

# Seven Ways a Fundraising Consultant Can Boost Your Bottom Line during This Critical Time

Dr. Peter Shedrake, esteemed author and visiting professor of Innovation and Global Business at Wake Forest University, has described this time in our history – living through a global pandemic – as our “VUCA” moment. Why VUCA? Currently, the entire world is living through a time that is:

**Volatile**

**Uncertain**

**Complex**

**Ambiguous**

In order to survive this VUCA moment, everyone – from businesses to individuals – must adopt strategic thinking, contingency planning, and a “bottoms-up” perspective, the noteworthy professor asserts. Being able to do the above proves the critical character traits necessary for survival: the ability to be empathetic, resilient, and willing to reach out for advice or help when needed.

While facing the present challenges, how do you know whether you need a fundraising consultant? How can you avail yourself of their services for your benefit?

In this whitepaper, you’ll learn some of the ways fundraising consultants can be useful to nonprofit businesses and their fundraising endeavors. To begin, let’s define who a fundraising consultant is and the services they offer towards fundraising efforts.

## **Definition: Fundraising Consultant**

A fundraising consultant is a professional that carries the experience, knowledge, and skillset needed to help you achieve your fundraising objectives. The consultant collaborates with your team to create strategies that work within your framework of values, vision, and objectives, to reach the goals you set. In specific campaigns, they provide various services to fill gaps when running specific campaigns related to fundraising.

These are some of the ways a fundraising consultant can help your nonprofit’s fundraising efforts:

### **1. Create or Refine Your Fundraising Strategy**

A strategic partner has the overarching role of providing support for all activities that your non-profit engages in. Because ultimately, all activities in your company directly or indirectly contribute to your fundraising efforts and cause (the reason for which you’re raising funds).

A fundraising consultant, therefore, partners with the client to identify opportunities, improve the efficiency of existing tools and capacity, increase engagement, and open new sources of revenue. As an external party, the consultant doubles up as an accountability partner – someone to ensure you stay on track with the strategic plan regardless of forces distracting you from progress.

Building the fundraising strategy is one of a handful of critical aspects of raising revenue for your nonprofit activities. If you've been unable to reach your goals or create sustainable streams of revenue, you need a strategy that is clear, effective, and easy to follow.

The consultant comes in to align your goals, budget and resources, manpower, and values to put your nonprofit on track to achieving fundraising goals. It is their job to align strategy to your vision and priorities, empower the team, and create actionable steps towards the goals.

Once the strategy exists, they can help you to execute it, overseeing its step-by-step implementation and recommending tweaks based on progress vis-à-vis your goals. The consultant offers both general guidance and assistance with specific campaigns, particularly with large or expensive undertakings like capital campaigns.

Even though you may have the resources to conduct your own feasibility studies, a fundraising consultant's input will be invaluable – they know the questions to ask, how to get honest responses, and how to direct resources for the greatest reach and highest levels of conversion for potential donors.

## **2. Research Supporters**

One of the biggest assets a fundraising consultant brings to the table is access to their networks of people, talent, and products. Their very careers are built on creating relationships, and this is invaluable to any nonprofit's fundraising efforts. Being on your team means you have access to their connections, which may be the difference between success and failure in your fundraising efforts.

In addition, you'll need help evaluating your supporters, such as giving behaviors, seasonality, and responsiveness to different campaign strategies. A fundraising consultant can provide accurate insights into your supporters' habits, patterns, and preferences, among others. You need to know your donors to know the best way to reach out to them and maximize their lifetime value (LTV, the amount of support each donor will give in their lifetime).

Each fundraising consultant will have the know-how to gather data on supporters and build donor profiles. Using this information, they can give ideas on the best way to run successful campaigns – sometimes this involves carrying out feasibility studies. Prospect research helps to identify major donors, and the research can unearth the best ways to appeal to them.

Prospective or current donors' profiles should also include their giving habits/patterns. If you know how they have given in the past, you'll tailor future campaigns to increase their responsiveness by appealing to their preferences.

For instance, if most of your donors give through mobile devices, you should ensure that your mobile platforms are optimized, and create campaigns/events around mobile giving.

## **3. Give Fresh Perspective**

The experience a fundraising consultant brings to the table is the knowledge they have gained from their own successes and failures. When handling the challenge of fundraising during moments of crisis like our present VUCA moment, their contribution could be extremely helpful.

You need an objective but experienced person sitting at your table to ask the right questions, review your data and provide insights that you can't see because you're too close to the center. You need a sounding board for your ideas to surmount various challenges, and someone with more experience to point out your blind spots.

An experienced consultant has worked with different nonprofit organizations, and so they know what fresh ideas to bring to your table depending on your core work. Additionally, you'll have someone to look at your campaign through donors' eyes and help you to improve donor engagement, resource stewardship, creative giving channels and events, and many more.

As you face the challenges that going through this VUCA period brings, you'll need someone to bring in perspective. If your donors start pulling out, executives and volunteers quit, or your efforts go unappreciated, you may appreciate the fundraising consultant's encouragement. You can borrow from their experiences to understand that dark days don't last forever – best believe they will have a wealth of challenging moments they overcame.

