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[Invest in Development Capacity Now - Four Key Steps](#)

During a challenging economic climate is not the time for athletics departments to “pull back” on fundraising efforts because of fear that donors will not be able to give. Now is the time to do just the opposite. A bad economic climate gives athletics a new reason to fundraise – the prospect of having to eliminate sports or a reduction in the program’s ability to compete because of funding challenges. While a large number of people may be reducing their spending, there are always key donors who have the ability to increase their gifts. Investing in new fundraising staff is really an investment in efforts to find just a few of these “nuggets” whose gifts can save the day. More people are needed to search the haystack. The more people you ask, the more likely it is you will find donors who will say yes. Fundraising staff should focus on increasing personal visits with qualified prospects – those prospects living in higher wealth zip code areas and people who already have donated to or indicated an affinity for the program but who may not have been individually cultivated.

In addition, the athletics director should check that four key steps in focusing fundraising have been achieved:

Step 1. Consolidation and Location of Fundraising Staff. It is too common for athletics departments to have overextended personnel and development personnel not assigned 100% time to their fundraising job responsibilities. Make sure that as many personnel as possible are dedicated full-time to fundraising. Some fundraisers may be located in the college or university’s central development office. Now is the time to ask that they be relocated in the athletics department. There are too many communications failures that are the result of inconvenient physical proximity. Fundraisers have to talk to each other to share information and contacts. They should be working together every day in close proximity with the box office manager and the athletics director figuring out who and how to approach prospects.

Step 2. Fundraising Leader. Either the athletic director has to accept or another person has to be appointed as the person accountable for (1) increasing the number of personal visits to donor prospects, (2) overseeing the selection of prospects and decision-making related to approach and “pitch”, and (3) ensuring that more people are used more effectively throughout the year to take advantage of the numerous athletics events which could be used for donor cultivation. As athletics departments grow, these leadership responsibilities often become unclear because of other responsibilities. Accountability

must increase during difficult economic times.

Step 3. Investment in Development Capacity. Now is the time to hire more people and to ask the college or university to fund such positions. Such investment should be viewed as a general university investment as opposed to an athletics program investment because future major donors to non-athletics projects will be derived from this donor pool. Athletics should be viewed as the “front door” of the University. No other department has as many event opportunities, home and away, to cultivate donors. Remember to argue that this investment in new positions will be recouped in Year One.

Step 4. Reorganize Management Structure to Allow Athletic Director to Focus on Fundraising. The person with the best relationship-building/fundraising skills and connections is usually the Director of Athletics and in most cases, this is the person who is most likely to be overextended with administrative responsibilities. The addition of an administrative secretary, an assistant AD or a COO position should be considered to take over daily operational responsibilities and free up the department's most effective fundraising asset. And, the athletics director must embrace the need to get back to 90% time fundraising.

Focus, focus and more focus on people dedicated to donor contacts is required to meet the challenges of difficult economic times.

-- by Donna A. Lopiano, President, Sports Management Resources

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