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Development at Metropolitan Universities

Metropolitan universities face special development challenges due to their age, circumstances, and lack of a strong fundraising tradition. Often confronted with stiff competition from other, more established institutions, they must move quickly to build annual giving campaigns centered on alumni, along with effective development organizations and infrastructure. Fundraising efforts that are clearly related to institutional mission, strategic plans, and a coherent image of the university are most likely to succeed. Metropolitan universities can benefit from proven lessons and approaches at other institutions, but will achieve particular success by building upon their unique strengths and developing strong relationships with individuals, foundations, and corporations in the local community. Development efforts can clarify and advance the institution's role, especially if it is fashioned around the university's metropolitan mission and what it does best.

Building and developing successful institutions are tasks shared by all higher education leaders. The particular challenges differ from institution to institution, however, because of varying circumstances and needs. Urban and metropolitan universities, as a general group, have experienced a particularly significant degree of growth and change—even transformation—over the past half century, but their growth was largely fueled by rapidly rising enrollments, a supportive public demanding more educational opportunities, and generous state funding. The new realities of public skepticism and declining state appropriations have highlighted the need for alternative sources of support, and for effective long-term development strategies.

We offer here a brief introduction to many of the development issues and opportunities facing metropolitan universities, and some observations about fundraising and broader institutional develop-

ment strategies. We do not attempt to be comprehensive or even necessarily original, but rather to stimulate thinking about the subject and to provide useful background for the articles that follow.

Development Challenges at Metropolitan Universities

Most urban and metropolitan universities are new institutions—either literally or in terms of function and mission. Many were established after World War II, often in urban areas that lacked a public four-year institution and suddenly faced demands for education and training from returning veterans with new families who settled overwhelmingly in the nation's metropolitan areas. Others had been in existence for some time, often as private institutions, but were initially dedicated either to the liberal arts or to teacher preparation. In the face of new educational needs and enrollment demands, they assumed new and more comprehensive public roles. In virtually all cases, these colleges and universities lacked a strong tradition of institutional fundraising.

To some extent, of course, this lack of a development history is common to public institutions generally, since educational giving was until fairly recently focused on private colleges and universities. And the major, established institutions, which counted among their graduates the leading state political and professional leaders, enjoyed the greatest alumni attention, loyalty, and financial support among the public universities.

Metropolitan universities, on the other hand, have generally had the least pronounced collegiate traditions (including athletics) and the fewest and least organized alumni. Whereas students in the traditional residential institutions identify closely with their class cohort, and with campus traditions and athletic teams that provide symbols for sustained loyalty, students at metropolitan universities tend to be nontraditional, are often employed part-time or full-time, and have family responsibilities. The traditional institutions have also tended to be the first choice for attendance of children from prominent families, or those who seek the easiest entry into the professional world, thus bringing the added appeal to future graduates of high public esteem and well connected alumni networks.

Alumni from even the older metropolitan universities have probably not been systematically cultivated until recently, and are unaccustomed to giving to the institution on a regular basis. They are also more likely to be among the first in their families

to attend college, and thus less likely to expect or appreciate a lifelong connection with their alma mater. The newer metropolitans have fewer and younger alumni, who have limited capacity for large gifts. In all cases, most alumni (especially those who graduated since 1970) will not identify with a particular class or a social group such as a fraternity or sorority.

Metropolitan universities all face stiff competition for recognition and public and private support from state "flagship" universities and other established institutions, especially those that are located in the same metropolitan area. The metropolitan universities are thus less likely to be considered an obvious choice for individual, corporate, or foundation gifts, both because they are less well known and because of more established relationships in the local community with the older, traditional institutions.

One common problem is that metropolitan universities are not well understood in the local area. Those that have changed dramatically—adding enrollments and new programs—may suffer from older local images and even stereotypes. Identification as a "teacher's college" or "extension center" may, in fact, persist far longer in the local area than in national higher education circles. Some metropolitan universities may have no strong public image at all. Problems of identity compound the difficulties of generating more financial support from a public averse to higher taxes and from elites more committed to private institutions or to the traditional public universities.

Thus, metropolitan universities face particular challenges in developing strategies and operations for significant institutional support from private giving, an arena that is more competitive than ever before.

Development Priorities

Building an Alumni Base

All successful institution-building efforts rest on a broad, solid foundation, and metropolitan universities often have the most work to do in this regard. Perhaps the most important element of a firm foundation is annual giving centered around alumni. Establishing a solid annual giving campaign and a vital alumni organization are high priorities for urban and metropolitan universities, even though the benefits of this

regular giving may not pay off in a significant way for years to come. In fact, just getting an effective alumni organization off the ground may take a decade or more.