#### **4. Plan Fundraising Events**

Fundraising consultants offer more than just the intangible support – ideas, recommendations, etc. – to offering help for the more practical aspects of fundraising. Hosting fundraising events, whether online or offline, is a great way to attract attention, build awareness for your activities, and onboard new donors.

The consultant can help structure different kinds of events, including all aspects from developing strategy and training volunteers to creating marketing materials and measuring results post-event. Their job is to infuse their experience and knowledge of your potential and existing donors to execute events that exceed fundraising goals while staying within budget.

A fundraising consultant is well-versed in management tools should you want to leverage software to plan the event. Such tools, like CRM software, help you to track leads, monitor engagement, and measure your results effectively. You can leverage these tools to save valuable time, especially if you have limited staff.

The networks a fundraising consultant brings will be instrumental in your fundraising events. They will readily invite the attendees you need as well as mobilize resources even before the event. For example, they can raise sponsors to offer cash or in-kind gifts like event spaces, refreshments, or giveaways to support your event.

The consultant can help you to market the event online and offline to create a buzz around it. He/she will help you manage the engagement leading up to and from the event. With their help, you can focus on the more important aspects of the campaign, leaving the smaller goals in their hands.

#### **5. Create Donor Stewardship Plans**

Every donor that you bring on board has a value – some people are one-time partners, while others believe in your cause enough to become regular supporters. After a fundraising event, you have a valuable opportunity to create long-term partners, who will ensure that you have funds to keep your doors open and run your cause.

In order to do this, you need a carefully-crafted stewardship plan, which details the steps to be followed from the time you have someone expressing an interest in your cause to when they become donors. A stewardship plan details the following:

- A plan for reaching out to donors (creating leads or building awareness)
- Designing and writing welcome packets to share with leads and first-time donors
- Suggestions for ways to interact with supporters/donors
- Details for email, social media or SMS engagement, etc.

For your nonprofit to succeed, you must have a detailed cultivation strategy to ensure that you stay at the forefront of your donors' minds.

Stewardship is a critical part of fundraising, because, as the saying goes "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush". Even when facing difficult seasons, people that have been nurtured to understand and be passionate about your cause will remain faithful to their donations. In such VUCA times when raising new support becomes even more difficult, your old networks will keep your doors open.

Effective stewardship need not be complicated; it boils down to knowing and reaching out to your supporters. A fundraising consultant can help you do both of these things by offering practical steps that are within budget for your resources and manpower. Fundraising never stops – even after you reach your current goal.

## 6. Find Fundraising Software

Next, a fundraising consultant can help you with the practical administrative aspects of running your nonprofit organization. Most nonprofits run on skeleton staff supported by volunteers, and it is essential to ensure their work is optimized for the greatest effect.

Using specialized software tools can help manage the small, repetitive tasks associated with fundraising efforts. You can trust a fundraising consultant to advise you on the kind of platform or software you need depending on what you want to do.

They can advise you regarding features to look for, platforms and hosts to use, and how to build an online campaign, among other aspects. Nonprofit consultants have worked on different fundraisers and can help you find software tools/platforms that are within budget and effective for you.

You can also talk to a fundraising consultant if you're thinking of automating some of your administrative or marketing processes. They can help you zero in on customer relationship management (CRM) software that is vital to effective donor outreach. After all, the process of attracting and retaining donors is no different from what sales and marketing teams in for-profit businesses do.

## 7. Conduct Training

Good fundraisers begin with having strong leaders and well-trained staff members to guide your nonprofit organization towards its vision and goals. For example, you can use your board members to:

- Solicit support and partnerships from major donors

- Guide your organization towards the achievement of its goals
- Build bridges to ensure future fundraising efforts succeed

However, to get the leadership you need, you may need to bring in a fundraising consultant to sensitize both high and low-level staff members. This includes:

- a thorough evaluation of your present capacity
- a detailed work plan with the improvements needed and how they will be implemented
- implementation of the recommendations above

The consultant should be present during all phases of staff training and capacity building so that every staff member is performing at their best. Consider getting an experienced fundraising consultant to bring out the best aspects of your organization and set up your fundraising efforts for success.

## In Conclusion

In order to excel in any profession, one must remain on top of current thinking and the trends that affect your industry. In the nonprofit industry, changes from the external world constantly affect your internal efforts.

However, because you're often understaffed and budget-constrained, the leadership is overwhelmed with responsibilities of day-to-day running, leaving no time for deliberate and well-thought-out fundraising campaigns.

Getting a fundraising consultant is the best way to bridge the gap between where your nonprofit is and where you want to be. Take advantage of the reservoir of knowledge, wealth of experience, and invaluable networks such a consultant brings to the table to streamline your fundraising efforts and bring your cause before its audience effectively.

**At BrightDot, we have a team of experienced, knowledgeable, and empathetic consultants ready to help you promote your cause. Call us at 919-830-3999 and let's talk about your business.**