Libraries Are from Venus, Fund-raising Is from Mars

Development at the Public Library

Peter D. Pearson with Stu Wilson

Public libraries and advanced development work exist in distinct worlds. Public libraries are free, public institutions serving thousands of patrons daily, many of whom are children or come from underserved communities. Development offices focus much attention on a small number of wealthier private individuals, foundations, and corporations. Public libraries receive most of their funding through tax dollars, deal daily with government bureaucracy, and have community service, information, and literacy as their core missions. The major fund-raising approach receives most of its funding from the private sphere, is more independent and free-wheeling, and its mission is to raise funds, albeit in support of a community service. These worlds and the community orbits they occupy often have little in common. Thus, the growth of comprehensive private development programs in public libraries, especially in comparison to such comparable community organizations as hospitals, museums, and colleges, has been slow to emerge.

Only in the past two decades have increasing numbers of public libraries created more sophisticated development efforts. From a historical perspective, this is a bit curious, as most of our public libraries were built on the generosity of their local communities. From Carnegie to Gates and beyond, public libraries have benefited greatly from the philanthropy of major donors. However, these major philanthropic efforts are unpredictable and are not sustained annually over a long period. Public libraries have turned to ongoing development efforts not only to increase private support, but also to make it more regular and dependable.

Historically, public libraries also were at the forefront of creation and use of Friends groups. For decades, especially since the end of World War II, public libraries across the country have seen the growth and development of effective community Friends organizations. These dedicated and worthwhile support efforts focus on such activities as book sales, volunteer coordination, and author programs, bringing much-needed support to the library. Yet in recent years, traditional Friends groups have been unable to fill the need for significantly increased amounts of private support for many public libraries.

Despite a history of major philanthropy and a culture supporting Friends groups, public libraries were slow to develop full-fledged development programs; indeed, many public libraries still remain hesitant about more advanced fund-raising programs. Most public libraries have turned to, or have been forced to develop, higher-level development programs only as their public dollars have failed to increase or have diminished. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, a broader societal push to cut back on government spending and, where possible, replace it with private dollars has affected local municipalities across the country.

More advanced development programs, capable of raising 5 to 15 percent of a public library's budget, are multifaceted. These programs usually involve a number of fund-raising activities, including corporate, foundation, and government grant writing; annual solicitation of major donors; planned giving involving wills and bequests; creation and maintenance of endowments; capital campaigns; and, more recently, corporate sponsorships. As these programs grow, they require professional staffing to nurture donors, track financial and other administrative records, and manage the ongoing work involved in these activities.

As demonstrated earlier, the circles of sophisticated development and public libraries do not often cross. Additionally, many public librarians have received little training in development work, and some localities remain justifiably upset over the loss of public funding and view major private funding only as a last resort or necessary evil. Local conditions and governmental structures can vary widely from one public library to another, so it has proven difficult to put into place one best practice model of the organizational structure for development work at the public library. In short, the creation of ongoing development functions at public libraries was and, in many locations, remains a struggle. The work and results from development are enticing and much-needed by public libraries, but the contrasts between the development and library worlds has translated into difficulties in creating effective public library private fund-raising programs.

As the need for private funding has continued to increase, however, more and more public libraries have evolved successful development programs. Again, because local conditions can vary extensively, these successful development programs often have different structures or organizations, but they also share many features in common. This

Peter D. Pearson is President, the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library; peter@thefriends.org.

article, then, will look at the three most common organizational structures for public library development programs, and how these various successful programs build strong constituencies and community support, mesh the library's strategic priorities with development work, and foster effective staffing structures to meet the needs of both the fund-raising efforts and library services. Ultimately, a comprehensive development program offers increased publicity, community networks, and new energy as well as increased financial resources for the public library.

Common Structures for Development Offices at the Public Library

The local conditions for public libraries, including governance, funding, and community support, are quite varied, and the development function at public libraries has grown along three lines of organizational structure. Before discussing these three models, it is worthwhile to review more fully the contrast between traditional Friends groups and library foundations. Library Friends and foundations are traditionally quite distinct. They both exist to support the library, but do so in very different ways, with different missions and constituencies.

