



ESSENTIAL 4: Vigilance for mission and economic vitality

The board's role in fundraising, in two parts.

SUMMARY

There's not just one expectation when describing the board's role in fundraising, but two. It's generally agreed that governing boards are responsible to 1) provide the best possible governance when gathered as the full board, and 2) when away from the boardroom, to assist in winning friends, funds, and goodwill supporting the institution's mission. In other words, there's a "we" and a "me" to this essential, and wise stewards appreciate that both matters.

The Association of Theological School's Standards of Accreditation describes the governing board -- the "we" in this story -- as "ensuring that institutional mission is achieved in ways that demonstrate educational quality and financial sustainability" (Standard 9.1). Specific to the fundraising program, good governance undergirds institutional legitimacy and helps to boost donor confidence. In fact, there's no exaggeration in naming good governance as a board's first and most important contribution to a theological school's thriving.

That said, institutions don't live by governance alone and for a wide swath of theological schools, financial challenges rule the day. This is where "me" shows up. Fundraising is one of the few areas of institutional life in which hands-on involvement by individual board members is encouraged, even expected. As a board chair described, "When talking about the ways by which individual board members can be helpful to the fundraising effort, the question isn't will you pitch in, but how."

Except, that is, when it comes to personal giving by board members. As In Trust's own research uncovered, there's an almost universal expectation of 100 percent participation in support of the school at a level that's significant and sacrificial for each individual. From there, however, it's a choose-your-own-fundraising-adventure for trustees. Making introductions, saying thank you, telling their stories of commitment to the school, hosting donor gatherings . . . Regardless of comfort level, personality type, or community network, every member of the board can be an asset to the fundraising program.

Nothing builds confidence in and generosity to a theological school as do the best efforts of a high-performing board. The best efforts of individual board members “out there” are a close second. The “we” and the “me” of the board and fundraising; wise stewards expect, encourage, and celebrate both.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Describe the fundraising culture of the institution. Of the board. What is and isn't working? (Investigative)

What aspects of the expectations of “me” are most concerning to members of the board and why? (Subjective)

What resources and training could enhance board members' comfort with being part of the school's fundraising efforts? (Productive)



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