

The Goettler Series
To Advance
The Business of Philanthropy

10

The Role of Volunteers

*Developing Effective
Fund-Raising Leaders*

The Goettler Series

This article is one of a series on what we at Goettler Associates consider to be the essential elements of fund raising and institutional development today.

We have developed this series in response to interest expressed by our clients and our colleagues in the field.

One must, however, always exercise caution in writing an article as a guide or “how-to” piece. While the article addresses general principles, each philanthropic institution finds itself in different circumstances.

We like to think that one of the qualities that distinguishes Goettler Associates in the fund-raising field is our recognition of this fact: that each institution, each campaign, each situation is different, and that each requires the experience and skills of a team of professionals to listen, learn, analyze, and interpret — and then to organize and carry out the strategy appropriate to the specific circumstances.

On the other hand, we also recognize the need to increase awareness of the time-tested principles of successful fund raising and to advance the “state of the art,” so to speak. We intend this series to be an important contribution in this respect.

This series may also help you understand how we think and how we approach fund development and advancing our philanthropic sector. We hope that it will provoke questions — and that you’ll call us for answers.

The Role of Volunteers

Developing Fund-Raising Leaders

© 1999 by Goettler Associates, Inc.
and Laura J. MacDonald, CFRE
Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University

In successful fund raising, effective volunteers are uncommon and essential. They are those rare individuals who are willing to “stick their necks out” in order to build, sustain and expand the organizations that enrich our quality of life. Fund-raising efforts thrive given the efforts of inspired volunteers, and stagnate when the voluntary spirit is weak or absent.

Some volunteers are high-profile individuals whose public persona rallies others to a cause. More common though are the quiet leaders who work tirelessly and anonymously.

Voluntary leadership has long been recognized as a critical ingredient in successful fund raising. Harold J. “Si” Seymour began his landmark 1966 book *Designs for Fund-Raising* by stating:

“. . . genuine leadership in any cause is rare, beyond price, and always the nucleus of significant achievement.”

The voluntary spirit has been unusually strong for the latter half of the 20th century. Nine out of ten of the nonprofit organizations now in existence were established since World War II, because men and women have identified society’s problems, inspired others, and worked to find solutions. They have established human service agencies, expanded health care centers, strengthened education, and enhanced cultural institutions.

As with most critical resources, the supply of volunteers is limited, and the pool is shrinking and changing in response to cultural shifts. Future volunteers will bring far more diverse experiences and backgrounds than their predecessors; their motivations and methods will be different.

Successful development professionals must adapt their training and management techniques to the needs of the volunteers if their institutions are to thrive.

Fund-raising efforts thrive given the efforts of inspired volunteers, and stagnate when the voluntary spirit is absent.

Many circumstances—a response to a crisis or a sudden windfall—may inspire volunteers to emerge. An organization would do well to recognize such leadership capacity and nurture it for the future.

The importance of voluntary leadership is most evident when an organization is planning to face great challenges—or seize great opportunities—in preparation for a major capital or endowment campaign, for example. Such times usually require an organization to seek potential advocates proactively.

Today, a new corps of volunteers is being asked to sustain the good works of a remarkably civic generation and initiate new responses to society's needs. Our current challenges can be met by recruiting, training, and nurturing the emerging trailblazers who aspire to advance the quality of life in their communities and beyond.

Why are volunteers so important?

Especially in a time when more and more fundraising efforts are partially or completely dependant on professional staff, the notion of volunteerism may seem impractical or even anachronistic. Admittedly, managing a corps of volunteers can be just as much work even more than assigning the same tasks to the employees of an organization. So why bother?

Perhaps the primary consideration is the impact on those who are the volunteers. Long-term financial commitment is built upon a tradition of voluntary involvement. When volunteers internalize an organization's case for support, and

begin to rephrase it using their own words and reflecting their personal experiences with the organization and those it serves, they internalize the cause. As commitment increases, the bond to the organization strengthens. So, too, does the likelihood he or she will support the organization generously over the long haul.

... a potential contributor is more likely to respond generously to a committed and capable volunteer...

