

Strengthen Your Advancement Efforts—Take Gender into Account

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A dean discovers that her college's philanthropic appeal can be made more effective by taking into account the predominantly female composition of the alumni.

A few years ago, we realized that representatives of our college were conspicuously absent from top leadership positions in campus-wide alumni groups and university foundations. Although our college was one of the first established at the university and we had a large, active alumni base, it became obvious we needed to develop a plan to broaden our effectiveness and scope of influence.

Historically, our college programs attracted a female population; the alumni base was largely female. We needed to develop a leadership and philanthropy focus designed especially for women. The question was how.

We knew that those who made up our donor base group (we call them Associates) were savvy, sophisticated, and skilled leaders. We searched for a mechanism that could be used to focus this talent into leadership beyond the college and increase the numbers who were giving of their time and treasure.

We formed a planning group to provide insight and guidance in finding a solution.

A FUND-RAISING APPROACH FOR WOMEN

In early spring 1995, we launched the first "Women in Philanthropy: Advancing a Spirit of Caring" symposium, a day-long program attended by 75 of our college alumni and friends. From this modest beginning, the yearly symposium has grown in size and now attracts between 350 and 500 participants. Symposiums have featured nationally known keynote speakers such as Martha Taylor (*Reinventing Fundraising: Realizing the Potential of Women's Philanthropy*), Suze Orman (*The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom*), Erica Whittlinger (*Sound Money*), "The Beardstown Ladies," Joan Perry (*A Girl Needs Cash*), and Renata Rafferty (*Don't Just Give It Away*), as well as practical, hands-on workshops in a breakout format.

The workshops grew to include financial planning basics, guidance for philanthropic decision making, and leadership skill development. Programming is now offered to smaller groups around the

state throughout the year. A quarterly newsletter, *The Giving Spirit*, has a circulation of 650. Private underwriting has increased each year so that the cost of attendance remains modest, encouraging the involvement of students and young women.

RESULTS

After seven years, the Women in Philanthropy (WIP) symposium appeared to be a success. It had evolved into a well-regarded campus-wide event that involved all colleges and their development officers, drew attendees statewide, and was recognized nationally. It appeared that we were achieving our mission—"to inspire and educate women to assume volunteer leadership positions and achieve full confidence in their capabilities as financial donors."

However, we wondered if it was possible to document what we believed we were achieving.

DOCUMENTING SUCCESS

A study was commissioned using an external research organization.¹ The aim of the evaluation was to determine if differences existed in women's views of philanthropy and charitable giving, based on their level of involvement in the program.

Three comparable groups of women were invited to participate in focus group discussions:

1. Women who had attended at least two annual symposiums and received the newsletter.
2. Women who had not attended the symposium but who had received the newsletter.
3. Women who had no contact with the WIP program.

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify the factors that motivate and influence these groups of women to give.
- To determine if they distinguished between contributions of time and contributions of money.
- To identify how they evaluate the effective use of their charitable gifts.
- To learn how charitable giving evolves with age.

- To assess views of what it means to be a “philanthropist.”

When asked what attracts them to the causes they support, there was a common theme across all groups—they were attracted to causes because of personal experience with the issue or cause.

However, beyond this common theme, there were notable differences among women, based on their level of involvement in the program. Those most involved in the program described themselves as:

- Having a passion for the causes they support; being emotionally “charged” by their financial donations.
- Motivated by a sense of giving back or repaying for their own good fortune.
- Wanting to leave a legacy.
- Desiring hands-on evidence that their gifts are being used effectively.
- Donating time to causes to which they are truly committed—involvement creating greater commitment.
- Being less likely to cite their spouse as an influence on their charitable giving decisions.
- Knowing their financial situations, hence able to develop comprehensive giving plans.
- Over time, with greater life experiences, donating to a greater number of and varied causes.

And, perhaps most significantly,

- Those more involved in the WIP program have a well-defined conception of philanthropy and are more likely to view themselves as philanthropists.

Our conclusion is that the program is achieving its goals.

- Those involved with the program have gained knowledge and confidence in their abilities to manage their finances, including charitable giving.
- Our alumni, both of the college and the program, are now highly visible in top leadership positions in campus alumni organizations and among foundation trustees.

- Since 1995, college endowments have increased by 176 percent; comparing dollars raised in 1995 to 2002, the increase is 142.6 percent—positioning our college among the top in private gifts received.

Of course, there are multiple factors that may have affected these increases. However, we believe the results of the study support our conclusion that the Women in Philanthropy program was an important contributing factor. In addition, it has brought a strong, dedicated group of alumni and friends together for the common cause of gaining greater understanding, control, and confidence in their ability to manage financially, while, at the same time, leaving the legacy of furthering the development efforts of the college and university they love.

THE FUTURE OF "WOMEN IN PHILANTHROPY"

Our Women in Philanthropy program continues to mature and develop. A Women's Giving Circle was initiated three years ago by a subgroup of the Advisory Board. Individuals invest in the fund, which supports a competitive grant program. Awards are announced at the annual symposium. Another recent addition to the program is naming the "woman philanthropist of the year."

A further goal of the program was to reach students. We are beginning to see results.

- Our undergraduate "Ambassadors," a student leadership organization, have initiated a Senior Legacy program and this year added financial management seminars to their activities conducted by Women in Philanthropy volunteers.
- The student council has added fundraising to its agenda and will award its first scholarship this spring.
- A recent graduate, who received a scholarship to attend the 2000 Symposium as a student, funded a scholarship in her undergraduate department.

Faculty and staff also participate.

- Over 90 percent of our college faculty and staff participate in a family fund drive each year and are now funding a scholarship.
- Likewise, the college alumni board, made up primarily of new careerists, is endowing a scholarship.

We believe the “Women in Philanthropy: Advancing a Spirit of Caring” program has provided the impetus to develop a giving culture that permeates our entire college—from students, staff, and faculty, to alumni and friends. We think it bodes well for the future.

¹ Complete study available upon request.

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