

Fern Potter

Choreographing your fundraising strategy

I find it remarkable that so many of my colleagues working in dance are fearful of fundraising, and especially in asking people for money. 'How do you do it?' I'm frequently asked. My standard response: 'I think of fundraising as choreographing a dance....it's a process that requires one to be imaginative, creative, acting with integrity and excellence, and to make intelligent choices. To achieve success, it must start with a clear vision that reflects a range of mindful decisions that help shape and realise how you may achieve your goal.' In other words, it starts with a strategy.

I often take my students on a physical journey to understand the process of setting out a fundraising strategy. We start as a clump, standing at one side of the room. I then time them to race to the other side of the room as quickly as possible, whilst dodging a range of obstacles (I know – not the best model for health and safety practice), and each other. Once they're at the other side, we debrief on what happened. Invariably, they talk about how they first judged the distance of the space, looked at the obstacles in their pathway in order to decide how to avoid them, and considered how they might also circumvent bumping into their fellow classmates in order to be successful in arriving within the designated time. What they have described is exactly what one needs to do when getting started in fundraising.

The classic definition of a fundraising strategy is that it is a process that starts with the question: what do you want to do and how will you achieve it? The strategy itself becomes an essential tool to achieve success as it focuses, prioritises and examines a range of ideas to reach your financial goal. Through writing it, you are pushed to assess all possibilities and funding opportunities. Because it is written, it ensures that others (such as your staff team, Board or Development Board) have a shared understanding of your priorities and objectives and how these will be reached. The strategy also prevents you from wasting time and resources. Some funders may even require you to have a strategy in place before they will consider providing support for your project.

As with choreographing a dance, the strategy needs to start with an expression of your core values - who you are, why you exist, and what you do (think of it as your main motif). It then needs to establish your current position – your first sequence, with a range of ideas to help bring your motif to life (within the strategy this will include a description of your strengths and weaknesses, financial position and overall plans). The meat of the strategy is where you start to look at all of the possibilities for developing your motif by using a range of decisions and ideas so that you are able to realise your artistic expression as fully as possible. This is where you need to be as creative as possible. Your conclusion will be a reiteration of your motif but with your ideas now in practise (within the strategy this will include your risk assessment and long-term plans). Congratulations, you've just choreographed your fundraising strategy.

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