

# In Trust / FOCUS Group Launch Conversation

A strategic framework for building sustainable, relationship-centered fundraising and endowment efforts from the ground up.



# Start With People, Not Activity

In year one, the temptation is to ask: *"What are we going to do to raise money?"* But the better question is: **"Who are the partners we need to engage in order to accomplish the mission?"**

Schools that begin with events and campaigns will exhaust themselves. Schools that begin with relationships and clarity of mission will build something lasting. The biggest first-year mistake is **confusing motion with progress.**

## Build Your Case First

Develop a clear, compelling case for support *before* asking for any gifts. Clarity attracts confidence.

## Identify True Partners

Prioritize prospective partners — not just a list of donors. Think in terms of relationship, not transaction.

## Activate Leadership Early

Fundraising should not sit on one person's shoulders. Distribute ownership across your leadership team from day one.

## Relational, Not Transactional

Begin building a culture where giving flows from genuine relationship and shared mission — not from events or asks alone.

# Build Endowment With Clarity and Governance from the Start

Year one is when structure matters most. Before significant fundraising begins, collaborating institutions must align on purpose and governance — because **donors give generously to permanence and hesitate around ambiguity.**

📌 Clarity first. Fundraising second. Always.

## Two Principles Major Donors Expect

### 1 Endowment With Purpose

An endowment must be created to support a **specific collaborative purpose**. Vague or undefined endowments fail to inspire transformational giving. Mission clarity is your most powerful fundraising tool.

### 2 Governance Agreed Upon First

Decisions about **where the endowment is housed and how it is managed** should be agreed upon by all collaborating institutions *before* major fundraising begins. Unified governance signals trustworthiness to major donors.

# Prioritize Major Relationships in Year One

In year one, focus disproportionately on the top 10–20% of prospective partners who could fund 60–80% of the vision.

This isn't because smaller donors don't matter — they absolutely do. But early momentum from major relationships builds confidence across the entire collaboration and signals that the vision is real and viable.

## Effective Year One Strategies

- **Face-to-face visits** whenever possible — presence builds trust that no email can replicate.
- **A compelling case statement** that articulates the full vision with clarity and confidence.
- **Ask clearly and confidently** — ambiguous asks produce ambiguous results.
- **Show donors how their gift fits** into the full financial plan and long-term sustainability.
- **Involve them meaningfully** in the collaborative vision — not just as funders, but as stakeholders.

## What Endowment Donors Must Feel

### **Unified Leadership**

The collaborating institutions are aligned and moving as one.

### **Strong Governance**

Structures are in place to steward their gift responsibly for generations.

### **Long-Term Vision**

Their investment will outlast any one leader or campaign cycle.

### **Their Gift Matters**

They are not just one of many — their partnership is essential and recognized.

 **People give to people they know and trust.** Relationship is the strategy.