  

**May, 2021 Full Newsletter**

**5 Ways to Advance Fundraising Right Now**

1. Schedule face-to-face donor meetings
2. Plan hybrid outdoor events
3. Take advantage of greater giving by lower-level donors
4. Convert pandemic donors to annual donors
5. Prepare for capital campaigns

Schedule face-to-face donor meetings. If it is safe to do so in your area, meet with supporters in person. Donors who have been reluctant to meet during the pandemic may be more open to meeting now. These meetings present especially valuable opportunities for rich conversations about how views about philanthropy changed during the pandemic. You can spark thoughtful discussions by asking open-ended questions like “How do you think about philanthropy in light of the pandemic?” and “What role has philanthropy played in your life over the past year?”

Plan hybrid outdoor events. People are social creatures, and we’ve all been deprived of in-person interactions for too long. Capitalize on people’s interest in gathering this spring and summer by offering safe events, such as bike-athons and walkathons as well as barbeques and outdoor receptions for small groups to cultivate, celebrate, or recognize donors. Stream all live events and continue to offer virtual events as appropriate so more people can participate.

Take advantage of greater giving by lower-level donors. Giving was up in the under $1,000 categories, reversing a downward trend, partly due to new tax deductions without itemizing. This is still in place for 2021 so take advantage of that in your communications.

Online campaigns including crowdfunding efforts target precisely these giving levels, so now is the perfect time to maximize lower-level and midlevel giving. Before you hit send or publish, here are few things to do.

* Choose a digital platform that enables you to recognize donors, sync with your donor database, and process gifts seamlessly.
* Develop a clear financial goal for each campaign as well as a punchy call to action that answers these questions: Why should someone give to your cause and why now? How will a gift make a difference?
* Develop strong messaging and compelling design to inspire donors without requiring much of your time.
* Share moving stories, impressive statistics, and memorable images to inspire donors to give.
* Mobilize your lower-level and midlevel donors by asking them to share your campaign with their peers.

Convert pandemic donors to annual donors. According to Rachel Cyrulnik, principal at RAISE, organizations must be proactive to keep new donors engaged and giving. The pandemic and calls for social justice have made many Americans realize the need for philanthropy and the needs it addresses.

To keep donors attention requires a strong communication plan where you share stories of impact to educate them on the importance of continued support. One way is to personally thank each new donor you acquired in 2020. Your entire organization may need to participate to make this a reality, depending on what threshold you set. Donors who gave a first-time four-figure or larger gift should be contacted personally. For lesser gifts you could use wealth screening to identify those who have the means to give more. Mailing a thank-you note is especially appreciated these days.

Prepare for capital campaigns. The pandemic paused many capital campaigns but you can time your press outreach to coincide with people’s return to communal spaces when public buildings will be in use again. Let donors know what you are doing and the results you’ve achieved to date, your plans for expansion, and how the new building will enable your organization to better fulfill its mission. When the time comes to launch, your audience will be predisposed to giving.

**How to Persuade Board Members to Raise Money**

Candidates for your board should know from the outset that trustees are expected to give generously and network on your behalf. If some are not, you could have one of the others have a development call-to-action at your next meeting suggests Maria de Mento who directs the annual Philanthropy 50.

If you invite your finance and development leaders to offer statistics and success stories it will reinforce the message. Also recognizing those board members who have made transformative gifts will help to inspire and motivate the rest.

**Fighting Falsehoods Must be at the Center of All That Nonprofits and Foundations Do**

The accelerated flow of disinformation has a profound effect on the work of nonprofits and foundations, and fighting it needs to be at the center of all our work according to Jen Soriano, Hermelinda Cortes and Joseph Phelan of ReFrame. Nonprofits and Foundations have a moral and strategic imperative to push back against narratives that continue to marginalize people of color and undermine the efforts of organizations advocating for policies and programs that combat systemic inequities.

Disinformation is misinformation that is intended to mislead and we all know that falsehoods spread faster than the truth. In order for the nonprofit world to stop them we need effective strategies starting with large-scale philanthropic investment in local and national racial justice organizations that understand best how disinformation spreads in their communities.

Once you have organized resources against disinformation, you can integrate your tools into all the work you do. Disinformation must be replaced with your own powerful and emotionally evocative messages.

Here are a few steps you can take:

* Inoculate staff against disinformation
* Listen for murmurs of misinformation
* Tell a more compelling story
* Shut out disinformation before it starts
* Collaborate with others

Today’s disinformation is a technology-assisted form of soft power and social control. At its core, it’s not a content problem but an organizing and power challenge that we must all meet with every available resource. People’s lives, the health and well-being of our communities and democracy itself are at stake. For more information on the steps to take please go to our website at [www.gatewaytogrants.com](http://www.gatewaytogrants.com)

**Foundations, the Solution to Our Democracy Deficit Lies in Plain Sight**

One indispensable solution to our massive and linked crises is the huge wave of emerging leaders, largely people of color and women, who have become active in social movements in recent years. Supporting these leaders to pursue vocations in social change and to take positions of power in society is an urgent priority according to Deepak Bhargava, a distinguished lecturer at CUNY and Gara LaMarche president of the Democracy Alliance.

