

MARC A. PITMAN

# 21 WAYS

FOR BOARD MEMBERS TO ENGAGE  
WITH THEIR NONPROFIT'S FUNDRAISING



# 21 Ways for Board Members to Engage with Their Nonprofit's Fundraising

by Marc A. Pitman

[WWW.FUNDRAISINGCOACH.COM](http://WWW.FUNDRAISINGCOACH.COM)

Boards members are often recruited to a board despite having no idea how to fundraise. And their nonprofit's staff are often so busy doing good, they don't realize the board members aren't clear on what "helping with fundraising" means.

You were chosen to be a board member because you have gifts and talents that will help move your nonprofit's mission forward. But sometimes it's hard to see how you can help. Coaching board members, I regularly see them undervalue their importance. They are so aware of what they are *not* and do not have that they miss what they do have.

I get it. Here are 21 very practical ways for you to jump in. Look over these and choose how *you* want to be involved. (Choose at least two: everyone should choose #1 and then another of the remaining 20.)

Each of these 21 ways will delight your nonprofit's Executive Director (ED) or CEO!

## 21 Ways to Help Your Nonprofit's Fundraising

### 1. Give regular gifts

In addition to being helpful at board meetings, the #1 thing you can do as board member is make a financial gift to your nonprofit. I challenge board members to consider at least \$1000 a year. That's just \$84/month—basically what you pay for cable or a cell phone.

Whatever amount you give, nonprofits need 100% giving from their board. Think of it this way: what would you do if you found out only 70% of the board gave to a nonprofit? Wouldn't you wonder what was wrong at the nonprofit?

People being asked by your nonprofit will wonder the same thing.

So make your own gift. That will help make fundraising easier for your nonprofit's leaders...without even having to ask your friends for money!

*Before you read more of these 21 Ways, go to your nonprofit's website and make a gift.*

Or check with your financial advisor about the possibility of making a gift of stock. There's an article about why at:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/free-articles/are-you-paying-taxes-on-your-charitable-giving/>

## **2. Talk to people about the nonprofit**

One of the biggest mistakes board members make is undervaluing their experience. They think they need to know all sorts of statistics and facts about the nonprofit before they talk to people about it.

You don't. You have made a decision to invest your limited time and hard-earned money with this nonprofit. Just tell your friends why. Tell

your story. *People you know will be interested in that.* More interested than you realize.

The best part of telling your story? You'll get the facts straight because it's...your story! Your story, as imperfect as you feel it is, will help people learn about your nonprofit. Your friends expect the nonprofit's employees to say nice things about the organization. They are paid to. But you aren't. So your story has an authority that employees' stories can never have.

Please, don't undervalue your authority. Share your story with people you know. (Nonprofit employees, you can make this process easier by using storytelling tools like this one:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/free-articles/the-rule-of-threes-for-non-profits/>)

### **3. Introduce people to the ED or CEO**

As a board member, you probably feel a mixture of guilt for not helping with fundraising and a sense of relief that you haven't been assigned to any prospects yet.

One of the most powerful things you can do that will help fundraising and marketing is to *introduce people to your nonprofit's ED or CEO.*

All too often, nonprofit leaders simply need help getting in front of new people. You know some of the new people your nonprofit needs to get in front of. And you can make that happen.

So, take out a piece of paper, or use the margins on this page, and list 6-10 people you know well enough to email or call who could significantly impact your nonprofit. “Impact” is an elastic term. It can be in giving money or giving media exposure or providing expert advice about some aspect of the nonprofit’s strategic plan.

All you need to say in your phone call or in an email is something like:

*“Hi [person’s name]. This is [your name]. In our last board meeting of [nonprofit’s name], I realized we’re working on some things that might interest you. Would you have 20 minutes to meet with our Executive Director?”*

If they ask about money, you could say something like:

*“Oh! Ha! I wasn’t planning on having her ask you for money this time! I wanted you both to meet since I think you have a lot in common.”*

The only thing better than making that call, is your going with the ED to the meeting. You won’t really have to say much if you don’t want to. But your presence in the room will make it much easier for the ED to connect with the person you’re introducing her to.

#### **4. Write letters to the editor**

Another way to introduce people to your

nonprofit is to write a brief letter to the editor. This is especially powerful in communities with a local newspaper.

Often, letters to the editor are either negative or political. So a letter praising the work of a local nonprofit can be a breath of fresh air.

Be sure to look for the “editorial guidelines” or the rules the paper has set up for letters to the editor. And try to be specific.

