

PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATIONS RESOURCES FOR FLORIDA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

9. RAISING MONEY

"If you don't ask, you won't get."

Robert Melanson, Director, Winter Park Public Library

Fundraising for public libraries is nothing new. In fact, America's oldest public libraries were privately funded institutions which over the years became increasingly funded by public funds. But it is only in the past few decades that public libraries have begun to actively and, in some cases, aggressively seek to supplement local funds with private fundraising from generous individuals, corporations and nonprofit foundations. Florida's public libraries have followed this trend. In Fiscal Year 2007-2008, Florida's friends and foundations spent \$6,359,257 on public libraries. This was one percent of the total of \$573,889,575 spent on public libraries in Florida for that period.

Library managers are well acquainted with the annual struggle to fund a successful and innovative library. The recent economic downturn has had a major impact on public libraries in Florida and beyond as budgets have been cut, library hours have been scaled back and allocations for library collections and services have been decimated.

Philanthropic giving, the willing and voluntary giving of gifts, i.e. money or services, to a nonprofit organization by an individual, a group, a corporation or a private foundation, is the target of fundraising. In the United States, philanthropic giving supports many causes, including education, social services, health, arts, culture, and libraries.

Almost all public libraries in Florida are governmental entities administered by public employees. While library leaders may be skilled in interacting with their local governmental entities to make the case for public funding, in the world of philanthropy and private donors, libraries are competing with many worthy, privately-funded nonprofit organizations and institutions, most of which are experienced players in the fundraising arena.

Making the Case for Fundraising

The public often has the perception that libraries get all the resources they need from governmental sources. Potential donors may also have such an assumption. Therefore, as the library begins to contemplate fundraising and, perhaps, establishing or energizing an existing library foundation, the image and the significance of the library in the community has to be illuminated.

A public library is an outstanding example of what a community can do with a relatively small allocation of public funds. As such, it is well positioned to speak to its role of providing services to benefit every resident. A public library with a long history of public funding may now also require private funds to assist it in initiating new services, expanding collections, building or renovating facilities and upgrading and adopting new technology. It will be necessary to make the case to prospective donors that, while the majority of the public library's financial resources come from the public sector, private funding sources are an important resource for the library's continued well-being as it serves the community.

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Is Fundraising Right For Your Library?

In financially challenging times, libraries are often faced with a dilemma – find an alternative source of revenue or cut the budget. Frequently, governmental officials, library board members, and well-meaning individuals suggest or even require that the library begin to raise money immediately. But, fundraising is not a fix for financial emergencies. While there have been campaigns designed to save an institution in dire straits, such efforts cannot be the basis of a sound long-range development (fundraising) plan.

Fundraising takes time, careful planning, adequate resources, skilled staff and/or volunteers and money. In order to raise money, you have to spend money – on donor cultivation, tracking and research tools, marketing materials, consultants and legal fees, if necessary, etc. Even if volunteers lead the fundraising effort, the library staff, usually at the management level, will have to devote time to work with the volunteers, prepare information, do research, account for the gifts, and spend the funds raised in accordance with the donors' wishes.

The library must be prepared to deal with the concerns of its staff and others as it embarks upon a new way to provide financial resources for its operations. Internal concerns can range from "Why should we?" to "We don't know how!" to "We're too busy." What is essential is knowing the library's priorities and then making sure that the fundraising follows the intent of these priorities.

Fundraising must be undertaken in a carefully planned manner because it is part of the financial equation for the library. That is, private funds will become part of the library's revenue mix. It should be done in concert with the strategic directions of the library and be used to fulfill the library's goals and objectives. While it is possible that a generous donor may offer to fund something special for the library that has not been on the library's planning horizon, in most cases the library's plans for the future are the same plans that should be on the library's list of funding priorities.

The library director should address the following questions as a fundraising effort and/or the establishment of a library foundation is contemplated:

- Will it be possible to talk frankly with the elected officials in the library's jurisdiction regarding the impact of private funding on public funding?
- Can the library leaders reach agreement with public officials that private funding should complement but not replace public funding?
- Can staff, as well as public officials, recognize the benefit of supplementing public funding to create new programs, enhance services, improve facilities, etc.?
- Can library leaders identify and contact potential private sector partners and donors to inform them of the library's plans?

Asking For Money

Before philanthropy can take place, in most cases, a person has to be asked for a gift. And asking is often the most difficult action a person new to fundraising must take. Ultimately, fundraising is only asking for a gift. Like public speaking, asking for money is something many people fear. They feel inadequate or unprepared and, of course, they fear rejection. The entire art and science of fundraising focuses on preparing to ask. This includes preparing the case for fundraising, doing the necessary research on prospective donors, finding and preparing the right person to make the request, making sure the request is for the correct amount, and, finally, thanking and recognizing the donor for the gift.

Florida libraries reporting the existence of a library foundation raised money for capital improvements, collections, technology, and service enhancements. Funding raised annually by the individual libraries varied widely from \$2,300 to \$400,000, with most libraries reporting raising less than \$50,000 annually.