

Mapping Our Experiences

A Training Exercise

GIFT and FIERCE

IT'S EASY TO TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO RAISE MONEY. It's harder to get them to actually do it. What often holds us back from being effective fundraisers is not lack of skill but negative experiences with money or fundraising.

Here are some of the typical negative experiences that many of us have had:

- Unhealthy communication—as when there is fighting within families over money
- Unjust power dynamics—as happens when people feel coerced by those who have money that they need
- Diminished self-worth from the feeling of not having enough money
- Guilt over having more money than others
- A sense of scarcity from believing that one will never have enough money

When we don't dedicate time to exploring these experiences during our fundraising planning processes, usually one of two things occurs: People go along with the creation of the fundraising plan but because they haven't raised or perhaps even recognized their negative feelings, they don't implement it. Or, people raise these issues but in a way that is unproductive, such as perpetuating myths, resisting participation, or creating tension or hostility.

To help bring these experiences into your fundraising discussions in a productive way, use this fun and revealing exercise at the beginning of a training, meeting, or retreat. It combines writing, talking, moving, and sharing in small groups as well as in the big group so that participants can dig deeper and think more creatively about how they can feel supported to raise money.

We have found that doing this exercise helps ground people in what they already know and helps them link their past experiences with their current fundraising efforts.

Questions to Get You Started

THE TYPES OF QUESTIONS THAT WORK BEST are those that are open-ended (rather than answered with a simple yes or no) but can be answered in a few words or one sentence. For example, rather than asking “Do you like fundraising?” (answers will be too shallow) or “Share one positive fundraising experience” (answers will be too long), try, “What is one thing you like about fundraising?” It's a good idea to mix a couple of fun and easy ones with those that are more serious and provocative. Here are some of our favorites:

What sustains you in fundraising?

Where do you turn for fundraising inspiration?

What do you like most about raising money?

What's the largest amount of money you've asked for and received?

What comes to mind when you think of the word “money”?

What comes to mind when you think of the term “fundraising”?

What's the most challenging thing you've experienced while fundraising?

How has race (or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, class) affected your fundraising efforts?

What's the worst response you ever got when asking someone for money?

What is one value you hold around the way you raise money?

What is a skill, talent, or resource you have that helps you in raising money?

What is one feeling you often experience in fundraising from institutions such as foundations, corporations, or government agencies?

What is one feeling you often experience in grassroots fundraising—asking for money from individuals within your community?

Exercise: Mapping Our Experiences

Goal: To help deepen our conversations around fundraising and increase our effectiveness in doing fundraising by recognizing the fuller breadth of our experiences.

Participants: Anyone who will be fundraising for the organization. This exercise is easiest facilitated for 8-20 participants.

Time needed: 30-60 minutes

Materials: Flip chart paper, enough markers for everyone there, tape.

Preparation: Decide who will facilitate the exercise. Choose four to seven questions from the list in the sidebar that are relevant to your group, or create your own questions. Write one question at the top of each flip chart sheet. Tape the sheets up around the room, leaving a few feet of space in between sheets.

Steps:

1. Everyone picks up a marker. Without talking, each participant walks around the room, writing answers to each of the questions on the posted sheets. The facilitator encourages participants to answer with their first reactions rather than think too long about what to write. People should spend no more than two minutes on each question. Provide two-minute and one-minute warnings.
2. Divide participants into as many groups as there are flip chart sheets or fewer (ideally, three to five people per group). Have each group stand in front of one of the flip charts and briefly discuss the answers there. After a few minutes, each group moves on to the next sheet, and so on. The total amount of time for this section should only be two to five minutes per question. Be sure to give time notifications to keep groups moving, as this section can take quite long otherwise. Don't worry if

there isn't enough time for every group to discuss all the questions. An alternative, if you are short on time, is to give the entire group five or ten minutes to walk around the room looking at all the charts individually without discussing their responses.

3. Bring the large group back together and ask these reflection questions:
 - Did you find any of the questions to be particularly challenging to answer?
 - Did you find any of the responses to be surprising?
 - Did you notice any similarities, differences, or themes among the responses?

Follow-up. Use this information to help inform your fundraising planning and training. For example, if several people shared during the exercise that talking about money triggers anxiety, you may want to spend time exploring the fear of asking (see the excellent *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* article, "Getting Over the Fear of Asking," by Kim Klein available at grassrootsfundraising.org).

You can then incorporate support mechanisms in your fundraising campaigns to address the anxiety, such as beginning fundraising discussions with breathing or relaxation exercises, pairing people up with fundraising buddies, or having each person post an inspiring quote on their wall when making fundraising calls. ■

FIERCE is a membership-based organization building the leadership and power of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth of color in New York City. GIFT and FIERCE co-facilitated this exercise at the Brecht Forum's 2011 annual grassroots fundraising conference.