Furthermore, in virtually every instance a potential contributor or campaign worker is more likely to respond generously to a committed and capable volunteer than to a paid staff member, no matter how impassioned or articulate the plea.

When a volunteer issues an invitation or advocates for a cause, his or her charitable motives are clear. Staff members or paid solicitors may be perceived as merely “doing their jobs.” While a formal letter or courteous phone call from the development officer could go unanswered for months, an inquiry from a friend or business peer will almost always get a response.

Respected volunteers are effective because they provide accountability and credibility. They are an organization's eyes and ears in the community — and the community's eyes and ears within the organization. Wise volunteers help to

ensure that an organization's mission adapts to meet community needs, and that the organization receives the recognition and support to sustain that mission. They create an environment that is conducive to effective fund raising.

Strategies for identifying, cultivating, soliciting and sustaining donors will differ, depending upon the role of volunteers. The most effective team approach combines the advantages of voluntary leadership with the oversight of professional management (see table below).

What are the traits of effective volunteers?

The first step in nurturing effective volunteers is to recognize leadership potential on your board or among your constituents. Not all will have the ability or desire to be effective fund raisers, so opportunities must not be squandered.

Of course, no individual will possess all of the ingredients of success in equal measure. But a self-assured volunteer will recognize his or her limitations and recruit others with complementary strengths to compensate.

Influence: They should be well known and respected within the community of prospective donors and workers, and capable of attracting attention and, ultimately, support.

Affluence and generosity: When a campaign leader makes a major gift* it can set the pace for success. An effective volunteer will certainly be as generous in proportion to his or her own resources as prospective donors are expected to be.

Advocacy and Action: His or her words and actions will speak loudly and inspire others, especially if they are authentic and reliable.

Volunteer/Staff Model in the Fund-Raising Process

	Identification	Cultivation	Solicitation	Stewardship
Volunteers and Staff Working Together	Volunteers' contacts are enhanced with research	Prospects' movement toward commitment is managed astutely	Blends volunteers' influence and credibility with professional oversight	Volunteers' appreciation complemented by structured management
Volunteers Alone	Limited to the volunteers' social and professional contacts	Sincere, but often neglected, haphazard, or unfocused	Even effective volunteers may fall behind schedule or stumble when the time comes to ask	Sincere, but often neglected, haphazard, or unfocused
Staff or Paid Solicitor Alone	Targeting the "likely suspects"	Number of prospects who can be cultivated is limited by number of staff who can make calls	Gifts often smaller when personal connection is absent	Long-term relationships often neglected as staff pursues short-term goals

Wisdom: An experienced volunteer can transfer business and life experience to the fund-raising process, helping a campaign avoid pitfalls and seize opportunities.

Those who would “lend” their name to a cause without dedicating an effort may think they’re helping, but they won’t inspire others.

Dedication: Seymour observed that “nothing is more dangerous than the second-class attention of a first-class [person],” and all too many development officers have learned this first hand. Fund-raising requires a personal commitment to soliciting gifts, recruiting others, and participating in campaign activities. Those who would “lend” their name to a cause without dedicating an effort may think they’re helping, but they won’t inspire others.

Enthusiasm and eloquence: Others will rally to a cause when the leader is able to clearly articulate the case for support** in a way that demonstrates personal enthusiasm and moves others to action.

Tenacity: Let’s face it. Fund raising is not an easy task. A leader must be prepared to stick with the job long after the initial excitement has waned.

Wit: In the midst of difficult decisions or tense meetings, a leavening of laughter can keep everyone moving forward together.

What are the jobs of an effective volunteer?

Too often, an enthusiastic supporter agrees to serve as a volunteer, but becomes bewildered because the task is unclear or the goal is ambiguous. Clear, written descriptions of each volunteer job can eliminate confusion and aid in the recruiting process.

A volunteer’s actual title will depend upon organizational structure and the task to be accomplished. He or she may be the chair of the governing board or the development committee, or may be the president of the auxiliary. In a special effort, an institution may have recruited him or her to chair an ad hoc special event committee.

