inquires about involvement in the organization.
- Everyone can answer basic questions about the finances of the organization.
- The Executive Director sees him/herself as the “face of the agency”
- The Executive Director is 100% committed and personally involved in fund raising.
- Recipients of service are viewed as experts in how the organization carries out its mission and are invited to share their stories whenever possible.
- The Executive Director, Board of Directors (and others directly involved in soliciting contributions) make a financial contribution at least annually.

If you are not a passionate champion of your mission, why should anyone else be? People give because they want to solve a problem or improve their community. Potential donors look for organizations who are authentic in their intentions and interactions. Successful organizations view the community as a partner in their work. They invite others into the process and value what they learn from them.

Some indicators that an organization has not embraced a culture of philanthropy:

- Fundraising may be crisis-driven or reactive: chasing money, rather than following a predetermined plan.
- Development activities are viewed as costs rather than investments, resulting in a development effort that is unfunded or inadequately staffed.
- The responsibility for fundraising is assumed by one or a few people (most often development personnel or Executive Director) and there are few roles for the Board of Directors, other volunteers, donors or program staff.
- Discreet activities such as special events or direct mail campaigns are emphasized, rather than a comprehensive strategy that taps multiple channels for giving.
- If major gifts occur, they are usually unsolicited: no one is charged with making the ask and few face-to-face meetings occur for the purpose of cultivation.
- Donors feel “at arms length”- their involvement is primarily viewed in terms of contributions. They are rarely sought out to advise or assist in the development effort.
- Donors who make large contributions or gifts of “personal significance” are treated no differently than casual or occasional donors.
- Programs or work groups may create their own fund raising activities, sometimes withholding information from the rest of the organization, or working against stated development goals.

On Course Consulting works with agencies at all stages to improve their organizational culture so development efforts can be more effective. From small start-ups to large publicly funded agencies, all organizations can benefit from cross-sector partnerships and a broad base of community support. Services include board coaching, staff meeting facilitation, outreach planning, and strategic communications.