Writing “XYZ nonprofit is awesome. The leaders are cool” isn’t effective and isn’t likely to get printed.

But writing something like this is effective and is far more likely to get printed:

*“XYZ nonprofit’s work in last Friday’s spay/neuter drive was amazingly inspiring to watch because of [specific reasons]. This organization is helping our community be better at [some value the community shares].”*

Whether or not you read the Opinion section in the paper, people in your community do. And your words will help shape public perception.

Best of all? It’s free.

Letters to the editor are more common during building projects or capital campaigns or program changes. But they can also be

noteworthy if they're simply highlighting a specific part of the nonprofit's ordinary work.

Would you take a moment to write a letter now?

## 5. Ask questions

Asking questions is one of the scariest things for most board members. You agreed to be on the nonprofit's board, but you're not an expert in their area. Here's a secret: *they need you to ask questions until you understand.*

Think of it this way: if you are on the board and you still don't understand, how in the world will a donor who's not on the board understand? Your questions will help the nonprofit staff learn to tell their story without all the "insider" language of acronyms and technical terms.

Also, if you are on the board, you're responsible for governance decisions. You need to feel comfortable with these decisions. Trust the leaders and committees *and* make sure you understand.

This means you don't need to be suspicious or second-guessing the staff. That isn't helpful. But asking questions so you understand can help ensure that *everyone* makes better decisions. And it makes it easier to fundraise. Your donor prospects may have similar questions. By asking, you help others on the board and on the



nonprofit's staff have a chance to develop clear answers to fundraising questions donors may ask.

## **6. Be ready to suggest new board members**

Every board will eventually need new members. As a board member yourself, you're in the best position to identify new board member prospects.

As you're spending time at board meetings, challenge yourself to figure out who else should be at the table. What skill-sets are needed? What areas of expertise? What connections? What communities or backgrounds? Keep a running list.

Then, when vacancies come up, you'll be able to suggest some names to the nominating committee.

## **7. Learn your asking style**

You probably didn't get on your board because you love asking for money. (If you did, great! I think asking is terrific too!) But as a board member, you should be active in some level of fundraising. Often the board chair or nonprofit staff will suggest extroverted ways to do fundraising—giving you a list of names to call or requiring you to sell tickets to a gala.

You may be well-suited for the tasks you are given. But what do you do if you're not? Most

suffer in silence. They feel guilty not doing what is asked but never “get around” to making the calls.

Did you know introverts can make the best askers? That’s right. In fact, there are at least four different profiles for asking! You may not be comfortable calling someone, especially since you’re not entirely sure what you’d say and how you’d respond to their questions. It turns out, you might be great at writing a personal letter with an ask. Writing helps you organize your thoughts so you are prepared in future conversations with the donor prospect.

You really can be an effective fundraiser just the way you are. To find out your asking style for free, go to <http://AskingStyleProfile.com/>.

## **8. Send thank you notes to donors**

One of the easiest ways to get involved with fundraising, and one of the most fun, is saying “thank you” to donors. You can use your own cards or cards from the nonprofit. The message is simply:

*Dear [donor’s name]: As a board member of [nonprofit’s name], I want to say “thanks.” Your support of [nonprofit’s name] is [tangible impact—changing lives/saving pets/giving kids education/feeding people]. We couldn’t do it without you. Thanks!  
[Your name]*

Just a couple personal and heartfelt lines of

thanks. This has tremendous impact on your nonprofit's ability to "retain" donors—to have donors who keep giving gifts year after year. A few years ago, the Chronicle of Philanthropy article reported that charities that had this kind of thank you for donors were more likely to meet their fundraising goals than nonprofits that didn't. (Read it at: <http://bit.ly/1417AtJ>)

Your thank you's are significantly helping your nonprofit hit their goals. Thank you.

## **9. Make thank you calls to donors**

Where thank you notes are powerful, thank you *calls* can be pure gold. Few people ever get a phone call simply saying "Thank you." Ask your staff for the phone numbers of 5-10 people who've recently made a gift. Since chances are great that you'll get a voice mail, these will probably go quickly. You can use the same lines as you use for the "send thank you notes to donors" action.

For three more phone calling tips, watch the short video at:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/phone-tips/>

## **10. Allow a fundraising letter to be sent over your name**

Another easy way for you to support your nonprofit's fundraising effort is to allow one of their fundraising letters to go out over your name.

A personal letter from a board member can be a refreshing addition to a nonprofit's regular direct mail program. You probably won't have to write the letter yourself. The staff will be glad to draft a letter for you.