A large list of donors—and the larger the better—is critical to any development effort. You can't ask for money unless you know whom to ask. And the number of donors is important, since the monetary return is ultimately a percentage (and a fairly predictable percentage at that) of the number of requests that can be made. Successful programs thus systematically identify and cultivate potential donors, starting with persons who have had prior involvement with the institution or who have indicated an interest in future involvement.

The obvious source of individuals with prior involvement is the institution's graduates. Even before the advent of modern fundraising efforts and techniques, farsighted university leaders recognized the importance of tradition, of imprinting and then maintaining an academic culture, a strong school spirit inculcated through ceremonies, athletic events, school icons and mascots, songs and colors, and a thorough emphasis on school history, tradition, and continuity. Ivy League institutions such a Princeton, Harvard, and Yale have long excelled at this.

Few such graduates can be found among metropolitan universities, partly because traditions are new and partly because the institution may have changed so much in recent years that the older traditions no longer seem to apply. Graduates of the teacher's college may have difficulty identifying with the comprehensive metropolitan university into which their alma mater has developed. Whatever the particular institutional situation, the cultivation and organization—and, in fact, the creation—of loyal alumni is exceedingly important.

Simply identifying alumni may be the first significant challenge, either because records have not been kept or existing records are seriously out of date. This is especially likely to be true, of course, in institutions that have not had a regular annual giving campaign. But developing and maintaining accurate alumni records is critical and cannot be delayed. All records that exist must be verified and all information, new and old, should be organized in such a way that it can provide maximum support for development efforts.

Alumni must be approached for the first time carefully and appropriately. A direct appeal for money is rarely well received when the institution has made no previous contact since graduation. Universities just beginning their alumni efforts will

have a considerable backlog of individuals in this category. An active group of alumni leaders is critical since alumni are usually more receptive to appeals by other alums than by university development staff. Alumni, however, do like to hear directly from the president or chancellor and they especially welcome contacts with favorite former professors.

Developing loyal alumni is a cultural as well as an organizational task—and one for the entire university community. The institution should begin developing a sense of tradition to establish its own, unique cultural identity. Seeking out and identifying instances in which historical continuity does exist can be followed by communicating these touchstones with the past at every opportunity. If necessary, the university should create its own sense of history and tradition with which its graduates can identify.

The University of North Texas, for example, has emphasized the "first generation" tradition of students who, largely through their own efforts, were the first in their families to obtain a college education. The tradition is further exemplified by a strong student work ethic and high employer satisfaction with graduates. Ironically, this very aspect has in some ways inhibited the growth of organized alumni efforts: upon graduation; UNT students tend to go to work and seldom look back. While they were in school they attended classes, worked part-time, and often helped support their families. Attendance at football games or immersion in student life were not often high priorities or major interests for them. Undoubtedly, many metropolitan universities have similar legacies and problems.

Positioning the Institution in the Community

Successful development efforts also grow, in most instances, out of a larger public relations strategy designed to accurately identify and position the institution in the metropolitan and state markets. As noted earlier, this is not a trivial challenge for universities with little history or a low, neutral, or inaccurate local image. To the extent possible, a broad strategy to guide all institutional efforts in the community should be developed at the outset to ensure consistency in the identity to be conveyed so that fundraising and public relations activities can be mutually reinforcing.

A clear sense of the present culture and mission—whatever the past traditions or legacies—is desirable, if not absolutely necessary. The much maligned process of strategic planning, when fully embraced by the central administration and the academic leadership, can provide one of the best ways to fashion common imagery, allay confusion about identity and purpose, and keep at least the key leadership on the same page. Whatever the specific approach, a confusing, inconsistent message will be damaging all around. Metropolitan universities are perhaps most likely to have to deal with recent changes in mission, internal debates about priorities, and competing constituencies. Given these circumstances, developing a coherent identity and message may not be entirely possible. But the negative consequences for development of failing to do so—or at least to try—will be measurable.

The importance of unified, concerted support among faculty, administrators, and staff for their institution's mission and development goals is worth emphasizing. A history of intense competition for limited resources within urban and metropolitan universities has created, in some instances, a climate in which collaboration and mutual support are difficult to achieve. But such a climate is precisely what is needed for successful fundraising: in development, there is no competition—any success, by any campus unit, leads to greater successes by other units.

In most cases, a central theme for metropolitan universities will be a strong identification with the local urban region, where the institution should have its most unique appeal and its greatest competitive advantage. There will be competitors for public attention and support. Most larger urban areas contain a variety of private schools and academies and even—as in the case of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex—several different four-year public universities. Each institution must then consider what particular and unique strengths and commitments it brings to the local area, to be highlighted in the strategic plan as well as in the overall public relations and development campaign.