One of the most likely and most critical times to find an effective leader is when a campaign chair is required. Whatever the role, it should be clearly defined with a written job description defining specific fund-raising tasks, such as:

* For more information about major gifts, see Volume 9 in *The Goettler Series*.

** For more information about the case for support, see Volume 4 in *The Goettler Series*.

Affirming the campaign plan: The approval of the campaign plan will reinforce its validity to other volunteers and donors.

Recruiting a volunteer corps: Most successful efforts depend upon a large corps of volunteers to call on all the prospects and serve support roles. A strong leader can be invaluable in identifying and recruiting the right people.

Articulating the Case for Support: When volunteers express an institution's vision in their own words with passion, they become effective and persuasive advocates.

Soliciting major gifts: Prospects for large gifts are most likely to give when asked by a peer who has already shown support for the cause at a similar level.

Planning and attending meetings: Few people enjoy meetings, but they are often the best way to inform, assign, and ensure accountability. A solid volunteer won't avoid meetings, especially if the institution keeps them brief, to the point, and adds a measure of hospitality or entertainment.

Resolving questions: How will deferred gifts be credited? Should a challenge grant be accepted? Questions such of these arise regularly and warrant input from key volunteers.

Experienced volunteers will bring depth of understanding beyond the job description to the role, testing the institution's decisions against his or her own experience and intuition. They will ask the very questions potential donors will pose:

- Has the institution clearly articulated its mission and clearly identified the purpose of the funds to be raised?
- Will the case for support appeal to the potential donors?
- Is the campaign planning study accurate and thorough?
- Is the table of gifts ambitious yet realistic in consideration of the donor constituency's financial capacity?
- Are there sufficient prospects for other leadership roles and the necessary major gifts?
- Can the institution (or its consultants) provide the necessary management and administration?

By asking these questions and insisting on thoughtful answers, a wise volunteer can ensure the direction and discipline that will keep an effort on course.

And finally, all volunteers deserve an opportunity to participate in one of the most important and gratifying steps in the fund-raising process: thanking the donors. This can range from a signature on a thank you letter to hosting the final celebration.

Such activity is not just good stewardship of the donors, it also rewards the hard workers with a well-earned sense of accomplishment. And a sincere “thank you” secures relationships for the long term: between volunteer and donor, between worker and institution, between institution and community.

Identifying and recruiting volunteers for a fund-raising campaign

Identifying and recruiting effective volunteers can be among the most significant decisions in a campaign, for all the reasons already discussed.

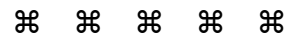
Ideally, leadership will emerge from the “family,” e.g., the board of trustees, the alumni association, or another group of “insiders.” Presumably candidates from these groups are already committed to the cause and will have participated in deciding the campaign goals and objectives, suggesting their tacit approval.

If there is not an obvious candidate among the “family,” then an institution has two options: wait to cultivate a stronger board, or attempt to recruit someone not closely affiliated. When necessity precludes an organization from waiting months, even years, for the board to mature, an outsider must be found.

Nurturing Leaders from Within: The “Junior” Board

A respected cultural institution enjoyed one of the strongest boards in the community. Many civic leaders and arts patrons aspired to join the small but influential board. It seemed an enviable position, but the small size and elevated stature had its weaknesses. Each time a board member retired or a special task arose, the staff had to scramble to find others to serve.

Concerns decreased with the formation of an auxiliary group of volunteer leaders. Here it was called the Donors’ Committee; other institutions have used titles like “Junior Board” or “Advisory Council.” Although its members do not set policy, they provide leadership for annual fund-raising efforts. The volunteers gain valuable experience with an elite organization and singular insights into its mission and programs. Several have been rewarded with an invitation to join the organization’s board. The institution has an opportunity to nurture new talent and test leadership abilities while sustaining community ownership.



Usually, the outside candidate will be motivated by an interest in the cause rather than loyalty to the institution. Take great care to ensure that he or she understands not just the campaign goal, but also the organization's mission.