It's best if you can actually sign the letters, but many nonprofits use mail houses so they may just ask you to sign on white paper so they can scan it and create an image to insert on the letter.

## 11. Notes on fundraising letters

You could even offer to write a brief note on the letters going to people you know. These notes help make the fundraising letter more effective. People see the letter and then see your note and realize that this isn't just some mass produced appeal. It's really for them.

Here are three things to consider when writing brief notes on nonprofit fundraising letters:

- ***Use blue ink:*** Using blue ink helps make your note stand out from the black ink of the letter.
- ***Write it at the top:*** When most of us think of writing a quick note, we think of writing it in the margin or down at the bottom of the letter. But the most viewed part of the letter is the top. And there is already a lot of white-space there, plenty to write a brief note.

Your few lines may help the donor actually read the nonprofit's fundraising appeal.

- **Consider writing on a post-it note:** In the direct mail business, a note like a post-it note is called a “lift note.” These have been proven to increase response to fundraising appeals. (Read chapter 10 in the book *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive* by Robert Cialdini’s team, starting on page 50. <http://amzn.to/16BQJ4M>)

Your note needn’t be long. It can be something as simple as:

*This is an important cause. I hope you’ll join me in supporting it.*

*[Your first name]*

That’s all!

## 12. Develop your own nonprofit story

Too often, board members equate fundraising success with a need to memorize some sort of “schpeal” and all the nonprofit’s facts and figures.

Not true.

The most persuasive thing you can do is develop your own story. I call this developing “your [your nonprofit’s name] story.” The beauty of your own story is that:

- People inherently believe stories, and
- You won’t forget your story!

It can take many forms. It could be about why you first started giving. Or why you continue to give. Or about a moment that made you proud.

In an age when we're assaulted by 3,000 – 5,000 ads a day, people will find hearing your own story refreshingly authentic. Use yours well!

### **13. Film a 30—60 second video about why you love your nonprofit**

People love video. The second largest search engine in the world is YouTube. Chances are, your nonprofit could use more videos expressing support for them. Fortunately, it couldn't be easier. With our smartphones, most of us have a video camera right in our pocket!

A simple, quick video can be powerful. You could share what impresses you the most about the nonprofit or why you're thrilled to volunteer for it. You could even use your “nonprofit story.”

And, thanks to YouTube, people are comfortable with amateur video, so you don't need to be professional.

In fact, you could even record a few of them with different people at your next board meeting. For an example of this type of video, taken right after a seminar with all the noise and clinking in the background, look at the testimonial at:

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/storytelling/>

There's no need to explicitly say, “This is why I donate...” or “Please make a gift...” Feel free to

if you'd like. But don't feel obligated to. Just be yourself!

#### **14. Share your nonprofit's blog posts and Facebook updates**

If the thought of talking about your nonprofit to your friends feels a bit forward right now, there is a more passive thing that will still help them.

*Whenever your nonprofit shares an update on social media or on their blog post, like it and share it yourself.*

Social media sites like Facebook measure how many interaction each update gets. The more an update is liked, shared, and commented on, the more Facebook thinks it will be interesting to others. Especially the sharing and commenting. As the update gets more interaction, it puts it into other people's feeds, getting your nonprofit's news in front of more eyes.

I could get geekier about this but, I'll stop here. Just know that your comments and shares help!

#### **15. Set up a Google alert for your nonprofit's name**

Another geeky thing you can do that will tangentially help your nonprofit raise money is using Google Alerts.

<http://www.google.com/alerts>

Google Alerts scour the web for any reference

you ask it to. You simply type your nonprofit's name in the appropriate box, tell them where to email it, and they'll let you know whenever the nonprofit's name comes up in the news or in blogs.

It can also be helpful to set up alerts with your CEO's or Executive Director's name, as well as other key employees.

Then, as Google delivers results to you, you can also share those mentions to your social media networks (typically Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.)

Be sure to share some with the nonprofit as well. Most of the references will be generated by the nonprofit itself. But, occasionally, there will be references that the staff aren't aware of but should be.

## **16. Volunteer at events**

Have you noticed that we've gotten to the sixteenth idea without even mentioning events! Clearly, one of the easiest ways to help your nonprofit with fundraising is to volunteer at events.

Events give all sorts of ways to get involved:

- Selling tickets (many find it easier to sell something than to ask for a gift)
- Helping with promotional activities like putting up posters
- Ushering



- Making food
- Working at a table

If your nonprofit is having an event, offer to help. You'll get to meet more people, help your cause, and often have fun.