Cultivating Individual and Institutional Donors

In addition to alumni support, metropolitan universities should move immediately to target foundations, corporations, and individuals who have particular interest in specific university programs and/or strong commitments to the local area. Whatever their commitments to or interest in national causes or other universities, these

individuals and organizations usually understand and appreciate the impact of higher education institutions in their own communities, both in terms of educational opportunities and economic impact. Virtually every large urban area has, in fact, one or more foundations whose focus is mostly or entirely on the local area, and support from these sources may also be important as a signal to outsiders that the contributions and importance of the local university are recognized. Obviously, initial contacts with foundations and corporations must also be appropriate, carefully considered, and built on discussions of priorities and long-term interests of all parties.

Loyal alumni from Ivy League and other private institutions have often been successfully recruited as donors and even leaders in fundraising for local universities. They usually understand and value a relationship with good programs and institutions, even though they also continue to support the schools they attended. But if they perceive that they gain something from their affiliation with the local university, and that they are valued members of the university community virtually on their doorstep, they may outdo true alumni in their support. Given the generally low economic capacity of many metropolitan university alumni (especially recent graduates), the success of any ambitious initial development effort may in fact depend largely on the work of prominent and well-placed "honorary" alums. These individuals are more likely to be prominent in their communities, and their support can legitimize and encourage patronage for the metropolitan university by other prominent citizens. Donors beget donors, especially among leading citizens.

Donors, at least in our experience, are motivated more by emotion than by reason. An argument may be logically persuasive, but unless it also strikes an emotional chord it is not likely to produce significant or continuing financial support. Individuals also tend to give to projects for which they have an existing affinity. Foundations usually have established goals and priorities, based on their own assessments and strategic plans, and must be approached within the context of these priorities. Once a person or organization with an interest in the university has been identified, it is imperative that they be matched with a program or activity in which they have particular interest.

Most development professionals would agree on one point: fundraising is a product of relationships. There is often a correlation between the strength of the relationship and the significance of the financial support. Thus it is extremely impor-

tant that donors be carefully matched with university representatives—from the president or chancellor to faculty or staff members—whom they like and trust. The importance of these personal relationships cannot be overemphasized. Most donors are probably like a well-known investment genius who, in an annual report, stated that he continued his habit of doing business with people he liked. To do otherwise, in his view, is akin to marrying for money—not a good idea under any circumstances, but sheer madness if you're already rich.

Individual relationships are built upon mutual respect and admiration and common interests—a chemistry of intangible ingredients that determines whether or not relationships take hold and grow. If donors act primarily on emotion rather than reason, the match between a donor and a particular university representative is one of the more critical decisions in a fundraising strategy, especially for large gifts. Friendships are difficult to orchestrate or mandate, and thus we are fortunate that they develop as often as they do. The main task is to recognize the positive relationships and build the specific development strategy around them.

The donor usually perceives his or her gift as the beginning of a new and important phase of a relationship with the university. The institution cannot be insensitive to that perspective, and must not simply take the money and move on to new relationships. Follow-up is crucial to sustaining the relationship and securing future gifts—from the donor as well as the donor's friends and associates. A formal expression of thanks appropriate to the gift is obviously called for, after which periodic contacts and invitations to university events will usually suffice. And continued awareness of the donor's changing interests and concerns will permit timely action.

Creating a Visible Presence

While a successful alumni organization, an annual giving effort, and cultivation of prominent local organizations and individuals with capacity for major gifts are most important, metropolitan universities cannot neglect any opportunity for outreach, at least within the capabilities of available resources and staff. People who come to campus or off-campus events—who attend concerts, theatrical presentations, exhibitions, athletic events, lectures, and open houses—should be cultivated for closer relationships with the university or its specific programs and activities. A visible presence in local cultural and public service efforts is, in fact, crucial to shaping a larger and

positive public image. These are also opportunities to work closely with community leaders, and to demonstrate the university's value to the local area. In this respect, however, local presence constitutes a substantial responsibility as well as an opportunity. Appeals for funds that extend beyond the perceived value and commitment of the university to the community will almost certainly backfire—in ways that may take years to repair.

Metropolitan universities should play to their strengths, including the establishment of mutually reinforcing relationships between the university and external organizations, other educational organizations among them. The historic tendency for academia to focus inwardly, to protect institutional autonomy and a separate academic culture, has impeded fundraising based on community service and open partnership with other agencies and institutions. Metropolitan universities should not hesitate to use their relatively greater openness to community needs and partnerships, particularly in the local urban area, to competitive advantage. Especially when the university can serve as a bridge between corporations and the community, or enable coalitions of multiple partners, the development rewards can be high. In development, as in most other activities, metropolitan universities should focus on what they do best.

The Basics Are Basic

Metropolitan universities must understand their particular circumstances and opportunities, but they should also recognize and learn from the key elements of any successful development effort at any type of institution. The experiences of other successful institutions, even the leading traditional private and public universities, can be very useful. The basics of development are the same for the University of North Texas as for Yale. At the most fundamental level, the rules are:

- identify individuals with an interest in the institution,
- match them with aspects of the university with which they find resonance, and
- match them with a representative of the university with whom they find rapport and comfort.

