

Fundraising Tips for Department Heads

The department head's role in fundraising is less about going to get money and more about developing a culture where the department thinks proactively about its funding. You need to communicate that everyone needs to be involved; when it comes to funding your department, no one should be sitting on the sidelines.

Focus on Relationships, not Transactions

- The first relationship to focus on is with the RIT Development Officer assigned to your college. Spend time helping that person get to know your department and the sorts of funding opportunities that are unique to your department.
- The next relationship to focus on is with your department's alumni. Partner with Alumni Relations to identify opportunities to speak with alumni and learn more about their interests.
- When you do have an opportunity to work with a potential donor, focus on building your relationship with that donor. Get donors talking to you. Ask potential donors about:
 - Their experiences with RIT
 - Their family
 - Their values and interests
 - Other activities and organizations in which they are involved

Focus on the Donor not the Department

- How would you feel if someone came to you and said, "Here's my vision; will you fund it?" Recognize that this approach focuses on your department and not on the donor.
- Understand the donor's aspirations and interests and how they mesh with your programs/plans/department. Match the work you are doing with what you know to be their needs and their aspirations.
- Once you know how your donor's aspirations your aspirations and are aligned, have an earnest conversation about what needs your program will be able to meet because of their gift. "Shift the focus, from what achieving your priorities will do for your department to what achieving your priorities will do for the constituencies you serve."

Manage your Time

- Donor cultivation is a long-term endeavor. "It is not wise to come in and expect that it will take 6-9 months to fund some new effort for the department. This isn't because the transfer of resources takes time, but because the building of relationships takes time. It will take time and investment to get the results you need."

- As department chairs have very limited time to begin with, don't be sidetracked by efforts that sound attractive but are unlikely to show much return. For example, while social media technologies offer inexpensive tools for listening in to alumni interests and reaching large numbers of constituents swiftly, social media, at present, is unlikely to provide by itself a vehicle that will allow department chairs to raise the amount of money needed to fund programmatic improvements. Text-to-give and Twitter, for example, are useful in specific circumstances (such as collecting funds swiftly in service to a short-term cause such as disaster relief), but have as yet seen little effect in higher education fundraising.

Involve Your Faculty

- Effective department chairs, as they rise through the ranks of academic leadership, recognize that the academic enterprise has to be funded by multiple sources if it is to thrive. One way that you get really good at cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding multiple sources is by engaging as many faculty in the work as possible.
- Have regular, candid conversations with both junior and senior faculty about the state of funding, and what needs to happen to ensure the future health and growth of the department; talk about the shared responsibility.
- Ensure that faculty and your college's Development Officer engage in ongoing conversations about the innovative research your faculty are doing that may interest and inspire donors.