Board Engagement:

Mapping Your Board for Fundraising Success

Authors: Dwayne Ashley, Founder and CEO, Sylvia White, COO, Bridge Philanthropic Consulting

Your firm's role in mapping board relationships

The lifeblood of any fundraising program is finding, cultivating, and keeping your donors. Unfortunately, too many organizations approach fundraising from a need-based mentality. Their immediate inclination is to hire a fundraising consultant hoping to raise funds quickly, hold a special event, raise the money they need, put their donors on a list, and then leave them there until the next time they need them.

Unlike fine wine, however, donors don't age well—at least not unless they are cared for like the grapes the wine came from. And the best way to do that is to cultivate existing donors to draw them into the organization, build a relationship with them, make them feel needed, and reward them as often as possible.

If your client organization doesn't have any donors, or only a small cadre of donors, the immediate job is to find more.

But where do you find them?

Finding Prospective Donors

You begin by identifying target prospects. The people closest to the organization make up the 'natural' constituency. These are the people who may benefit directly from the organization's mission. If your client is a college or private school, they would be the students. If your client is a medical center, they would be the patients.

While the organization may have a relationship with these people, however, they don't make your best donors. At least not until they've moved beyond needing your services. School alumni and grateful patients, on the other hand, are good target audiences for development officers.

The next level out is the 'institutional' constituency. These are the individuals closest to the organization by choice. They include board members, volunteers, current donors, and staff. These people should all be familiar with and believe in the organization's mission and therefore make the perfect initial target audience. Not only should they all be current donors, but they can lead you to a broad group of indirect connections who may support the cause because of a relationship with someone in the organization's institutional constituency.

Mapping Board Relationships

How do you tap into the group indirectly connected to your client organization? The best way is through relationship 'mapping.' And the place to start is with their board.

If building relationships is the golden bullet to fundraising, then the board is one of the greatest resources any organization has. If they have recruited their board well, they have connections that run deep within the community, deep within various professions, and deep within the business/corporate arena based on who their board members know.

Relationship mapping tracks those connections and 'data mines' them for their potential benefit to the organization. When done properly, the staff will be left with a treasure trove of information they can use to identify potential organizational ambassadors and volunteers, expand marketing and public relations efforts, evaluate the potential for major campaigns, secure corporate partners for big initiatives, and yes, raise money.

What is relationship mapping?

It's the process you'll go through to map the organization's board members' sphere of influence, namely their relationships with other potential stakeholders. The goal is to highlight people and/or businesses that board members have potential influence with and then to determine which ones of those could potentially be of benefit to your client's mission.

How you introduce the idea of relationship mapping to the board, however, is crucial. People tend to guard their personal and business relationships and rarely give them up easily. While board members may have a passion for your cause, when it comes to giving up the names of their friends or business associates, they might feel they are betraying confidences, intruding on people's lives, or pushing themselves on others.

The process, then, becomes a careful dance between you, the staff, and the board members. Your job will be to carefully remind board members why they have chosen to support the organization in the first place, how important their help is in meeting the long-term goals and objectives, make them comfortable with the idea of expanding into their sphere of influence, and then recruit their help in doing so.

Start with "Why"

If you haven't read Simon Sinek's book *'Start with Why,'* you should. It explores the essence of why people connect to a business or a cause. A simple example of that is the difference between someone joining the board of a clothes bank because they want to give away clothes to people-in-need and joining the board because they want to help restore a person's *dignity* by providing clean, gently used clothing. One motivation is transactional, while the other is based in emotion. Tap into that emotion, and the board member will be happy to help build a relationship map using the people they know.

Secondly, be clear on what the goal is – Are you searching for auction items for a big gala or high-net donors for a capital campaign? This will help you refine the search. In other words, your goal will determine whether you are looking for small business owners who could donate important auction items or corporate decision makers who control the potential for major gifts.