It is a process of identification, cultivation, asking, and stewardship, and, in an ideal relationship, the subsequent identification of new or greater interests and increased cultivation in a continuous spiral of involvement and support. Each step in this simple process requires a supportive—and increasingly sophisticated—infrastructure.

A good organization, a capable staff, and a clear development plan are three critically important elements of such an infrastructure. Equally important—and usually a handmaiden of the other elements—is good information on all individuals and organizations capable of supporting the university. Who they are, what they are interested in, their financial circumstances and capacity, and what other contributions they have made are as important to a development effort as intelligence is to our nation's national security.

Sophisticated information technology has made this task both easier and more frustrating. Storing data electronically is relatively easy, but the rapid advances of the hardware and the proliferation of differing systems actually renders data accuracy and retrieval more problematic. It is not uncommon for information on donors to be maintained in multiple—perhaps even dozens of—different databases. This not only presents a technical and communications problem, but tends inevitably to fragment development efforts across campus and interfere with collaboration. Obviously, one component of any effective development strategy must be to ensure accurate, useful, and readily accessible information.

Good development information does not consist only of names, addresses, and basic biographical data. It also includes intelligence about the net worth of specific individuals, past patterns of charitable giving, and interlocking connections with other individuals, families, and foundations. Knowing how much to ask for is almost as important as knowing who to ask. Not having such information puts any fundraiser, and any institution, at a real disadvantage.

Universities abound with individuals who are gifted in building relationships, which was probably a strong factor in their selection of teaching as a career. But not very many have the experience to be comfortable (and to make a potential donor comfortable) when asking for money. Most of us tend to confuse asking for money with the reality of university development and fundraising, which proceeds from the query, "How would you like to be involved in our success"?

Professionals know the difference. Often as a result of apprenticeship experiences in successful development efforts, they know how to build relationships, to set their sights high, and to build an organization that is capable of realizing institutional objectives. They have the confidence of experience and they know what is possible. They also know how to relate the needs of the institution to the capabilities of a

potential donor and to enlist the willing, enthusiastic assistance of the donor in addressing those needs. The professional understands that all potential donors *want* to be asked to help when the time is right. And, most important of all, they know when the time is right.

Many universities new to the development business have turned, more frequently than not, to internal representatives to lead their development efforts—individuals with superb interpersonal skills and prior successes as teachers or administrators. In most instances that approach has not worked very well. As in any other demanding endeavor (and development is more demanding than most), success is more likely with experienced, professional leadership.

We have already addressed the role of personal relationships in the development cycle. Such relationships relate the potential donor to areas of need within the university. Although there are exceptions, there is usually a relationship between the amount that a potential donor intends to provide and the rank of the university representative with whom they wish to build the relationship. Donors equate their value in the eyes of the institution by the rank of the person they work with: $100 donors can be comfortable with a relatively impersonal telephone relationship, or even a newsletter publication. Million dollar donors most often require a direct, personal relationship with a senior officer of the university and involvement, ultimately, with the chancellor or president.

Institutional governing boards are primary sources for such important relationships. In most instances, board members already have connections with high-potential donors, and they can meet the expectations of other significant donors through relationships that are guided by the development staff.

The same holds true for all academic leaders: potential donors whose interests are directed to aspects of academic programs want and need the involvement of the senior academic leader of that program, which in most instances is the dean of the college or school. Increasingly, deans are called upon to cultivate and capitalize upon such relationships, in addition to somehow managing all the internal issues and decisions attendant to complex intellectual and professional enterprises.

Development organizations have long been subject to outcome assessment. They exist to provide support (especially over the long term) for the educational enterprise. The dollars they raise and the friends they make for the university are the

ultimate proof of their effectiveness. Thus, development operations should reflect the very best characteristics of effective organizations—lean, customer-oriented, focused on institutional mission and priorities, and quickly responsive to new challenges and circumstances. The organizational structure should be clear and relatively transparent to donors and others who deal with it. The development office should be the easiest unit to work with in the entire university, and a model for others.

Development and Mission

Metropolitan universities often lack some of the infrastructure and advantages long established in traditional institutions. But they can learn from and build upon the experiences of these institutions and also take advantage of certain key aspects of their special role in their communities and in American higher education generally. Their development efforts should mirror institutional missions and aspirations, and complement their public relations efforts, their athletic programs, their presentations to the state legislature and other audiences, and their academic activities. Internally and externally, the development strategy should make sense to all important constituencies, and clarify the role and purpose of the institution and enhance its academic and public service programs. The stakes in all this are high. External fundraising is a more important key to institutional success than ever before, and many metropolitan universities have the most catching up to do. But given the importance of these institutions in our major population centers, there is no reason they cannot do it better.