

Ten Things to Consider About Leading Your Staff's Efforts

1. Infusing the Culture of Philanthropy

Infusing the culture of philanthropy is about much more than developing a major giving program; in fact, it is not about funding at all. It is about shifting the way the public perceives public media within the non-profit landscape. The current emphasis is placed on public broadcasting's content, its competitiveness with commercial media, the costs for service delivery, and other aspects of "broadcasting as business". The culture of philanthropy gives context to the content/service delivery by emphasizing the distinct nature of public radio and television as significant local institutions in service to the community.

Beyond the education, entertainment, and informative content of the programming, public radio and television also serve as education centers, voices for the under-represented, access points for civic engagement in democracy, community conveners, protectors of journalistic integrity, and many other roles. These form the foundation of the case for support that prompts donors to offer a major gift as an investment in this service to the community. To raise awareness of public media as an important community agency and service, there must first be an internal transformation of how we perceive ourselves, how we achieve the mission of public broadcasting, and how we place the needs of the community at the heart of all we do.

2. Major Giving is about Relationships

Fundraising, as a profession, is not about money; it is about building relationships, one person at a time, with those who believe in the mission of public media as a vital service to the local community. The sincerity and longevity of these relationships bring stronger commitment to the mission and increased levels of investment, sometimes as major gifts. While these relationships may occur by chance or shared interest, leaders in public radio and television must be intentional, strategic, systematic, and persistent in building these relationships. The quantity of relationships is not as important as the quality since each one brings unique added value to station resources. Over time, the investment in relationship building supported by evidence of responsible stewardship will yield support in greater magnitudes of time, emotion, advocacy, and funding.

3. Preparing Staff for Transformational Change

In public broadcasting, staff are fairly used to change – in leadership, in finances, in programming, and many other aspects of their work. But, as the aphorism goes, the more things change the more they stay the same. In a

2004 article on change in public radio, a veteran noted that “organizations become successful by doing the right thing well, making incremental improvements each and every year to serve their markets better. But, because the world changes continually, what was the right thing yesterday may be the wrong thing today.”¹ Public radio is one of the most reliable, trusted, and recognized brands in media, but the business model and practices that have helped to achieve this are no longer sufficient.

For public radio to remain relevant, accessible, viable, and sustainable, new business models and practices are necessary. LFP is part of a fundamental transformation taking place across all aspects of the industry. General managers must help staff to understand what is driving this transformation and the new roles for all professional staff as collaborators. Each station must develop and implement strategies that grow their audience, implement new technologies, diversify revenue streams, and other shifts that will propel public media forward.

4. The Development & Major Giving Skill-Set

The need for non-profits to fundraise in order to survive is nothing new, but, public media has never been viewed as a traditional non-profit organization. The traditional skill-set for development in public media includes underwriting (corporate support), membership (individual giving), and grant-writing (foundations). These are critical to the continuing success of public broadcasting but are not sufficient to provide long-term financial sustainability.

Strategies and skill sets must be expanded to include other strategies with the potential for positive returns including major giving, planned, giving, capital campaigns, community engagement, capacity building, board development, electronic management systems, among others. The underlying skills of case building, donor identification, prospect research, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship are familiar to experienced development professionals. General managers, board volunteers, and professional staff will need training, support, and resource development to develop the competencies that will result in successful outcomes.

5. Consistency of Messaging, Focus on Core Values, Building A Brand

Public broadcasters have always been attentive to the sound and messaging related to station programs and services. The care to maintain those elements of the station and system brands are even more critical as the focus on mission, core values, and service delivery to the community become the motivation for major gift donors. The community must see these

¹ Cindy Browne, “Analyzing Change Models helps you Beat the Odds and Succeed”, *Current*, 2004

values reflected in all aspects of station operations and messaging from on-air elements of programming, voice, and personnel to digital, website, print, and other content/messaging.

6. The Exponential Impact of Staff and Volunteers

The development team is the work engine that moves the development strategy forward, making sure all of the working parts are in place and well tended. The General Manager, as the public face of the station, is the champion of the major giving program advocating the case for support publicly at every opportunity possible. But, the CEO has a limited amount of time and associations to yield the quality and number of contacts needed to achieve the full potential of the major giving program.

To truly achieve outcomes that can help to transform and stabilize public radio and television for generations to come, it is necessary for staff and volunteers to do their part. Individual board and staff members exponentially increase the number of “quality touches” prospective donors have with the station. Whether intentional or incidental, every interaction is a philanthropic moment that advocates/represents the case for support for the station, they deepen the relationships with individuals and the community. With intent, strategy, and communication, the activities of volunteers and staff will extend the breadth and depth of major giving strategies.

7. Collaborative Leadership

A comprehensive development program will require collaborative leadership between the CEO, Development Director, Board Chair, and Senior Staff. The daily operations, strategic initiatives, and development/major giving efforts are linked. To successfully move all of them forward will require elevated levels of trust, support, collaboration, and communication. Senior Staff will need to rise to new levels of leadership for internal operations as the CEO supports volunteers as they rise to new levels of external leadership. Everyone will find new roles, new challenges, and new opportunities as the transformations take place.

8. Communicating A Plan

The greatest barrier to success of a major giving initiative is lack of planning. LFP work is focused on the development and implementation of a workplan to construct a major giving program that is custom fit to your station and community. The workplan is an implementation road map that, when completed, should position the CEO, Board, and station to facilitate the program with positive results. The more stakeholders who are aware of and engaged in the plan, the greater the levels of investment, collaboration, and the likelihood of success. Transparency yields results, secrecy breeds

anxiety; while everyone does not need to know every detail, the more that is shared about strategies, goals, action plans, roles, and outcomes, the lighter the load for the CEO.

9. Strengthen the Station Firewall

Public media have been particularly careful about maintaining independence, autonomy, and authority for internal and strategic decision making. This has been the case even with those relationships that are financially linked such as institutional licensees, corporate funders, even individual members who make requests during fund drives. Major giving does not present new challenges to the funding firewall but the number, magnitude, and nature of the relationships and gifts necessitate attention to these issues. Station leadership will need to develop/update policies and procedures related to gift solicitation and acceptance. Volunteers will need to assist in mutual accountability to keep separate funding and management issues. Staff will need to become more comfortable with deeper engagement with the community, partners, and donors. None will need to compromise their integrity but all must elevate their awareness, attentiveness, and communication regarding the protective mechanisms that build the station's funding firewall.

10. The Responsibility of Shared Stewardship

Community expectations of nonprofit leaders have undergone great change.. Donors and volunteer leaders have "soft expectations" including wisdom, vision, and integrity as well as "hard expectations" including accountability, transparency, and measurable action. Staff also have these expectations and, along with the CEO, share the responsibility to deliver them. Every staff member must be attentive to good stewardship through teamwork, attention to the mission/vision/values/brand, constant awareness of the culture of philanthropy, championing the case for support, and consistently providing quality opportunities for volunteers, the community, and donors to engage with the station, on-air and off.