Library Friends were originally organized as nonprofits to provide grassroots support, and this continues as one of their main functions today. Sometimes the impetus for creation of a Friends group originated in the community itself, and sometimes it came from the library administration. Leaders and members of Friends groups are usually personally attached to the public library and also serve as the library's main corps of volunteers. The majority of public library Friends organizations have no paid staff. In addition to volunteers, Friends groups historically have been successful at a number of other activities, including book sales, other fund-raising events, author programs, and membership campaigns. Typically, Friends organizations have not been asked to conduct large fund-raising efforts, such as capital campaigns or major planned giving campaigns.

In contrast, the impetus for creation of most library foundations came from the library or library board, and the foundations were developed with the express purpose of engaging in large, private fund-raising efforts to provide enhancements, create endowments, or conduct capital campaigns for the library. Directors of foundation boards are recruited specifically to support fund-raising activities, and thus usually reflect local business, corporate, or philanthropic interests rather than the community as a whole. Library foundations typically are staffed by fund-raising professionals, and in focusing on higher-end donors, most foundations are not membership organizations.

In practice, the three common organizational structures for advanced development work are more complex than outlined here. These varied structures have evolved mainly in larger library systems, where the pressure for private dollars is perhaps more critical, the service community is large enough to warrant this type of development work, and the library system itself is large enough to sustain the staffing needed for larger scale development activities. Public library development work and structures have grown and changed to meet local conditions, needs, and priorities.

Model 1: The Internal Development Office

The first model for public library development is an internal structure. In this model, the development office is part of the public library itself or, in some cases, a separate nonprofit organization, but it is housed and closely controlled by the library. In this structure, the development work may be conducted by public library staff or by staff members of a separate foundation, but in either case, the department head for development reports to the library director. These internal development offices most often function with a board of directors separate from the library board in order to open doors for fund-raising. Generally, in public libraries with this internal development structure, a separate, independent Friends organization also exists to conduct fund-raising events, volunteer recruitment, and other community support functions.

The main strength of this internal model is the strong internal communication between library administration and the fund-raising efforts. Essentially, the development office is part of the library administration. This means that there is close oversight of the development work by the library trustees, and the chance of raising funds for nonpriority items is minimized. On the downside, this model suffers in that many larger donors are reluctant to provide contributions to government agencies directly for fear of the funds being siphoned off for other purposes. Endowment accounts set up in governmental agencies typically cannot invest in stock portfolios, so investment growth and return is stifled. There is more work for the library director in overseeing development staff, the library more directly bears the cost of supporting the development staff salaries and other administrative costs, and the library often loses flexibility in how to expend the private dollars raised through the development efforts.

Model 2: A Separate Foundation with One or More Friends

The second standard development model at the public library consists of a separate library foundation, which is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with a distinct board of trustees, paired with an older, separate Friends group. In this case, the Friends organization is usually quite old and sometimes has subgroups, such as Friends groups for each library branch. The foundation was created more recently with the express purpose of advanced

fund-raising, often in response to a major event, such as library budget cuts or the need to spearhead a capital campaign. The foundation is independent and separate from the public library administration.

This model has a number of advantages over the internal model, and is perhaps the best known of the three development structures. Advantages include increased visibility for the fund-raising efforts, involvement of more influential community leaders on the foundation board, freedom of where and how to invest endowment funds, and greater flexibility in designating where private dollars are spent in support of the library. Additionally, many major donors have a greater ease of affiliation with a nonprofit, independent foundation than a government entity, and a foundation exists in a culture of fund-raising with a public persona helping to attract larger donors.

While the foundation model may maximize the fund-raising potential of the public library, by operating in a separate sphere, this model also has limitations. Having a separate, prominent foundation may lead to fractured communications between the fund-raising organization and the library administration and trustees. Being independent, foundations can be tempted to raise funds for items that are not priorities for the library or part of the library's strategic plan. Successful foundations have many established community leaders on their boards, which can result in confusion between the library trustees and foundation boards as well as the possibility that the foundation board may attempt to get involved in setting policy for the library. A final, significant point of confusion under this model is between the foundation and Friends group. In many cases, the Friends group is older and more established, but the newer foundation has more panache. With multiple groups, the library director's time is pulled in many directions. In the worst scenarios, conflict or competition between the groups can create difficulties for library administration and seriously undercut fund-raising opportunities in the community.