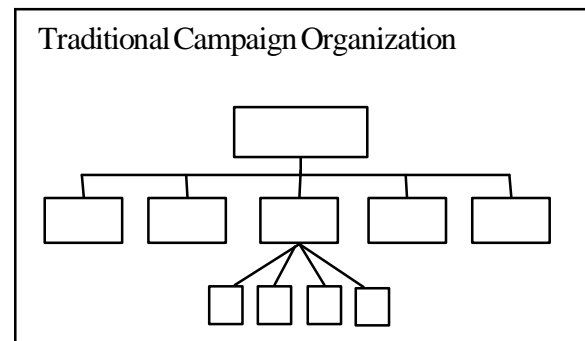
***... recruiting the campaign chair
... is not the time to play down
the responsibilities of leadership.***

Whether the candidate for leadership is a long-term board member or a new friend, he or she should be given a clear understanding of the role before being invited to serve. This is not the time to play down the responsibilities of leadership. Mutual understanding and respect will provide a strong foundation for a productive working relationship between the staff members, other volunteers, and the campaign chair.

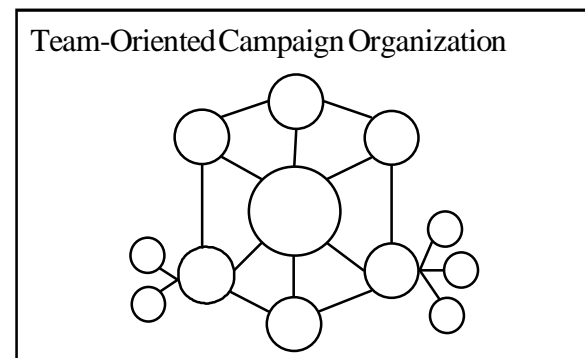
The "courtship" of a prospective leader must be discreet. Even the most compelling campaign effort can be undermined when word leaks out that one or two or three top citizens have declined a leadership role.

Even the most careful cultivation strategy can fail to secure the hoped-for commitment. When a recruitment effort fails, an immediate alternative is to ask the person who declines to help in identifying and recruiting another candidate. This often results in a leader with the skills that are necessary.

Traditionally, this process has begun with the identification, courtship, and recruitment of the campaign chair. He or she then went on to identify those who would lead the various campaign divisions, e.g., leadership gifts chairperson or the corporate gifts division. This rigid hierarchical structure worked well for a generation of leaders who were comfortable with its formality and is still applicable in many instances today.



In other instances, a more flexible approach is finding favor, especially with younger leaders who are accustomed to a team-oriented workplace that gives greater authority to independent groups of workers rather than relying on a "top-down" management structure.



**How are effective volunteers developed? —
*Training versus coaching***

“Volunteer training” conjures images of bored business executives and civic leaders sitting in dreary classrooms listening to a self-anointed fund-raising expert. This didactic method is among the least effective ways to teach adults in general, and fund-raising volunteers in particular. Successful entrepreneurs or civic leaders are not likely to sit quietly and listen to someone else tell them how things ought to be done.

Successful entrepreneurs or civic leaders are not likely to sit quietly and listen to someone else tell them how things ought to be done.

Effective fund-raising is more likely to be “caught” than “taught.” It requires that the student be motivated to learn usually by his or her passion for the cause and/or desire to succeed. The basic skills are not different from those found in most successful people: commitment, integrity, personableness, and sensitivity to the needs of others. Volunteers with these traits need only to be coached in the specific tactics of fund raising.

The best way for volunteers to learn is by doing. Making that first fund-raising call can be intimidating, though. To overcome hesitation, start with a role-playing exercise among the volunteers. The next step may be to pair the new fund raiser with an experienced volunteer or staff member and schedule a few visits with those who are known to be generous and likely to give — fellow board members or campaign workers for instance. Each call should be choreographed and rehearsed so that everyone’s role is clear and the goal of the appointment is achieved. If the protégé is especially skittish, the development officer might even call the donor in advance to ensure a successful outcome.

When the volunteer has gained confidence, then he or she can be assigned prospects to work independently. But keep the task manageable. Begin by assigning only three to five prospects per volunteer. Once those are accomplished, then additional assignments can be made, whereas the volunteer who starts out with eight or ten prospects may find the job too daunting and never begin at all.

