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# Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

## A board's work can attract major gifts

By **Barry VanderKelen**

Nonprofit boards of directors play a more meaningful role in major gift fundraising than most people think. Of course board members need to be involved in the cultivation and solicitation of major gifts. But the manner in which the board conducts its work can attract major gifts.

People give major gifts if they think the organization will be able to handle them properly. Strong boards will protect donor intent and report out on the impact of a gift. Providing accurate information to donors is essential because donors want to know how their donations are being used.

Rarely does someone make a major gift without having researched the board and the

organization. Also, donors will test the organization by making smaller gifts and increase the size of donations as their confidence in the organization grows. Experienced fundraisers report that a major donation, as determined by the donor, comes after the fifth or sixth donation to the organization.

Prospective donors frequently look to see who's on the board. Do you have acknowledged leaders on your board? If not, are you able to succinctly state what expertise and passion each board member has?

This does not mean that every nonprofit should recruit the same board members. There is an inverse relationship between the effectiveness of a person and the number of

boards he or she sits on currently. As the number of boards increases, the effectiveness of the person decreases. It is difficult to adequately serve as an ambassador for all organizations.

Being a board member is a serious responsibility. Prospective donors want to know if your board takes its role seriously. Do board members connect the organization to new people? Does your organization have a reputation for using resources wisely? Are questions answered credibly?

Bottom line: Good governance leads to good gifts.

*Barry VanderKelen is Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo*

### Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

### Nonprofit Business Column of *The Tribune*

Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes a bi-weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community.

*The Tribune* publishes the column every other week in the Business section.

Each column is reprinted as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at [barry@slocf.org](mailto:barry@slocf.org).