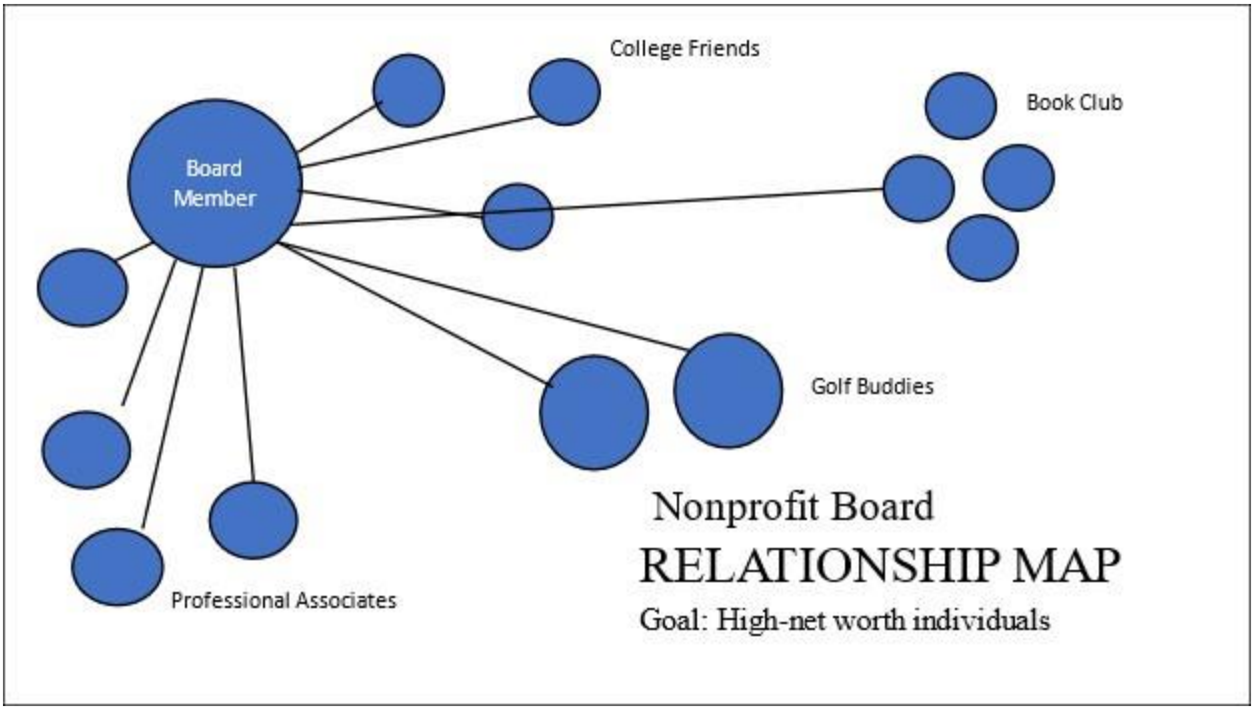
If your client is a young organization without any donors or just a small group of donors, it's best to map as many contacts in a board member's sphere of influence as possible. Have them think about things such as:

- **Social groups they belong to;**
- **Other nonprofits whose boards they sit on;**
- **Business associates;**
- **Alumni organizations they are active with;**
- **People they are in a fraternity or sorority with;**
- **People they go to church with.**

Don't just collect names, however. Create a profile of each individual so that you have a picture of what they're like and how best to approach them.

The Finished Product

When you're finished, a relationship map should be a visual diagram of circles and lines connecting each board member to the people within their sphere of influence. With the information you've gleaned, you'll then connect each person to a potential goal or objective. This way the fundraising staff will be able to outline the organization's total network, visually link goals to new prospects, and develop cultivation plans.



Your next step is to help the staff activate the relationships. You need to plan ways to bring these individuals closer to the organization with the help of the board member who knows them, so that at some point that individual becomes a prospective donor. Board members should also follow the organization on social media so that when the staff posts something about the organization, they can make comments or repost for their network to see. Staff can always ask folks they are cultivating to follow them as well.

It’s All About Relationships

Remember, if the lifeblood of any fundraising program is finding, cultivating, and keeping your donors, then to be successful you’ll need to build and maintain those relationships. Through that process, they will actively keep donors and prospective donors informed, inspired, and motivated to give repeatedly.

In the end, relationship mapping is a perfect tactic to help you help your clients. It is a visual image of their interconnectedness between insiders and outsiders and gives them a road map to begin the process of moving people closer and closer to their organization. It will also help them make decisions as to who they feel is ready to be asked for their financial support.

And isn’t that what it’s all about?

Authors

Dwayne Ashley *Founder and Chief Executive Officer*

Dwayne Ashley is renowned for his bold, strategic thinking and wise counsel in philanthropy. He is a successful entrepreneur in the course of his career, he raised more than $800 million. A fearless and authentic solicitor, he is committed to social justice and helping organizations of color maximize their fundraising success. He advises non-profits and influencers globally.

A powerhouse of energy and a passion for fundraising, Dwayne has managed capital and annual campaigns and spearheaded development for such notable organizations as the Jazz at Lincoln Center, Success for Kids, 100 Black Men of America, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, the United Negro College Fund, and the United Way of Texas Gulf Coast, among many others.

Dwayne is a thought-leader in the field and he has shared valuable concepts in numerous articles and in four books. They include Eight Steps to Raising Money: Measuring Your Fundraising Impact, Word for Word Publishing; 8 Winning Steps to Creating a Successful Special Event with Carol Campbell, Director of Events at Prairie View A&M University; I'll Find A Way or Make One: A Tribute to HBCUs with noted journalist Juan Williams and Dream Internships: It's Not Who You Know, But What You Know! He is an alumnus of Wiley College and the University of Pennsylvania Fels School of Government.

Sylvia White *Chief Operations Officer*

Sylvia White is the Chief Operations Officer at Bridge Philanthropic Consulting and a seasoned executive with experience managing teams in every development area, including major gifts, corporate and foundation relations, annual giving, stewardship, systems, and research. With significant experience in principal and major gifts, Sylvia has worked with top-level donors to secure millions of dollars in pledges to various organizations and businesses championing change.

In addition to her professional accolades, Sylvia has published articles in the New York University College of Dentistry's Global Health Nexus, The Positive Community Magazine and is a proud member of The Harlem Writers Guild, the oldest operating Black Writers Workshop in the United States. A recipient of many awards for civic and community service, she has also served as a volunteer for The Harlem Arts Alliance, The Hope Center, The Harlem Renaissance Five Mile Race, Volunteers in Service to America, Literacy Volunteers, and Prison Fellowship, and the NAACP Mid-Manhattan Branch.