Once a committed supporter has made a few successful fund-raising calls and discovered the personal fulfillment that comes with success, he or she will be an invaluable resource.

Is the pool of leadership talent declining?

Certainly the number of causes competing for the attention of civic-minded individuals is increasing. In her book *Pinpointing Affluence*, fund-raising demographer Judith E. Nichols asserts that:

“More and more charitable causes are competing for the best of the volunteer pool, a pool that is both changing and shrinking. Your new volunteers may well come from the emerging demographic groups: baby boomers, Hispanic Americans, older people, working women.”

These observations are supported by research from the Independent Sector that found that the percentage of the population that volunteers declined 5 percent in one five-year period. These trends have been attributed to various causes: more women in the workplace, professionals working increased hours and even a declining sense of civic duty.

While these statistics are cautionary, it is important to distinguish between the general pool of volunteers (such as dedicated museum docents and selfless soup kitchen workers) and leaders — those who take on extraordinary responsibilities. Leaders have always represented a small subset of the general population. And while our increasingly busy society has eroded some sources of volunteers, leaders have tradi-

tionally been busy working people.

Whether the availability of qualified leaders is declining or not, it is most certainly changing.

Only by seeking to understand our volunteers can we begin to provide the support that will allow them to be most effective.

In the latter half of the 20th century, leaders have come from the “civic” generation that came of age during WWII. Increasingly though, leadership is emerging from younger generations who were shaped by different circumstances. Understanding each generation’s unique characteristics can help guide the recruitment, management, and recognition of potential leaders.

General descriptions provide helpful guidance, but anyone who has worked with people in philanthropy or another realm has observed great differences, even between two people of the same generation and similar life experiences.

As with most aspects of philanthropy, the best way to understand someone’s motivation for serving and potential for leadership is to listen. Only by seeking to understand our volunteers can we begin to provide the support structures

***Leadership Emerging
Among Young Entrepreneurs***

When a social service agency in a small Midwestern city dreamed of building a new community center, they wondered who could provide the leadership to realize such a vision.

The town had not experienced the civic and economic renaissance that other rust-belt communities had enjoyed. Most of the traditional industries had been shuttered, or the senior positions had been transferred to out-of-town headquarters. The usual leaders were tired, retired, or gone.

Few had noticed when a former resident moved back to town to start a small technology firm, and began to win contracts, enlarge her facility, and add staff. The agency's leaders invited her to lunch and a tour of their decaying facility. By the time blueprints for the new center were unrolled, the young entrepreneur had created a mood of optimism with her enthusiastic response. When she agreed to serve as campaign chair, her enthusiasm translated into success for the agency and a new spirit in the community.

Many communities, large and small, are recognizing and nurturing younger leaders who are emerging from non-traditional industries and bring an entrepreneurial approach to campaign strategy.



that will allow them to be most effective.

What motivates a volunteer?

There are many hints to a volunteer's motivations and actions: generation, family circumstances, life experience, behavior, or other traits. While these clues are helpful to a point, we can never fully understand the complex expressions of leadership.

Motivations are as numerous as volunteers. The following are likely to inspire a strong voluntary spirit:

- An opportunity to meet the needs of the community or society rather than the "needs" of the institution. An institution that looks outward, rather than focusing on itself, will be most appealing.
- The opportunity to fulfill the personal needs of the volunteer, which might include self-acceptance, career advancement, personal fulfillment, or social interaction.
- It is human nature to be attracted to strong, successful organizations that provide authentic involvement, not those that are shallow or on the threshold of failure.
- Fiscal prudence—most agree that philanthropic resources should not be spent extravagantly.
- Strong management—while most expect some degree of independence, successful volunteers will also expect strong administrative support.

Organizations that recruit volunteers from such a position of strength will be far more likely to attract the attention of the community's best and brightest.

An institution that looks outward, rather than focusing on itself, will be most appealing to a prospective volunteer or leader.

