

TIP SHEET

Four Critical Elements of Managing Arts & Cultural Development Officers

There are many types of people involved in arts & cultural fundraising like ticket buyers, event go-ers, members, major donors, and occasional donors. Sometimes the way they interact with you is out of your control: the economy, politics, changes in leadership, and pandemics. One crucial component is within your control: how you manage your development team and set them up for success. The human talent component of fundraising is vital to a successful development office. *Professional development officers are relationship builders.*

They spend time cultivating and engaging donors, yet Blackbaud's research shows the average development officer's term is only 18–24 months, and the average time from the first solicitation to a donor's first gift is four years. This means a donor may have two or even three different people from the same organization soliciting them before they finally make a gift. That is why retaining top officers is so crucial. Retention saves money by reducing recruiting and training costs, and increases income by eliminating relationship disruptions, thus shortening the time between first solicitation and first gift.

18-24
months

average development officer's time with an organization

Here we present four critical elements of managing and retaining development officers: consistency, clarity, accountability, and solidarity.

1

Foster trust through consistency.

Erratic management behavior alienates officers and staff. They are looking for a trustworthy, reliable, and attentive leader. To build that trust, develop a strategic plan and share it regularly with your team. Involve them in the process and create that shared vision together. Spend time with your officers. Become their trusted resource, coach, and advocate. Get back to the human element of what the team does.

Another way to establish consistency is to standardize processes and policies regardless of the team manager. All officers should have similar experiences across the organization and be aligned on how the work gets done. Set portfolio size and distribution standards to level the playing field across teams. If one team has a portfolio of 25 and another has a portfolio of 250, that will erode trust and create confusion. Set criteria for contacts, proposals, planning, and forecasting. Involve your managers in these decisions and get their endorsement, so they advocate for these standards within their teams.

2

Clarify roles and responsibilities.

A fundraiser's job is to raise money for the organization. Development officers should be very clear and unapologetic about that role, especially when establishing relationships with donors. On the first visit, the donor should understand that the meeting is for fundraising purposes. Development officers should use every interaction to meaningfully engage every donor in a movement towards their next gift. It's the manager's role to free those officers from other tasks, so they spend time working on their portfolios and raising money rather than writing newsletters, planning events, or visiting donors just to catch up. The most successful organizations are laser-focused on the bottom line.

When hiring fundraisers, look for people who are confident and excited about raising money and who understand the position. Hiring based on experience does not always equate to talent. Be mindful of job hoppers. Research shows that 50% of development officers currently working aren't meeting goals and expectations and are raising less than \$500,000 annually. In some cases, they are not raising enough to pay their salary.

Be clear in how you measure job performance so everyone on your team understands their duties and the expectations around their role. Tailor goals and expectations based on each officer's role, tenure, experience, and portfolio. A brand-new associate might need to focus more on first-time visits, while a more tenured officer with a more mature portfolio should concentrate on solicitations delivered. Measure the most important goals that lead to results.

3

Schedule accountability meetings.

How do you ensure that goals have weight and meaning? Schedule regular meetings to review data points with your officers to build accountability. Ensure they understand it's not about micromanaging or a lack of trust. Accountability meetings keep a pulse on things and maintain open communication. Here is one recommended cadence:

Bi-Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review lapsed prospect contact (≥ 180 days) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review goal progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review organization-wide and unit-based progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review contact activity month-to-date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review this month's activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess likelihood of hitting year-end targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss barriers/challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review delivered and upcoming solicitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and share trends vs. peers

Successful cultural organizations use [powerful analytics software](#) in conjunction with their main [constituent relationship management database](#) to identify the top 3–4 quantifiable metrics to evaluate performance. For example, you may want to measure total visits, the number of proposals submitted, the dollars raised, and first-time or qualification visits. Clarify how you expect your officers to spend their time and ensure that reporting is up to date and easily accessible for officers and managers to review at any time.



Establish solidarity within your team.

While mission solidarity is essential, so is curating connections between team members. Remember that a new team is formed every time an officer leaves or a new officer is hired. Be sure to provide opportunities for interaction between leadership, senior officers, and newer talent. Senior officers can help mentor new staff. Encourage collaboration by allowing for joint credit for solicitations and visits. This can create a stronger team and help reduce turnover.

When discussing performance, use goals and progress as an opportunity to coach, not punish. Help create solidarity in your team with agreed-upon metrics. Blackbaud has many [analytics tools](#) that work with your fundraising database or CRM. It can help you manage your development officers and guide you to the data your team needs to work more efficiently. Blackbaud's target analytics solutions include predictive models, peer benchmarks, and year-round consulting to improve fundraising results. Paired with [Blackbaud Altru](#), the simplified ecosystem built just for Arts & Cultural Solutions, you will have the right tools in place to set your development office for success for a long time to come.

Curating a culture of excellence

Training and retaining top officers are crucial to successful fundraising. The longer gift officers stay with your organization—mastering the systems, practices, and relationships associated with the job—the more productive they tend to become.

The most effective development teams have consistency, clarity, accountability, and solidarity within their organizations. Establishing all four takes time and requires attention throughout the year. That hard work pays off when donors recognize the stability and dedication of your team and make more frequent or more significant gifts. To sustain your organization's mission, it's imperative to develop human talent and curate a culture of excellence.

Blackbaud has fundraising software for cultural organizations of any size, including small museums up to the largest zoos. Our innovative solutions have helped thousands of organizations raise billions of dollars to power museums, zoos, gardens, and aquariums all over the country.

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