$ Marks The Spot: Mapping & Identifying Your Potential Donors

By Craig Bowman

One of the best ways to begin preparing your organization to embrace individual giving as an integral part of your resource development activities is to help your team recognize all the people and organizations that already care about your work. Many organizations believe that they aren't connected to enough people to make individual giving a viable strategy for raising money. This simple activity will not only show this belief to be false, but will also provide some important information as to how to *structure* your efforts.

People have been using "webbing" or web maps as learning tools for decades. Webs are visual maps that show how different categories of information relate to one another. They provide structure for ideas and facts and provide a flexible framework for organizing and prioritizing information.[1]

For this activity, you will place your organization at the center of the web. Links from the center will connect your key stakeholders and core constituencies as well as track details about their connections to you.

Begin by convening a small group of the people responsible for raising money for your organization. It would be terrific if you could include your executive director, all of your development staff (even if that is just one person), perhaps a couple of key board members, senior program staff, and anyone else who brings passion and energy to your organization's work. Don't get too hung up on who is in the room. There is no right or wrong formula and you can always repeat the activity with more people as your donor work progresses.

Once folks are ready:

1. Draw a circle in the middle of a large piece of newsprint taped to a wall so all can see. In that circle, write the name of your program.
2. Next, ask your participants to shout out the names of organizations and groups of individuals that have a connection (even a slight one) to your program. Don't limit yourselves. Think of this as a kind of brainstorming and don't censor anyone's ideas.
3. Now, spend a few minutes listing all the resources that each group has in abundance (i.e., knowledge, experience, access, space, ideas, MONEY).

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[1] It is important here to credit another of the most amazing fundraisers I've ever known, Terry Axlerod of Raising More Money™[1], for adapting web maps for use in fundraising. Much of what I have learned about raising money from individuals is rooted in my relationship with Terry and it is her "Treasure Map™" activity that started it all for me.

4. The next step for your group is to spend some time discussing the self-interest (See “A Special Note about Self-Interest” below) of the people and groups you have identified. Why are they connected to your program? What’s in it for them? Or potentially in it for them if you strengthened or changed that connection?

At this point, your small group should be getting excited! You have a tremendous amount of information about a lot of people who are already connected to your program. These are your potential donors. You already know all the people you need to launch and sustain your individual giving program and you know how and why they are connected to you. This is all you need. The only thing left to do is start asking!

But before you do, spend a few minutes in your group talking about what you learned from the activity. Let group members process the experience so as to reinforce the key points of the exercise. If you have enough time, you may even want individuals to do their own personal prospect map. Terry suggests that we each do our own map every three–four months. It helps us to stay connected to our existing prospects and it helps us to identify new ones more quickly. I’ve followed her advice with great success.

The sample on the next page should give you some ideas as to what yours may look like.