Model 3: The Merged Model

A third model for the organization of development work at the public library has emerged primarily in the last decade. Essentially, this model merges the functions of a library foundation and at least some of the traditional roles of library Friends so that the public library only has one fund-raising and community support group. These groups often evolved from the older Friends group into having a full-fledged, sophisticated development program. While they focus much of their attention on higher-level donors, planned giving, grant writing, and corporate support, they also incorporate traditional Friends activities and efforts, such as membership, volunteers, free author readings, or book sales.

This merged model has all of the strengths of the second model as well as some additional advantages. It eliminates any confusion that may result between separate Friends and foundation groups. One support organization decreases the amount of time library staff, particularly the library director, needs to spend working with development functions. Having only one organization keeps the library from diluting the pool of potential board members across multiple support groups. A number of these organizations also have found it easier to move into effective advocacy for public funding by combining their strong community base with the leverage of significant private funding and the involvement of influential community leaders. On the other hand, this organizational structure shares many of the downsides of the separate foundation model, with the added concern that the merged model organization runs the danger of becoming too prominent and even overshadowing the library itself on occasion.

Which Organizational Model Fits Your Library?

History, future needs, and the local landscape help determine the appropriate development model for a particular public library. There is no one correct model. Local fund-raising must have the buy-in of trustees and administrators who have policy oversight for it to be effective, and the library decision makers need to set the priorities for the major fund-raising efforts.

Whichever model is chosen, there are commonalities to successful public library development offices. Successful efforts involve the best possible boards of trustees. In many cases, these leaders are neither booklovers nor library users, but they can tap into resources and are committed to the advancement of their communities. They understand the need for good public libraries just as they understand the need for good local schools. That said, it is important to recruit community leaders who understand the support role of development rather than trying to set internal priorities for the library. Good board recruitment and training is important in ameliorating this potential problem. For successful development, it is also important for the community to perceive one point of entry for giving. More than one organization—a Friends and foundation typically—can resolve this problem by having very clear roles and definitions for which organization does what type of fund-raising. For instance, Friends groups typically stick with fund-raising events and membership, while foundations do grant writing, donor solicitations, planned giving, and corporate gifts. In fact, successful public library fund-raising depends on all of the major institutions—library, library board, foundation, Friends—having agreed-upon, clearly defined roles.

Staffing is an inevitable requirement for sophisticated fund-raising. The reasons for this are primarily time and expertise. Wealthy donors, private foundations, and corporations all need to be nurtured for successful fund-raising; this can be very time-consuming and happens over an

extended period of time. Many aspects of development, such as grant writing, and particularly grant requests to government agencies, require research and other expertise to accomplish goals successfully. Many other aspects of development work, from accounting and recordkeeping to public relations and marketing, also require levels of expertise that ultimately leads to the creation of professionally staffed offices. To be sure, the growth of development staff occurs over time and depends on the size of the library and community as well as on the model of organizational structure adopted.

Development and Strategic Priorities

Coordinating development work with the strategic priorities of the library is critical to the successful melding of the world of private fund-raising to the public library. However the development functions are organized, funds should only be raised for items or projects designated as needs by the library. The development staff should have a clear set of strategic priorities for private fund-raising efforts that are set by the library administration or library board.

A first step in creating development priorities is the library's strategic plan. Successful private fund-raising depends on clearly delineated needs backed by research or evidence confirming the needs, a plan of how to meet these needs, and a future vision of how these needs will be met by the library. Identification of priorities and future directions are essential parts of the library's strategic planning process. This process, which should ideally also include foundation or Friends staff or board, becomes the basis for a fund-raising case statement.

As part of the library's ongoing strategic planning process—typically a three- to five-year plan—an annual review of plans and priorities should be incorporated. The library administration should review the library's annual priorities with the development staff, and a list of potentially fundable projects for the coming period should be agreed upon jointly. The necessity of this big-picture and annual planning process is reinforced by common timelines for private fund-raising. Once a need or strategic priority is identified, it usually takes at least six months to secure any private funds; more typically, the process can extend from nine months to two years. Capital campaigns often require an even longer timeframe ranging from four to six years, from the initial prospecting phase until the final campaign pledges are realized. With timelines of this length, planning and a continual process are key elements to success.