In order to understand how to tackle sprialing economic inequality, structural racism, climate change, and authoritarian threats to democracy, they mapped leadership-development ecosystems on the left and right and found some astonishing results.

Conservative investments in leadership have outpaced and dwarfed progressive ones for decades. Their research uncovered a number of large organizations that provide entry into right-wing movements and activism with annual budgets like $24 million where they have trained over 200,000 people and offered services like professional career advice, continuing education and workshop opportunities for its members.

Outside of this conservative bubble, U.S. foundations spent less than 1% of their budgets on leadership development. After a nearly 50 year endeavor, the infrastructures can’t compare.

Not only did their scale differ dramatically, but so did their methods. Conservative programs stay with their leaders over many years providing consistency of messaging, like in world views and how to acquire and wield power.

These researchers sought out industry leaders to figure out how to build a robust alternative and they found that they must:

Create pathways for up-and-coming leaders of color, especially women. Many established leaders told stories of their own accidental landing in positions of leadership. Young people cannot see their way into the opaque world of social change. There is no clearly defined way to get a job in social justice without first volunteering, doing an internship, and then applying for a position. Most organizations do not offer pay for these opportunities, which puts them beyond the reach of many who most need them. Those who found their way in confirmed what senior leaders told us about how obscure or inaccessible the entry points are. Said one early-career interviewee: “Getting into this industry, whether it be government or social change is hard. ... It is not necessarily about the skillset, but it is about who you know.”

Provide help to midcareer advocates so they can get through the bumpy moments and take on new challenges. After about five to seven years in social-change work, leaders may be ready for the next challenge, burning out, or entering a stage when very long work hours no longer fit into their personal lives. It’s a big leap even for successful midlevel people into management roles. People who confront entrenched power imbalances in society find it challenging to wield power skillfully themselves. Entry-level roles (as frontline organizers, say) do not always provide them with the competencies they need to move up, such as managing budgets, supervising people, and setting strategy.

Build a hub where leaders can find not only robust training opportunities, but also a hearth they can return to over the course of their careers. Social-change leaders need ways to connect with mentors, peers, continuing education, and space for reflection. Tracking and coaching people as they move from job to job over the decades will benefit all social-justice work — but those duties are beyond the capacity of any single organization.

Assemble and teach a “canon” of social-change leadership. Today we lack a curriculum that integrates understanding of movement history and theories with the day-to-day practice of hard and soft skills. It’s especially important for people in the early stage of their careers to be exposed in an ecumenical way to the range of approaches from insider advocacy to movement in the streets that are part of successful social-change efforts. Even if people specialize in a particular function, like policy, their orientation at the outset of their careers to other disciplines like organizing and communications will accelerate our collective impact.

Make equity, anti-oppression, and structural racism central to the DNA for any leadership effort. We must abandon the idea that people of color have deficits that must be addressed for them to ascend to leadership and, instead, provide the support and networks they need for their talents to find full expression.

Emphasize the importance of collective leadership. Successful social-change work requires a strong sense of accountability, an understanding of the value of service to others, and commitment to developing *other*leaders. This contrasts with the “rock-star leadership” model often promoted by philanthropy. Instead, collaboration is the key.

Make sure that leadership training is widely accessible. It must be available not only to people in paid roles in social change, but also to grassroots volunteer leaders who are the heart of movement work. What’s more, it should not be simply for front-facing program roles, but also for grooming the people who lead the operations, finance, administrative, and fundraising functions that are crucial to the success of our organizations and movements.

Pay attention to the “inner” aspects of leadership. Issues of resilience, healing, and community need to be at the center of all training.

Many organizations and their staffs were in tumult themselves and tensions surfaced during the research so the path forward will not be easy or well-defined.

* While there’s a widespread desire in the nonprofit world to elevate people of color, many people of color worry about tokenism and “performative” rather than substantive equity efforts, and they fear new leaders of color are too often set up to fail. Some raised concerns about organizations that were mainly looking to ensure their staffs were diverse, rather than the acknowledging the need to focus equally on transforming inequitable systems and ensuring that leaders of *all*racial backgrounds are equipped to do the vital work of multiracial coalition building required in these times.
* Young staff members have different expectations and demands for how they can use their voice and participate in decision making. Some younger activists are questioning the hierarchical structures of many organizations, while others who have fought to move up in the workplace wonder why hierarchy is being questioned at precisely the moment when people of color are finally achieving positions of authority in some movement organizations.
* Big organizations are grappling with the inadequacy of a “human resources” perspective, which tends to be technical, compliance oriented, and bureaucratic. Some are replacing or supplementing human-resources duties with tasks focused on nurturing talent and culture.
* Young people of color and first-generation students are grappling with how to earn a sustainable livelihood in social change. They are deeply committed but worry about low salaries, debt, and grueling work environments. Making a living wage is a top concern for everyone. Young people and midcareer leaders told us they crave mentorship from people whose identities and experiences reflect their own. A consistent theme from young leaders especially is the need to build into leadership development an understanding of the traumas people working in social change have faced, given racism, violence, and growing inequality. They also stressed issues of inclusion for trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and queer people that have not been adequately addressed by social-change leaders.

Enjoy the nice weather this month!

Christine Limb

President, Gateway to Grants