

Values-based Fundraising in Today's World

DANA

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**The
Nonprofit
Center**

Please take your seat if the statement reflects something that you've experienced or witnessed:

- Has your organization ever changed program priorities or timelines to satisfy a donor's preferences?
- Have you ever been asked to "soften" or "sanitize" the truth about community needs to make a donor more comfortable?
- Have you seen staff with lived experience excluded from donor meetings because they were not considered "professional enough"?
- Has your organization ever highlighted a community member's hardship in ways that felt extractive or deficit-based?
- Have you ever felt pressure to accept a gift even when the donor's values or expectations conflicted with your mission?
- Have you seen fundraising success celebrated more than program impact or community trust?
- Has your organization ever prioritized the preferences of a major donor over the expertise of frontline staff?
- Have you witnessed decisions being made primarily to avoid upsetting a donor rather than to advance equity or impact?
- Have you ever been encouraged to "tell a more compelling story" even when the real story was more complex or less flattering?

Please stand if the statement reflects an experience or mindset that you wish for your nonprofit/the nonprofit sector:

- Do you want more people with lived experience shaping program design, evaluation, and storytelling?
- Are you energized by nonprofits that center agency and community voice?
- Do you believe donors should be invited into a learning journey rather than treated as customers to be pleased?
- Are you eager for a board or staff team to make a decision that prioritizes values over revenue?
- Do you want fundraising language that reflects strengths, assets, and partnership rather than scarcity or pity?
- Would you feel positively about an organization that shares power with program participants in authentic, non-performative ways?
- Do you believe fundraisers should be supported as ethical storytellers rather than pressured to produce emotional manipulation?
- Do you believe that there are donors/funders who genuinely want to align with community-defined priorities rather than impose their own?
- Do you want fundraising metrics that include trust, relationship quality, and community impact — not just dollars raised?

Why the disconnect?

Are we not in control of our own destiny?

Implications of Culture on Organizational Health

Level One

Generic values, not always lived
Homogenous (Board, Staff, Volunteers)
“We’re all good people”
Risk averse
Lack of succession: “forever” or revolving door Board members
Compelling vision is not articulated
Missed opportunities for program growth

Level Two

Hybrid values = actions
Some organic diversity (Board, Staff, Volunteers)
Statements of outrage/solidarity
Isolated commitments to diversity and equity
Tentative risk taking
Fresh voices and perspectives sometimes lead to friction
Some self-reflection
Some success in seeking strong partners/ funders in alignment with vision and values

Level Three

Seamless values = actions
Intentional diversity and inclusivity (Board, Staff, Volunteers)
Embedded use of equity lens; overt creed, equitable policies, processes, practices
Calculated risk taking
Often will refer to itself as a “learning organization”
Active revitalization of the Board
Engagement of stakeholders/ program participants in program design and assessment
Innovative, effective programs and initiatives

Try this with your team! Work individually then develop a single, collective answer.

What are the conversations to be had to strengthen the alignment?

What are the nonprofit's shared (and lived) core organizational values?

- I mean after you've all written down "Integrity" "Community" "Accountability" "Stewardship" and "Leadership"
- What are the real values underneath that your organization will embrace as rudders—in times of crisis, ambiguity, and opportunity?

If we were to curate the board's composition, what would it look like?

- What are the expectations for the board in terms of board work?
- What kinds of people are best suited for fulfilling those expectations?

Who is involved in what kinds of decisions and decision making?

- Between the board and the Executive Director
- Amongst the staff
- In relation to stakeholders
- Is there clarity, transparency, and agreement across the board?

What is our organization's level of risk appetite and risk tolerance?

- How does that inform the direct influence of large-dollar donors?
- How does that inform the indirect influence of all donors?

What is our organization's relationship with program participants?

- How are they viewed?
- How are they engaged?
- How are they spoken/written about?