

Neighborhood Networks Quarterly Consortia Conference Call “Starting a Fundraising Plan”

On February 5, 2008, Neighborhood Networks held its Quarterly Consortia Conference Call. The call was entitled, “Starting a Fundraising Plan.” Information was provided to consortia about designing a fundraising plan because it can be a powerful tool for cultivating relationships and acquiring new resources.

Guest speakers Susan Shiroma, Delia Burke, and Madelyne Pfeiffer discussed strategies necessary to raise funds for sustaining a Neighborhood Networks consortium’s programs and services. Shiroma is a senior librarian at The Foundation Center’s national headquarters office in New York, where she focuses on providing information services and educational outreach programs to staff at nonprofit organizations and private foundations. Burke is a board member of Digital Promise, a Seattle, Washington based Neighborhood Networks consortium, and Pfeiffer is the vice president of the California Neighborhood Networks Consortium.

Highlights from the call:

- Shiroma suggested implementing the eight-step approach to start a fundraising plan, which includes the following phases:
 - Create a strong mission statement. Encourage board members and the consortium to remember the mission statement and use it as the basis for an “elevator speech” when connecting with people interested in the organization.
 - Conduct an assets inventory. Compile the consortium’s funding history and include a budget that identifies and explains the income flow.
 - Develop a case statement. This is an internal document outlining why the consortium deserves funding, both now and in the future.
 - The case statement should include: the mission statement of the consortium, a description of the goals and objectives, programs and services, an account of the consortium’s finances, and information about staffing. It is also beneficial to include the history of the consortium, and the delivery of each service and/or program. The case statement is valuable because it can be applied to donor requests, direct mail, or other marketing materials in which the consortium will be requesting donations.
 - Establish realistic fundraising goals.
 - Fundraising goals should be established annually. Neighborhood Networks consortia can follow the formula below to derive their annual fundraising goal.

$$(\text{Budget}) - (\text{Consortium's Organizational Expenses}) = \text{Anticipated Fundraising Goal}$$
 - Clearly stated financial goals will enable each consortium to communicate its needs to prospective funders. These goals also should identify the use of the funders’ contributions, and thereby motivate the funders to donate. Financial goals are beneficial for making informed decisions. By comparing the goals against the amount that has actually been raised, the consortium is better prepared to make program decisions. If financial goals are unmet, the program or service offerings may need to be modified.
 - Diversify the consortium’s funding income.

- Identify all individual sources of giving, new donors, renewing donors, and upgrading donors. In selecting prospective funding partners, the consortium should also list the rationale for donor solicitation, such as face-to-face solicitations, personal letters, telephone, direct mail, special events, and membership programs.
 - Financial resources exist in each consortium's community. It is imperative to request support from vendors, local businesses, community leaders, and national foundations.
 - Create an action plan and a timetable. The consortium should set an achievable dollar amount and a realistic timeframe in which this revenue can be raised.
 - Cultivate relationships. Fundraising is about relationships and connecting people and organizations to the consortium's mission.
 - Monitor and evaluate the consortium's fundraising efforts.
- Shiroma encouraged the consortia to solicit funding from community foundations by promoting its services and programs. These local organizations are experts at giving locally. Another key step is tapping individuals for financial support who are likely to develop an interest in and extend support to the consortium. Board members are also crucial for their ability to get or to give funding to the consortium.
- Shiroma recommended that the new Neighborhood Networks consortia start small when developing a fundraising plan. Many foundations give seed money grants, which are sometimes called management development capacity building grants. Fundraising events should complement the consortium's cause and interest its constituency. If the main priority is to raise money, the consortium should place special emphasis on planning the event's budget. It is important to remember that an event requires sustained effort by the consortium's board, members, and volunteers. Everyone must be committed to the event to make it successful.
- The second guest speaker, Delia Burke, discussed two fundraising events held by Digital Promise, the Seattle-based consortium. Digital Promise's first partnership was with the Seattle Symphony. The consortium members were given a total of 200 tickets to sell for \$15 each to a symphony concert. The consortium was able to keep all the profit as there were no upfront costs. Next, Digital Promise partnered with the Association for Women in Computing and held a dinner auction event. To keep costs low, Digital Promise contacted local organizations to design invitations and posters, secure sponsorships, and utilize the services and experience of the board members. The consortium benefited from both events by meeting new potential board members and volunteers. It also increased the visibility of the consortium in the community.
- Madelyne Pfeiffer from the California Neighborhood Networks Consortium discussed a community event during which her employer, C.A.R.E. (Communities Advocating for Resident Empowerment) partnered with the San Diego Chargers professional football team. The goal of the community event was to increase awareness of C.A.R.E. In attendance were professional athletes from the Chargers, children from the community, local politicians, and members of the media. The event increased awareness of C.A.R.E. and helped raise money. Neighborhood Networks consortia could also attempt to host similar events.
- The call concluded with a question and answer session.