## 17. Get fundraising training

Whether you are comfortable with it or not, fundraising is part of your job description as a board member. So get training. There are lots of seminars, webinars, and coaching to help you excel. The two I recommend most are:

- [www.MovieMondaysVideos.com](http://www.MovieMondaysVideos.com) – free weekly videos
- [www.TheNonprofitAcademy.com](http://www.TheNonprofitAcademy.com) – over 100 trainings, tools, and templates for a nominal charge.

Additionally, you could commit to reading one book on fundraising a year. Be careful! Many fundraising books are *far* too complicated. They're fine for nonprofit staff, but as a volunteer, you deserve something that is readable. I wrote one called *Ask Without Fear!* specifically for board members.

<http://fundraisingcoach.com/ask-without-fear/>

Another great, very easy to read book on fundraising is by Jerry Panas. It's simply called *Asking*. You can find it on Amazon here:

<http://amzn.to/14Cjr7C>

There are many other good books on

storytelling, fundraising, and marketing. If you find a book you'd like to get for the entire board, ask the authors for a bulk discount.

## **18. Memorize your nonprofit's mission statement**

Memorizing your nonprofit's mission statement helps you with all aspects of governance. In fact, nonprofits that use name cards on tables at board meetings are increasingly putting the organization's mission statement on the side of the card facing the board member.

This isn't going to immediately help you raise money. But it will help ensure that the decisions you make around the board table are in the best interest of the nonprofit's mission. And *that* will make it easier to fundraise!

## **19. Check in with ED monthly, offering to help with visits**

Another way to help with fundraising, is to offer to go on visits with your CEO/ED or other staff. They'll do the asking, but your presence in the room will help create an atmosphere that makes it easier for the donor to say "yes."

Offering once is good. But nonprofit work is hard and the staff may forget. So put it on your calendar to remind them of the offer every month. You might use a free tool like <http://www.FollowUpThen.com/> to automate those reminders.

It's even more helpful if you can offer some

names of people who might be good to talk with.

## **20. Host a house party**

A relatively low effort, high value way to help your nonprofit is by hosting a house party. Simply invite people you know to your home to hear from the CEO/ED. These can be effective with or without an ask. It's like going on a visit with the CEO/ED, but rather than seeing just one person at a time, you both can see 12-14.

## **21. Ask for money!**

Of course, any list like this would be incomplete without the most straightforward way to help your nonprofit's fundraising: ask for money!

Do you know the number one reason people give money to a charity? They aren't asked.

They expect to be asked by the staff. But being asked by a volunteer, a person who isn't paid by the nonprofit, is usually much more compelling!

So ask!

## Summary

There are literally hundreds of ways you can help your nonprofit raise more money. This list of 21 ideas is a great place to start, but it's only a start. I challenge you to share these ideas with your entire board. Perhaps you could challenge each person to take on 2 of the 21! Can you imagine how much better your fundraising would be if each board member committed to doing at least two things on this list?

If you want more help, I have hundreds of free blog posts, tools, and articles at <https://FundraisingCoach.com/> and over 100 tools and helpful templates at <https://TheNonprofitAcademy.com/>.

Also, feel free to email me at [marc@concordleadershipgroup.com](mailto:marc@concordleadershipgroup.com).

And if others on your board want this booklet for themselves, they can get it free at <https://fundraisingcoach.com/subscribe/>

## A Note to Nonprofit CEOs, EDs, and Fundraising Staff

Originally published in 2013, this booklet has been helping board members around the world get engaged in fundraising. But what's surprised me the most is how nonprofit leaders and fundraisers have been using it too!

This booklet has also helped many nonprofit leaders realize they need to improve their own board's new member orientation. To help them jumpstart their orientation, many are simply handing board members a copy of this booklet! They're using it like a menu, saying:

*"You've heard us ask board members to help in our fundraising. Here are 21 ways to do that. We're asking board members to choose just one or two of these tasks and do it for the next year. In addition to #1 of course! Which ones would be a good fit for you?"*

This ask works in one-on-one conversations and in full board meetings. Knowing a board member's choice helps you have more substantive conversations throughout the year. And it helps you have "fundraising by board members" become hard-wired into your regular process.

I hope this booklet is as helpful for you as it has been for so many nonprofits around the world. And please let me know how I can help. I'd love to explore coaching you or coming out to train your board. After one half-day board training, a nonprofit saw a *40% increase* in their fundraising...the year *after* the housing market crashed! ***Engaged board members can transform your fundraising, regardless of the economy!***

You can read about that nonprofit at:  
<https://fundraisingcoach.com/case-studies/>

To your fundraising success,



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