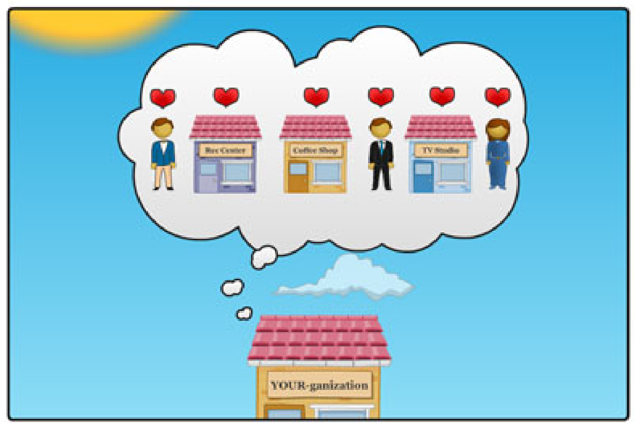
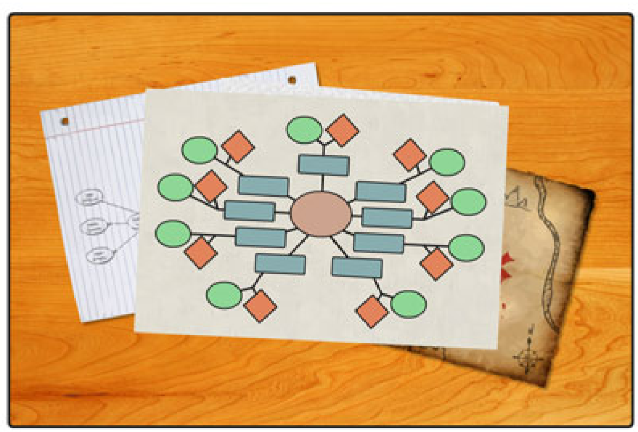
The Prospect Map

This is Craig Bowman. I'm the President of Common Ground Consulting. We've been working with social profit or non-profit organizations around the world for almost 20 years.

One of the best ways in preparing your organization to embrace individual giving as a key or integral part of your fund development strategy is to help that team recognize all the people and organizations that already care about your work. Many organizations believe they aren't connected to enough people to make individual giving a viable strategy for raising money. A simple activity you can do with this group of committed fundraisers to show this belief to be false is to provide them with the information about the people that you already know and helping them to structure your planning and your efforts around that activity.



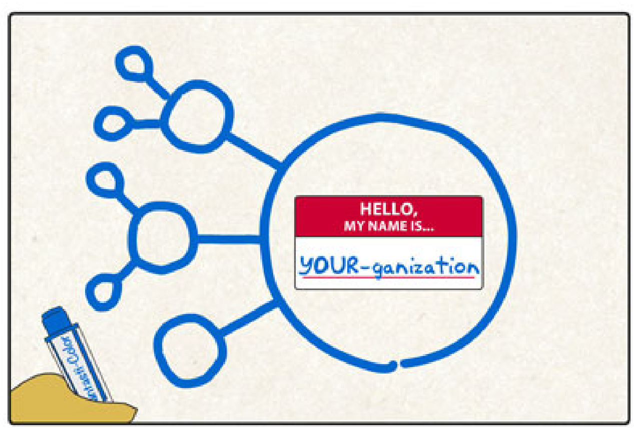
People have been using web maps or prospect maps, treasure maps, whatever you want to call them, as learning tools for decades. Webs are visual maps that show how different categories of information relate to one another. For this activity, what we're talking about doing is really convening this group of people and really giving yourself some time. It doesn't take long. You can probably do this entire activity from start to finish in 30 or 45 minutes. And so it's a great activity for a Board meeting. It's a great activity for staff meetings, and it's pretty simple.



So you get that group in the room. It would be terrific if you could include your Executive Director, if you have one; all of your development staff, even if that's just one person; a couple of key Board members and senior program staff; anybody who brings passion and energy to your organization's mission work is really useful to have in that room. But don't get too hung up about who's there and who's not. If for whatever reason you've scheduled this and somebody that you think is key isn't there that day, it's not the end of the world. There's no right or wrong way to do this. You can always engage other people as this work goes forward.

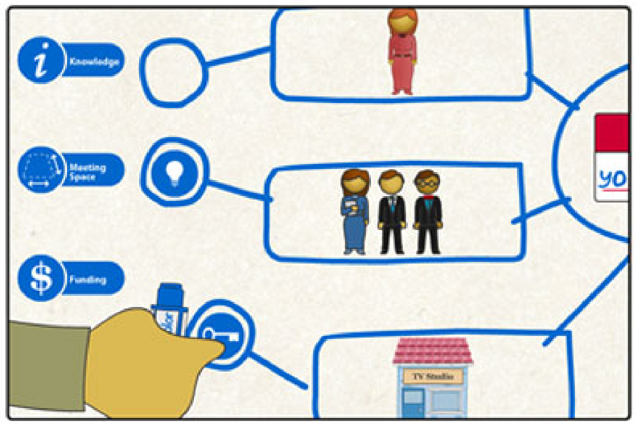
You want to put some paper on a wall, and you'll start out that way. Give yourself some open space to begin to really engage people. It's not a high-tech kind of activity. You can do this in a pretty low-tech environment. As long as you've got some newsprint plans and some markers, you can get a group of people really engaged in a pretty powerful activity that's going to lead you to some real direct new opportunities for resources for the organization that you're working with.

