



The Role of Fundraising Counsel

At a recent conference conducted by the national Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), J. Patrick Ryan was asked about the role of fundraising consultants. Mr. Ryan is past chair of the AFP Foundation for Philanthropy, the American Association of Fundraising Counsel, and the World Fundraising Council, and is chairman of the firm of Skystone Ryan Inc.

What services does a fundraising counseling firm provide?

The scope of services provided by a firm can best be described by dividing services into four categories.

- **Studies.** Examples include a pre-campaign feasibility survey, a broad analysis of development needs, a study or audit of the annual fund with recommendations and projections for the future, a study of the constituency and prospective donors, and an assessment of the internal management of a nonprofit's overall fundraising program.
- **Counseling.** Services include assisting an organization in planning, analyzing the performance of a plan, and supervising the execution of a plan related to such things as annual funds, major gifts and planned giving programs, capital campaigns, and the overall development program operation. Such counseling services customarily involve senior consultants on a limited-time basis.
- **Program Management.** Frequently, a firm is actually responsible for executing and carrying out a fundraising program. A firm can be retained, for example, to manage an organization's overall development program on a short- or even long-term basis. Program management is most commonly found, however, in connection with the direction of a capital campaign where a firm has been retained to provide as much as full-time service over a period of months or longer.
- **Ancillary Services.** These services comprise a long list of tasks related to fundraising such as conducting an executive search, doing prospect research and setting up record-keeping systems, establishing computerized systems, writing and designing fundraising literature, telephone and direct mail fundraising services, staff training, long-range planning and board development, producing audio-visual programs, planning marketing strategies, and preparing foundation proposals.

What functions can you expect a professional counseling firm to perform?

In general, I believe there are two basic types of skills a firm brings to any fundraising project; technical skills and personal skills:

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Technical Skills come from knowledge and experience regarding the mechanics of fundraising. They include the ability to help an organization do such things as prepare the case for a campaign, set objectives, establish a budget, organize and train volunteers, and coordinate prospect identification efforts. The firm's consultants also use technical skills to help an organization manage a program, conduct donor research, select appropriate planned giving instruments, design appropriate job descriptions, and communicate with the public.

Personal Skills are related to the personality and character traits of the firm and the individual counselor. Because each firm has a particular style, manner, approach and tone, it is important to match these traits to those of the organization when choosing counsel. Successful fundraising projects are nearly always the result of a team effort and personal skills are, therefore, vital to the success of a program. These skills include the talent to guide leaders, work effectively with volunteers, train staff members and maintain a cooperative spirit among all the people involved in a project.

What are the advantages of hiring outside counsel?

I believe there are four advantages to retaining professional fundraising counsel.

- **Expertise and Experience.** The professional fundraising firm has the advantage of having worked with many different kinds of programs and organizations. This background and knowledge can be put to good use in helping an organization look at a variety of approaches to a given project and to benefit from a broad range of alternatives.
- **Efficiency and Productivity.** Most development officers and staff members have existing duties which are time-consuming enough to prohibit their taking on additional responsibilities related to a major fundraising project. If they attempt to do both, they will find it difficult to do either effectively, with productivity suffering on both fronts.
- **Objectivity and Independence.** Often outside counsel can see a nonprofit's needs more clearly than those who are involved with the organization on a daily basis. This objectivity and independence also allows counsel to say and do things that internal staff members may be reluctant or unable to say and do.
- **Cost Effectiveness and Results.** Years of evidence with many fundraising programs indicate that the most significant advantage of hiring outside counsel is the success factor. Fundraising programs served by professional counsel usually produce the results intended and, for many nonprofit leaders and volunteers, this is really the key issue. Most of them recognize and appreciate the fact that the likelihood of success justifies the investment in fundraising counsel.