An example of this process was experienced in the last ten years in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The public library, with extensive community input, created a comprehensive ten-year strategic plan in 1995. The priorities in this plan, reviewed each year, drove annual fund-raising efforts by the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library (operating under a merged foundation and Friends model). The library's 1995 strategic plan helped make clear the need for a major capital campaign, conducted from 1997 to 2001, which funded a renovation of the central library, and overhaul of the library's computer system, collections enhancements, and other identified library needs. The plan also allowed the Friends to explore the need to advocate for an alternative tax levy structure, put in place in 2004, with the long-term goal of increased public funding. The Saint Paul Public Library will undergo a new strategic planning process in 2005, with Friends board and staff expected to participate at appropriate points in the process. Throughout this period, development work expanded significantly, providing much-needed assistance allowing the library to meet most of its stated ten-year goals.

From the development side, there also are some cautionary notes about integration with library strategic planning. In general, private funding should not replace public funding for basic services. Many development offices are increasingly being asked to raise replacement funds, but because individuals, foundations, and corporations are reluctant to support what are viewed as basic government services, it is very difficult to raise private dollars for these needs. Private fund-raising is more likely to be successful if it focuses on enhancement projects, where the basic level of service is tax-supported and private funds add much-needed amenities.

One exception to the replacement versus enhancement principle is library collections. Funding for library collections can never be too high, and libraries are almost always looking to add to their collections. Because funders see the ongoing need for new materials, and books are passionately viewed as central to the library, many development offices are quite successful in raising private dollars for this basic library priority. Private funders are likely to fund books and other materials when they may balk at paying for bookshelves or the staff to stock the shelves.

A strategic decision that can allow for funding of basic services is the creation or expansion of endowments. Ideally unrestricted, endowments can provide for a broad range of support across all of the public library's endeavors, and if managed well, can do so on a regular, annual, predictable basis. This becomes a strategic decision in that many endowments are built through planned gifts or capital campaigns, and only endowment income is used each year. Thus, the relatively large sum of money creating a new endowment is not available to meet immediate library needs. If private funding for basic services is desired, endowment building—a long-term, strategic decision for both the library and development office—may be the appropriate course to follow.

As part of development planning and strategizing, it is also useful for library administration and the development office to be clear in deciding what private support will *not* fund as well as setting priorities for what it will. While this boundary often needs to be renegotiated as the local situation or external factors change, setting clear lines for

private fund-raising helps clarify roles and expectations. A good example of a library function for which private funds might not be raised is restoration or increases in library hours. Funding of library hours involves extensive support on an annual basis and thus is rarely appropriate for private development. Once again, local conditions will determine strategic priorities for private fund-raising, but the development office and library administration must work together on setting goals and expectations.

Building Constituencies and Working with the Community

In many ways, building constituencies and working with the community on private development at the public library is unique. The public library has a broad community base, but does not have a "natural" fund-raising constituency the way a university would look to alumni for contributions. Public library cardholder lists are usually off limits due to privacy issues, but even if they are available they may represent too broad a segment of the community for effective targeted fund-raising. More than 80 percent of all philanthropic dollars in the United States are raised from individuals, so it is critical for successful development to focus on individual donors to the library.[1] How, then, can a public library build a constituency for its private fund-raising efforts?

It is important to recognize that individuals willing and able to give to the public library may have a significantly different profile than the library user. For many public libraries, a typical donor might be older (aged fifty to seventy-five), well educated, and from a wealthier than average household. He or she currently may be a heavy user of the library or, just as likely, may rarely use the library but have used it extensively in the past, often as a child or when raising children. In a 2003 statewide survey in Minnesota, 60 percent of library users said they would consider a gift to a public library foundation, but perhaps more surprisingly, 45 percent of nonusers also stated they would consider a contribution if asked.[2] On the other hand, for many libraries, the typical patron may be a family with young children, or perhaps a teen from a diverse background. These patrons are not likely to be able to contribute significant private funds to the library but are core service audiences for the library's mission. This is not to say that the public library should focus on only one donor profile, and it should be strongly noted that these profiles vary from community to community and change over time. Nonetheless, it is valuable to recognize that the library's service constituency is different from the library's donor constituency. Library donors will have an interest in the library but do not necessarily use it, have the ability to give financial support, and must be afforded an opportunity to contribute.