Once folks are ready, you want to draw a circle in the middle of that large piece of paper on the wall so everybody can see it. Put your organization in that center; and then from that, you're going to create links that are going to connect your key stakeholders and your core constituencies to your work, and also give you some tools for tracking details about how they're connected to you.

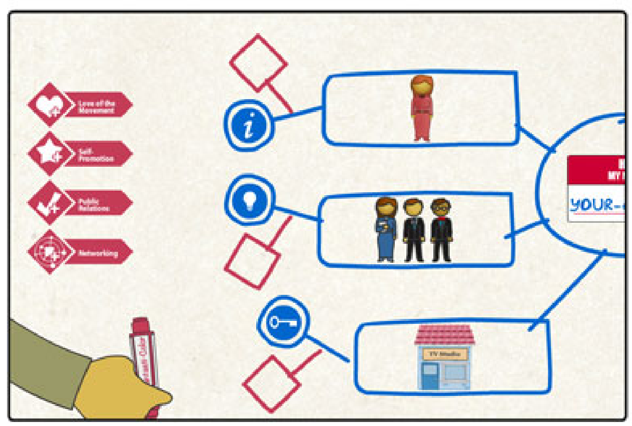


And then you want to ask your participants to shout out the names of people, of individuals, and groups of individuals, of organizations, that have some sort of a connection to your program or your organization. And I don't want you to limit yourselves. I really want you to think of this as a kind of brainstorming. You don't want to be censoring anyone's ideas.

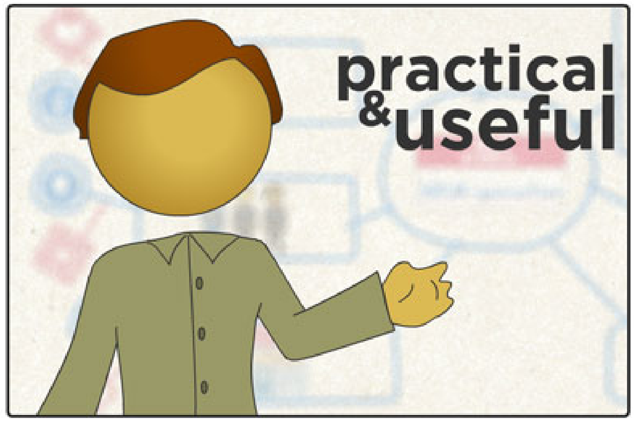
Once you've done that, you're going to spend a few minutes then going one-by-one with each of those names, just listing what each of those groups or individuals have in terms of resources in abundance. It might be knowledge, it might be experience or access, it might be space, it could be their ideas or their belief in what you're doing, and of course it could also be money. And so you really want to understand though, "What is it that this group or this person has in abundance?"



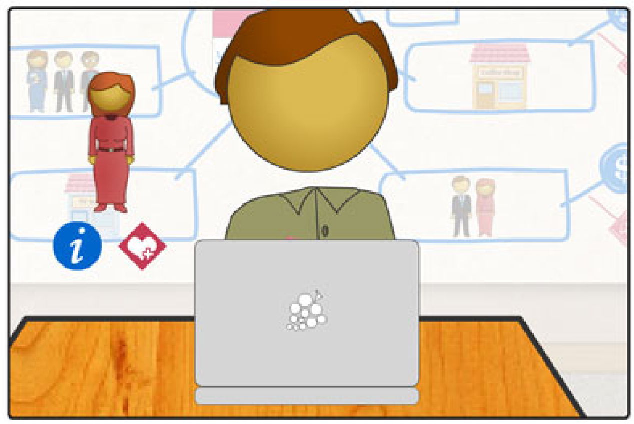
The next step then is to spend some time talking about the self-interest of those people. What is it that has connected them to your organization in the first place? And sometimes we get hung up on this. Groups sometimes get worried that – or sort of confused a little bit – that self-interest is like selfishness; and it's very, very different. All of us have a self-interest. All of us are making decisions based on a set of values, based on a set of ideals for our own lives. And so it's important to understand what is it that would cause this person to want to be involved with us, to want to give to us, to want to be invested in the work that we're doing? So how are they connected? What's in it for them? What's their self-interest? What is it that they have in abundance? This is all data that's going to help you later in crafting your fundraising plan.



Once you're done with this map, what do you do with it? How do we make it useful? I'm a firm believer in using tools that are both practical and useful. So a tool like this one, an activity like this one, we want to make it easy. We want to make it simple to do. We want to make it practical as you go forward. So while the actual mapping activity is done best through that brainstorming process I described a few moments ago, the information that comes from it – the data, if you will – needs to get organized then in a way that allows you to track and measure your progress.



All of that information comes from the data that you collect. So you want to make sure that you use this tool to help lay out a clear plan and a clear strategy. So my work when I use these tools is to really take that information, transcribe it from those big sheets on the wall, put it into a spreadsheet, put all the information that's up there into that spreadsheet, and then we'll start together to do some prioritizing: who we're going to ask first, who's going to be doing the asking, what are we going to be asking them for, and is this set of people – is this set of relationships -- going to lead us ultimately to the goals that we have for this particular fundraising effort?



So you can enter all that information into a lot of different donor-tracking systems. There are plenty of them on the market. You may use one already. Don't get hung up on that. You can create a simple Excel spreadsheet that allows you to update the information as your campaign or as your development planning process progresses. And this is going to ensure you that you have the data to share with your fundraising team, that your staff and Board members are updated on what's going on, that those who are investing in what you're doing have an idea of how things are working. It helps to create momentum. It helps to maintain enthusiasm. And it helps to engage even more supporters in the process.