

# PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATIONS RESOURCES FOR FLORIDA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

## 2. FUNDRAISING: ASSESSING CAPACITY

*"The Brevard Library Foundation provides financial resources for the Brevard County Library Service to enrich and accelerate innovation within the library experience for the shared benefit of our community."*

*Mission Statement, Brevard Library Foundation.*

How does a library know if it's ready to fund raise? Self-assessment is the key, undertaking a real searching look at the library's organizational structure, governance structure, volunteers and friends, staff capability and expertise and, of course, the competitive environment in which it is situated.

Fundraising should only begin after the library does an assessment of its position and its capabilities. Of course, some libraries simply jump into fundraising and are successful. However, in order to build ongoing support, the library leadership has to realize that fundraising is not a one-time event or campaign but rather a strategy of building friends and supporters for the long-term benefit of the institution and those it serves.

### **LIBRARIES WITH NO EXPERIENCE FUNDRAISING**

Many libraries, no matter their size and/or service area, have had no experience fundraising. While some of these libraries may have Friends or support groups that have raised funds via book sales and ice cream socials, there has been no concentrated intention to raise funds from the private sector for specific purposes. An assessment of the library's fundraising potential should answer the following questions:

- Is there a plan for the library's growth and development?
- What is the financial picture of the library and what are its financial needs for the next year and beyond?
- Who will make the decision about whether to pursue outside sources of revenue and how?
- Do the library staff and/or board have individuals with knowledge of and experience in fundraising? If so, who will take the lead? If not, where can the necessary individuals gain experience and expertise?
- What is the competition for private donations in the library's service area: museums, hospitals, universities, etc.?
- Are there private individuals, foundations or businesses in the local area that are very supportive of the library and who would step up to help in a fundraising effort?
- If there are one or more Friends of the library groups, will they be an asset or a detriment to a fundraising effort?
- Can the library seek outside assistance, i.e. a fundraising consultant, to kick-start the effort and provide training and information to the library's leadership?
- Can the library make the case for private support? Is private support part of the library's strategic directions?

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- How will the leadership of the library's governmental jurisdiction feel about the library's fundraising effort and will it affect the jurisdiction's public funding support of the library?

### LIBRARIES WITH LIMITED FUNDRAISING EXPERIENCE

Some libraries have limited experience raising funds from the private sector. This may include having an active Friends of the library group that has solicited funds from individuals and businesses, or library staff, particularly the library director, has asked for funds and/or in-kind donations for special projects like summer reading programs for children or book collections. Money and donations may be given to the Friends group or to the library's operating budget. In this scenario, there are individuals on the staff and in the volunteer group who have actively asked for money and are at least somewhat comfortable doing so.

If the library wishes to step up its fundraising program and prowess, it will need to address the questions from the previous section. In addition, a library with limited fundraising experience will need to answer these additional questions:

- Where is the money raised going to go and why?
  - A separate library foundation?
  - The Friends group?
  - The library's operating budget?
- Who will be responsible for raising and accounting for the funds and why?
  - The library's director?
  - The Friends group?
  - A library foundation?
  - A development director on the library's staff?
- Is there sufficient staff support to undertake a major fundraising effort? If not, where is the support going to come from?
- Are there prominent local individuals who can help the library raise funds and are they willing to do so? Who is going to identify and ask these individuals to commit to the library's effort?

### LIBRARIES WITH CONSIDERABLE FUNDRAISING EXPERIENCE

*"Foundation activities, successes and outputs need to be evaluated by an outside group ... every few years to make sure the Foundation is operating the best it can."  
Robert Cannon, Director, Broward County Libraries Division.*

As more and more libraries have engaged in fundraising over the past several years, libraries of all sizes have gained considerable experience in raising private funds. Libraries have created library foundations with separate boards of directors and staff. Others have hired development directors and other staff to organize the fundraising effort. Some of these libraries have continued to build on their successes with larger and more complex fundraising campaigns and initiatives. Some have found that their fundraising efforts stall after completing successful but exhausting campaigns and the fundraising leadership grows tired or moves on to other causes.

In order to re-inspire and refocus the efforts of this type of library and to put in place a more sophisticated fundraising apparatus, the more experienced fundraising library will have to assess its position by

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answering all the previous questions as well as addressing those that follow:

- What is the best organizational structure for continued successful fundraising and why?
  - A separate library foundation?
  - A revitalized Friends group?
  - An internal development office?
- Do we have the best board for fundraising?
  - Who is on it?
  - Where are there gaps?
  - Have the board members made their own contributions?
- What kind of fundraising campaigns have been undertaken and why?
  - Annual campaigns?
  - Planned giving?
  - Special events?
  - Others?
- Is the library's leadership totally behind the fundraising efforts and how fully are they engaged?
- Is the library's staff knowledgeable about the fundraising effort and can they speak to its successes if asked by the public and/or potential donors?
- Is donor cultivation ongoing and donor recognition appropriate?

By taking a realistic and searching look at its experience in fundraising, the skills and expertise of staff and volunteers, the potential leadership for future fundraising efforts and its organizational assets and gaps, a library can set the best course forward to build fundraising capacity.