Two fundamental ways to build a community constituency for public library development are through membership and board of trustee contacts. Most Friends groups have a membership program involving a small annual fee or contribution. Memberships (or other programs soliciting small donations) allow a broad range of donors from throughout the community to connect to the library. This membership or small donor group, while rarely generating significant income, is important as the base for all individual giving. If a Friends and foundation both exist to support the public library, the Friends should be encouraged to share their membership list with the foundation. It is critical to remember that many members will also make additional larger gifts for special projects or annual support at another time in the year. It is also well-documented that a high percentage of planned gifts comes from members and donors who give small amounts each year for ten or more years in a row. This is the typical profile for Friends members. It is important to pay attention to and nurture the library's smaller individual donors.

A second way to build community constituency is through the board of directors or trustees. Building a board of community leaders and expecting them to use their influence to expand the library's donor base is a fundamental and sound approach to building library support. As the board grows and develops, board members should be asked to participate in soliciting new donors from the community. Former board members also provide a natural constituency, and keeping them involved only serves to expand circles of influence. In many cases, and especially for donors at higher levels, it is the relationship to another person, such as a board member, that prompts an individual to give, rather than their commitment to the institution itself. The importance of fund-raising leadership for the public library can be summed up most appropriately: people do not give just to causes; people give to people who care passionately about an issue. Board members become the core group for this expanded development network of interpersonal relationships.

There are innumerable ways to further public library constituencies for private fund-raising. A few common methods include trading lists with other nonprofit organizations or buying targeted lists, and then sending out a direct mail solicitation; putting a contribution form in with a utility bill; or collecting names at author readings or other public events. Partnering with other organizations on programs or communitywide events, or joining community organizations such as the Jaycees or Rotary are also excellent ways to network and expand potential constituencies. As many of our localities are becoming increasingly diverse, it may be particularly important to network through other nonprofit or service organizations in order to connect early on with emerging communities. One must always remember to sustain current constituencies as well as broadening efforts to new audiences. Annual meetings or reports, author readings and cultural programs, public relations efforts, or simple thank-you notes are classic ways

to ensure that your audiences stay connected to the public library and its development program.

Staff Roles in Fund-raising

As previously outlined, the need for professional staff in the development office becomes clear as fund-raising efforts grow. The creation of a comprehensive development program at the public library certainly can begin with volunteers or part-time library staff, but as the more time-intensive work—grant-writing, recordkeeping, nurturing donors, creating case statements, corporate fulfillment, and accounting—increases, the necessity of dedicated fund-raising staff becomes unavoidable. A critical part of staffing the fund-raising office is to recognize that working with board and donors is an essential skill. Particularly in individual fund-raising, much of the role of the staff is in fact organizing and working with board members. It is the board members who provide the critical connections to higher-level donors, whether they be individuals, foundations, or corporations, and the staff should be skilled in this type of board management.

Regardless of the organizational model, library staff also has a vital role to play in development. The library director's involvement and work is central. If the development office is internal at the library, the director becomes the head of the team directing development. In the other models, the director ideally should have a close partnership with the head of the foundation or support organization. The director, with the library board, sets library priorities and then works with the fund-raising office to integrate these needs with the reality of what is fundable. The director can, and should, be involved in meetings with major donors in order to provide information about needs, services, and other background on the library. However, it is good practice for a representative from the foundation or support group (often the foundation director) to make the ask for the donation and take the lead in any negotiations that occur about the contribution or sponsorship. This helps establish the nurturing role of the foundation, enhances the request for a donation as contributing to the broader community good, and removes the library director from the often uncomfortable role in direct solicitation.

