



Do Donors Really Care About 100% Board Participation in Giving?

You Bet They Do!

BY RICHARD TOLLEFSON

Many prospective donors, when determining if, how much, or when to make a major contribution to a nonprofit organization, want to know what the governing board has done with their personal giving. One hundred percent participation from the board is a testament to board members' commitment to the organization.

Giving by board members demonstrates a personal and financial investment in the outcomes and impact the organization seeks to achieve. It shows that board members "have skin in the game" and demonstrates they "put their money where their mouth is."

"If an individual commits to being on a board, they should also be willing to commit financially commensurate with their capacity," says Jeri Kendle, a consultant with The Phoenix Philanthropy Group. "When in a capital campaign, if board members are involved in an ask, donors must know the board is committed financially."

"I have had conversations with many local and national funders on this topic," says Kim Joyce, President and CEO of Kim Joyce and Associates. "If we are writing a grant proposal – we always want to answer that question with 100%. If it's less than that, I tell the client it should be 100%, and it could potentially jeopardize the grant funding. Why? Foundation funders have actually said, 'If the board hasn't invested, why should we?'"

Board Giving Impacts Donor Decisions

If there's not 100% board participation in giving, will a donor, grantor, or foundation really tell a nonprofit no—or is this just a myth that fundraisers perpetuate? The reality is YES, according to Joyce. "A major foundation declined one of our client's grants after a great relationship, multiple conversations, and an invitation for a full proposal," says Joyce. "The funder said the decline was based on one reason: they didn't believe their board of directors was engaged because of low board contributions. Their percentage was just under 70%."

In-kind contributions, volunteer hours, and professional services are important to acknowledge and appreciate, but they do not count as a financial gift toward the 100% board-giving goal. The goal is achieved when every board member is personally a financial donor at some point during the fiscal year.

Achieving 100% Board Giving

It starts with setting board expectations. As with all fundraising, when and how you ask for a gift from board members can be the difference in whether a gift is made, how much the gift is, and if it is a satisfying and rewarding experience for the board member. Here are several approaches to getting 100% giving from the board.



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Do Donors Really Care About 100% Board Participation in Giving?



Determine Right Time, Right Amount

Work with each board member individually to help them determine the right gift at the right time. Board members should be expected to give at levels that are meaningful and appropriate for them. For one board member, that might be \$100, while for another, a gift of \$10,000 is reasonable. One common rule of thumb in a campaign is that the board in total provides 20% to 30% of a campaign total or cumulatively gives a specific dollar amount—and agreed upon goal—each year.



Establish an Individual “Target Ask”

Do not establish a minimum giving amount or take a “one size fits all” approach when it comes to board giving. Instead, assess each board member’s potential and determine a *target ask* amount based on research and analysis. This can be accomplished by conducting a wealth screening to assess each board member’s ability to give. It may be helpful to establish an overall goal for the board that focuses on full participation and levels of giving that support each individual’s income or wealth assessment.

Take a Top 3 Spot

Convey to board members that the organization should be in their top three for charitable giving, especially during a campaign. This type of engagement and support speaks volumes to other donors considering a contribution.

Focus on Give, Then Get

Some organizations have used the “Give or Get” approach to board giving, challenging board members to donate a certain amount of money by either making a personal contribution or raising the amount through donations from others—in some cases including their employers. Board members should be required to do both, give AND get. Contributing one’s personal resources is the only way to achieve 100% board participation.

Be Consistent

Launching your board-giving campaign at the beginning of the fiscal year is likely to garner the best results. Setting these yearly expectations will help maintain consistency and continuity with board giving.

Board giving is critical to nonprofits. To reach the 100% goal, set the expectation at the beginning of each fiscal year, convey the impact of personal giving to reaching fundraising goals, and work with members individually to find the right amount at the right time. With a well-thought-out and executed plan, organizations can get a personal, financial donation from every board member, every year.

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Key Takeaways

- 1 Nonprofit organizations need to have 100% board giving. Fundraising is one of the main responsibilities of the board; it's their job to lead by example. The only way to do that is to have every board member committed to raising money, starting with their own donation.
- 2 Savvy major donors expect board members to make a personal contribution and many foundations and grants require 100% board giving. Organizations can and will lose donations, grants, and foundation money if they can't say every board member is a financial donor.
- 3 Board members should be asked to make an annual financial contribution that would be considered generous and meaningful for them. Work with each individual to determine what that amount should be. Minimum amounts or "one-size-fits-all" approaches are generally not an effective method to achieve 100% participation.
- 4 Time the board member "ask" at the beginning of the organization's fiscal year. Be consistent, set expectations, and follow through.
- 5 In-kind contributions, volunteer hours, and professional services are important to acknowledge and appreciate, but they do not count as a financial gift toward the 100% board-giving goal.



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