Special Issue Papers

Introduction: Union Gives Strength—Diversity and Fundraising

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Most of us have a fascination with, or at least appreciation for, the folk tales that have shaped our history as humankind. Records of such human experience can be traced to nearly the beginnings of our common history, and one such tale is by Aesop, written in the sixth century, BC. One in particular, The Bundle of Sticks, is applicable even today.

AN OLD man on the point of death summoned his sons around him

to give them some parting advice. He ordered his servants to bring in a bundle of sticks, and said to his eldest son: "Break it." The son strained and strained, but with all his efforts was unable to break the bundle. The other sons also tried, but none of them was successful. "Untie the sticks," said the father, "and each of you take a stick." When they had done so, he called out to them: "Now, break," and each stick was easily broken. "You see my meaning," said their father. "UNION GIVES STRENGTH."¹

It is precisely because of such a philosophical belief that diversity in the

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fundraising profession is a priority for the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP). Representing 28,000 members worldwide, AFP's current strategic plan outlines five priority goals. Diversity is one of those five goals: *AFP will embrace and engage diverse individuals, groups and organizations within the fundraising profession.*

In 2005 Janice Gow Pettey chaired AFP's 1st International Summit on diversity, "A Vision for Fundraising and Philanthropy in an Inclusive World." The summit was held in Baltimore, Maryland in conjunction with the AFP International Conference on Fundraising. The purpose of the summit was to gather leaders from diverse fundraising or philanthropic associations to share ideas and develop a strategy for collective action leading to greater inclusivity in fundraising and philanthropy. The highly focused agenda of the summit discussed broader issues surrounding diversity and inclusiveness.

Questions posed included:

1. How can the fundraising profession better serve underrepresented communities?
2. How do we increase the participation by underrepresented communities in the fundraising profession?
3. How do we improve access to formal/informal education or mentoring in the fundraising profession within underrepresented communities?

The definition of the challenges relate to the brain drain problem where organizations experience a cultural drain to the organization when fundraisers leave and the costs to

organizations to train new people. Depletion of experienced diverse staff from grassroots and community-based organizations is a challenge faced by some nonprofits. Smaller organizations lose people because there isn't a career advancement plan.

Summit participants noted that if professionals learn by doing, where are the experienced fundraisers to help the younger fundraisers from diverse populations, and are organizations providing internships, fellowships, and/or mentoring opportunities?

Building capacity in the field among diverse populations needs to include: acknowledging mission passion as a driver for selection of potential employees; addressing prohibitive membership costs for professional associations; acknowledgment of the potential for groups to work together; and a frank discussion on who is setting the table for the dialogue.

Diversity leads to inclusiveness. In the discussion on inclusiveness, the need for ongoing research on the potential population of fundraisers was highlighted. A reference to the four R's for successful cultivation of diversity in nonprofits serves as a good reminder. They are:

Respect
Relevance
Relationship
Reciprocity

The components of each "R" apply to boards, staff, and volunteers, and should be embedded in the formal organizational structure through a statement of values and standards of professional practice.

Proposed responses to the initial question posed at the summit are:

- institutional acknowledgment of the problem;
- sensitizing and education recruitment services and search firms;
- encourage program development in the nonprofit sector;
- do not make diversity a separate program. Integrate it into the organization;
- make diversity a business imperative;
- provide leadership for change tied to metrics;
- build in incentives for change;
- ask what underrepresented communities can teach fundraising professionals;
- explore reciprocity;
- engage funders in the dialogue and action;
- define success and greatness and move toward it;
- display courage.

As members of AFP, many higher education professionals in fundraising realize desirability of diverse and international perspectives and practices in today's colleges and universities, and embrace diversity as a mission and organizational value. As the mix of students becomes more diverse, fundraising also expands (or should do so) and taps into the economic growth and power of Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, and other diverse population groups both nationally and internationally. It is not just the right thing to do. It is a useful perspective in building and managing credible, comprehensive fundraising programs.

At the same time, diversity presents a challenge to fundraisers. No longer

can fundraisers function under the assumption of "one size fits all."

Diverse groups have identifiable, valuable, and significant philanthropic characteristics and traits. Therefore, fundraisers find that in order to be successful, they must tailor their fundraising appeals to the prospective donors' customs, frames of reference, and sensibilities.

Diversity for higher education institutions can mean not just population groups which current students and alumni represent, but also international students who come from many points of the globe and are not US residents or citizens. The potential of support from these is enormous, yet perhaps unrealizable if individual population group characteristics and preferences for philanthropic engagement are not considered and practices.

To not acknowledge and work with diversity is to ignore much potential of income. Unfortunately, many fundraisers approach a relationship and solicitation from their own perspectives, therefore leaving themselves unprepared for cultural differences that can easily be misinterpreted and misconstrued. Likewise, the cultural dimensions of charitable behavior have a variety of meanings from culture to culture. Therefore, generalizations about fundraising from minority groups should

be approached with caution, even if intentions are good. This is especially true when expressing generalizations about those with whom we lack experience or knowledge. This relatively common state of affairs makes this issue of the *International Journal for Educational Advancement*

(*IJEA*) highly relevant, particularly as it is proactive in addressing practices viewed as conventional wisdom and generalizations, but which are gaining credibility through research-based practices.

In the meantime, while research is growing in the topics of diversity and global philanthropy, cautious generalizations do provide us with some basic information from which we can develop further knowledge that is more specific, accurate, and individualized. Some similarities in giving can be seen across cultures, such as the importance of giving to family, the influence of religion, and philanthropy practiced in ways not recognized by the nonprofit world and IRS. Other identifiable similarities of giving among diverse and international populations are:

1. Convergence of wealth accumulation, education, career growth, and increased earning capacity allows many to become philanthropists in their own right.
2. For many cultures, philanthropy is seen in the broadest sense—gifts of time, talent, and treasure—and revolve around family, church, and education.
3. There is direct and informal support to children, elderly, community members.
4. Level of immediate need is important.
5. Planned giving is seldom a priority.
6. There is some distrust of traditional nonprofits.
7. Most groups are highly influenced by leaders—religious, community, professional, social, and family.
8. Much philanthropy is focused outside of the United States without regard of tax benefits.

9. Reciprocity is an accepted concept. Helping those in ways they themselves were helped often motivates giving in diverse populations.

The implications of the above generalizations, cautiously presented, are significant for colleges and universities and deserve further study and dissemination. For example, alumni may choose to give because of the concept of reciprocity. Carefully selected leadership, representing minorities at the community college, may influence giving by various potential markets. Personal experience and involvement may motivate giving, as may the high value placed on educational achievement among many ethnic groups in the US. This issue of *IJEA* is a welcome part of a trend that has been growing over the last 10–15 years by thoughtful practitioners and research scholars interested in the many dimensions of philanthropy.

Given the diverse populations of the United States and the fact that what we now call minorities will make up nearly half of the population by 2050, nonprofit organizations have a stellar opportunity to increase giving from diverse groups in the coming years. This fact provides our organizations with numerous opportunities to understand and interact with rich differences in languages, values, and cultural practices. It is a movement away from homogenizing everyone to accepting and embracing cultural richness in our American lives, interacting with international populations both in the United States and globally, and also expanding our potential for fundraising from nontraditional donors.

Note

¹ Æsop. The Bundle of Sticks, from Fables, The Harvard Classics, 1909–1914 (sixth century BC).

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