Beyond the director, all public library staff can play important roles in fund-raising. Individuals, and especially those giving smaller amounts, such as Friends members, are often influenced in their giving by excellent customer service at the library. As a free public institution, staff should not be expected to solicit contributions, but all direct service staff should be trained how to refer interested patrons to the appropriate way to make a contribution. All staff should be familiar with membership brochures, memorial or donation forms, and other fund-raising support materials available at the library. Staff can also be an important connection to the community, providing leads on potential donors, community groups, and other constituencies for the development office to pursue. In short, the public service staff needs to be knowledgeable about and supportive of the library's development program. The library administration can reinforce this through ensuring good communications, modeling support for private fund-raising, providing in-service training on philanthropy, setting in place reasonable procedures and processes for private giving, and offering occasional opportunities for the library staff to interact with development staff.

As a public library's development program becomes more comprehensive, other key library staff become more and more involved in supporting fund-raising. These staff members often oversee projects or areas for which private funding is sought. Typically, other library staff who provide key support for fund-raising include the members of the public relations, marketing, or community relations department; acquisitions or collections staff; outreach and youth services directors; and the technical services department. Facilities management staff are often close partners during building campaigns. Development is not divorced from the day-to-day operation of the public library, and to be effective, library staff at many different levels should understand, support, and promote the private fund-raising efforts.

Ideally, staff from the library as well as the foundation and Friends groups also will become donors. Staff contributions are especially critical during major campaigns. These contributions are less important in amount than that they convey that the entire institution supports the fund-raising activities. It is essential that the foundation board and staff as well as the library administrative staff be seen as financially supporting development drives. Obviously, requests for contributions from library staff should be handled sensitively and with prior approval from library administration. Through regular giving campaigns, such as a United Way–type program or through payroll deductions, many localities make these solicitations easier and less intrusive. Current and retired library staff should also be made aware of planned giving opportunities. Planned gifts offer library staff members a method to significantly support, sometimes in a targeted way, the aspects of the library they care about most and to which they have dedicated much of their working lives.

Mars and Venus in Alignment

Coming onto the scene only in recent decades, and having a culture often seen as at odds with the public library environment, a comprehensive program of development has the potential to generate conflict and contention within the public library. Management, governance, giving policies and procedures, internal strife between Friends and foundation, corporate sponsorship, and staffing issues are just some of the areas where significant problems can

occur for the public library embarking on advanced fund-raising programs.

There is a danger of focusing too much attention on the potential difficulties in public library development. As more and more public libraries have gained experience with private fund-raising, the positives are clearly winning out. The marriage of private fund-raising and the public library can in fact lead to a greater whole than the individual elements. By working together, a comprehensive fund-raising program can significantly improve the resources of the public library, and, in turn, the library can help itself through collaboration with and support of the development work. But the question still remains: "What positives should the public library expect to experience in its relationship to a development office?"

The first positive is obvious: increased financial support. Most libraries have plunged into development to increase their financial stability, and the success of all development should be judged against the new financial resources created for the library. Good development programs, however, provide a multitude of other positive effects. Creating and maintaining a strong board of trustees means that increasing numbers of community leaders are directly invested in the library. Donors and members at all levels, in fact, take a more personal interest in the library. Managed correctly, this can translate into strong, effective advocacy for increased public funding for the library. A high percentage of library donors also vote regularly in local elections, and many are active in political issues.

Good development programs also expand the library's connections to numerous community organizations and businesses, leading not only to increased financial support but also use of the library. Public and community relations are central to development work. Ongoing fund-raising, as an activity, usually promotes the most positive side of institutions as well as a future vision. For the public library, this often translates into extensive publicity about how dynamic the library is as an institution, how essential the library is as a community resource, and how the general public can use and get involved in supporting the library.

Finally, the world of development can add a new dimension and energy to the public library. Development work is naturally more entrepreneurial, independent, and risk-taking than public library environments. A strong, committed community support organization, providing real financial resources and marketing the institution as vital and growing, can provide a major boost to the best of public libraries and their staff. The trend toward more and more private fund-raising at the public library is likely to increase. A harmonic marriage of the worlds of public libraries and development—Venus and Mars—will assure that today's public libraries remain useful, active and well-supported in our communities.

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