

**THE CHECKLIST**

**Common Considerations**

The most important tasks/actions an athletics director (athletics development professional) should ensure are fully vetted before the CEO makes an ask.

Reductions in state appropriations to higher education (state assisted institutions) and the tightening of grants and foundation philanthropy (public and private) affect all facets of an institution of higher learning — the athletics department included. As we all know, fundraising has taken on an even more important role. We are working twice as hard now for incrementally less percentage growth in philanthropy — than in the past.

That said, when we get a significant, potential donor ready to be asked for a major gift by the institution's CEO, it is imperative that the following checklist items be accomplished or have a strategy in place to ensure their success.

*Note: These checklist items cannot be accomplished by one individual unilaterally. While it is true the CEO plays an integral part in the solicitation, it is imperative that each team member thoroughly and successfully accomplishes their specific role relative to the process.*

**Plan Your Work, Then Work Your Plan**

The goals of any fundraising process must be consistent with the goals of the strategic plans and vision for the future — both departmental and institutional. All activities and processes should reflect the needs of the program as delineated within objectives outlined in the strategic plan. The “tying in” of the specific advancement plan to the more-broad strategic plan is paramount. This is due to the monumental impact the institutional/departmental strategic plan (CEO's vision) has on prospective donor buy-in and acceptance.

**Appropriate Investment of Financial and Human Capital**

To realize successful, high-level fundraising success, the department needs to invest appropriately in all facets of the fundraising process: identification, qualification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship. It is through the efforts of both the typical front line fundraiser and the advancement services support team that a prospective donor can properly be prepared for a solicitation by the institution's CEO.

**Successful Negotiating of Competing Interests**

Donors do not belong to any department, individual sport or institution. Believing this is critical and sometimes a detrimental error. Donors give because they believe in your mission, vision, core values, guiding principles and are interested in your programs success. Well in advance of an ask — usually in the qualification stage — all entities who “stake a claim” in a prospective donor need to convene to devise the most appropriate strategy for all involved. Many times, a combination ask (ie. a gift in support of the men's basketball program and the business school) is the win/win strategy that is employed.

**“The Rule of Rights” — Right Donor, Right Solicitor, Right Amount, Right Project, Right Time**

While it seems simple to comprehend, you never want your CEO at a meeting where the prospective donor — upon hearing the pitch and paging through the proposal — hands the document back and says they can't participate at the requested level. The single greatest predictor of a successful solicitation is to have the “Rule of Rights” on point.



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**Ensure a Team Approach**

Who is the best person to make an ask — many times it is not the CEO. It could be a volunteer, coach, athletics department staffer, board member, etc. Remember, people give to people. It is essential to have the right people in the room. Many times, one of the constituencies mentioned above goes along with the President on the solicitation. Having this/these individual(s) — along with the CEO — fully briefed, is essential.

**Thorough Communication**

Regular, consistent, two-way communication is imperative for the successful high-level ask. This has to happen well before and directly after the solicitation. Doing so will ensure that the next time the prospect is ready to be asked, the above-mentioned fundraising process will start at the cultivation stage. Regular meetings between all invested in the solicitation process will keep continuity in the communication process and also make sure that the message is both consistent and not overbearing.

**People Support Initiatives They Help Make**

A willingness for a prospective donor to make a significant gift is strongly aligned with the frequency and quality of engagement with the department and the institution. This involvement can take a number of forms such as, participating at events, serving on a board, providing advice and counsel, providing introductions, etc. Development professionals need to be weary of this and fend off over-engagement. The focus on the type of engagement and appropriate delivery mechanism should be the one the prospective donor prefers. This needs to be clearly defined — just like the terms of their gift.

**Two Ears — One Mouth — Listen More Than You Talk**

As mentioned earlier, the ask should be predicated on a very clear understanding of the donor's: ability level (right amount); area of interest (right project/initiative); personal and professional circumstances (right time); and circle of influence (right solicitor). It is imperative that the prospective donor's interests be matched with satisfying one of your opportunities, goals or intentions. Never attempt to put the proverbial square peg through a round hole. You can make sure this doesn't happen by listening to the prospective donor and truly understanding what it is they want — more so than what you need.

**Acknowledge All Involved in the Successful Outcome**

As it has been mentioned, there are many individuals involved in the successful solicitation of a prospective donor. Throughout the entire fundraising process — especially the cultivation, solicitation and stewardship phases — all involved should be continually acknowledged. Especially internally, you want to ward off the perception that just one or a few individuals were responsible for the success. Not doing so can negatively impact teamwork. Also, it is possible that it can jeopardize the prospective donor's long-term involvement with the program and institution.

Finally, it is important to remember that, for the most part, donors are really interested in the following: 1. How much are you asking them for? 2. What will the project/initiative look like upon completion? and 3. Why will the world (institution, department, specific sports program) be better because of their generosity and sacrifice? Don't hold the belief that the fundraising process is all about the money. Rather, believe that any fundraising initiatives undertaken will directly and indirectly advance the educational pursuits of the future leaders of tomorrow where concern for the human condition and social justice should be served.

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