Leading the leaders: the role of staff

Even the most capable volunteer will need a clear road map if he or she is to lead an institution to success. This is the role of professional staff: to provide the road map and all of the necessary resources that will fuel the volunteer corps' efforts.

The journey toward volunteer-centered fund raising begins by building authentic relationships with those who are likely to serve. Get to know their aspirations for the community and the organization and, if compatible with your mission, incorporate their vision into plans for the future. A volunteer is most likely to serve when he or she feels ownership for the cause.

A commitment to the role of the volunteer most often radiates from the board. Board members who embrace their responsibility as advocates will encourage others to serve.

And the voluntary spirit is strongest at those institutions that also radiate healthy morale among the staff members. A culture of accomplishment is inspiring and contagious whether it comes from the employees or the volunteer corps.

But, as Edison observed, inspiration is only five percent of the job. The other 95% is perspiration—most likely the development officer's or the campaign consultant's! Even the most competent and committed volunteers are likely to have other significant responsibilities. They will depend upon the professionals to prepare materials, conduct research, maintain records, plan strategies, and keep everything on track and on schedule.

When the development professional provides this level of support (usually behind the scenes), then the volunteer corps can shine, the organization can achieve its aspirations, and the voluntary spirit is sustained for future good works.

About the Firm

Goettler Associates was founded by Ralph H. Goettler in 1965 to serve the nation's nonprofit organizations. The firm brought together a group of highly qualified professionals to serve the total funding and marketing requirements of clients' major fund-raising initiatives. Since 1965, we have helped more than 1,500 nonprofit entities raise over \$1 billion to fund capital projects, build endowment, or facilitate special projects.

Services

Goettler Associates is a full-service, client-oriented firm. We tailor a program to the special circumstances of each client. This often requires a combination of several essential elements, including capital, annual, and deferred giving; and marketing and public relations. We take pride in the quality of counsel that we can provide in all of these areas.

We have helped our clients conduct successful capital campaigns, increase annual operating support, establish planned giving programs, and strengthen their endowments through our services:

Studies and Assessments

- › Campaign Planning Studies
- › Development Assessments
- › Strategic Planning

Donor Cultivation and Campaign Positioning

- › Leadership Awareness Programs
- › Case for Support Development
- › Campaign Identity and Marketing
- › Writing, Print Design, and Video Production

Development Support

- › Prospect Research
- › Endowment Management
- › Executive Search

Campaign Management

- › Resident Campaign Direction
- › Periodic Campaign Consulting
- › Consultation on Annual and Deferred Giving Programs

The Team

The Goettler Associates team of fund-raising professionals draws upon a wealth of experience and is supported by extensive human and information resources. Our consultants average more than fifteen years of experience in institutional advancement.

Building on Trust

Our Mission is to assist nonprofit organizations in achieving challenging fund-raising goals by:

- › strengthening the client's image and awareness;
- › recruiting, training, and motivating volunteers; and
- › attracting significant philanthropic support.

We guide our clients toward their financial goals through:

- › the integrity and high performance standards of our employees;
- › effective and honest relationships; and
- › the quality of our work in achieving success.

Let's Talk About Your Situation

Fund-raising campaigns have been won without implementing all the principles and strategies discussed in this article. Often, in the course of planning and executing a particular campaign, we find that the best way to achieve success is to “invent” new tools and approaches to replace the standard ones. We at Goettler Associates strive to apply the principles of fund raising in a flexible way that is appropriate to the needs and circumstances of each individual client.

There are certain constants, however. Our experience shows that the campaign which is properly conceived, planned, and executed—with the assistance of professional counsel—is the campaign which invariably enjoys success.

We'd enjoy talking with you informally about these ideas. Or, better yet, we'd like to learn about *your* situation and discuss with you how we can apply our experience and talents to further your success. We would welcome the opportunity—without cost or obligation—to learn more about the current status of your advancement program. This includes your development objectives, the challenges you face, and the resources you have for achieving your goals.

GOETTLER ASSOCIATES, INC.

580 South High Street

Columbus, OH 43215

(614) 228-3269

(800) 521-4827

www.goettler.com