

Why your charity's strategy is the key to achieving your fundraising goals.



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Paul, a charity, sports, and CSR leader, joined Oaks in 2023 as the Director of Charities. With a 20-year career in the military and various strategic roles in organisations including The Football Association, Barclays, and Blesma - The Limbless Veterans, Paul brings a wealth of experience to his current role. His expertise lies in national strategy, programme development, partnerships, and consultancy, particularly within the charity and sport sectors.

For charities across the globe, strategic planning and fundraising go hand in hand. A robust strategic plan is underpinned by your charity's vision, mission and purpose, and fundraising provides you with the means to achieve these goals. However, for charity leaders under huge pressure to raise critical funds as quickly as possible, it can be difficult to find the time to make sure your fundraising is aligned with your strategic direction.

Here, we explain why effective strategic planning is so important to realising your charity's fundraising goals and provide a few tips to help you on your way.



1. Understanding your charity's identity and purpose will help you focus your time, energy and resources

The first stage in any charity's strategic planning process is understanding and articulating your charitable purpose: the reason for your organisation's existence and work. This needs to be step one because all your charitable activities, including your approach to fundraising, should support the progress of this purpose. For registered charities in the UK, your charitable objects, (the purpose-statements that underpin your charity's governance and activities), should provide this information. For other organisations, it is important to begin your strategic planning by identifying exactly who it is that your charity helps and how it helps them.

In today's competitive fundraising environment, approaching individuals or institutions who don't align with your charity's purpose is likely to result in disappointment. For this reason, it's never been more important to understand exactly who you are and why you exist. Determining and articulating your purpose will enable your charity to understand your funding priorities, identify relevant opportunities and prioritise accordingly.

2. Mapping out your fundraising goals will enable you to take a long-term approach

Through effective strategic planning, you can map out exactly how you're going to reach your fundraising goals and communicate this easily among your team and stakeholders.

Start by conducting a thorough investigation into your current fundraising activities: finding out the breakdown of your income streams, and which fundraising-related resources and capabilities you possess. This step will inform all your subsequent strategic decisions. Ask your leadership team a series of questions:

1. What is our fundraising revenue currently (and how does this compare to previous years)?
2. Where is our income coming from?
3. What are our charity's strategic priorities over the next X years?
4. Roughly how much money do we need to raise to achieve these priorities?

These questions will help your team understand where you are at the moment, and how this stacks up against your priorities for the next few years. The next step is to map out how you get from where you are now, to where you want to be. Here's a few useful questions to get you started:

1. What resources and capabilities we currently have? (This could be skills, time, budget etc.)
2. Where do we need additional capacity?
3. What are our existing income generating opportunities?
4. Are there any new opportunities we could be exploring?
5. What are the risks?

These questions are similar to a traditional SWOT analysis: helping you to identify your charity's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats when it comes to fundraising. This simple analysis of your internal and external environment is a staple part of the strategic planning process and ensures your fundraising ambitions are within the bounds of your resources and capacity.

3. Establishing a system to quantify success and track progress will help you monitor your fundraising performance

Fundamental to both strategic planning and fundraising is identifying your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): the metrics that will determine what success looks like, and deciding how you will track your progress against them. Many charities will have annual or quarterly income targets, but strategic planning enables you to look beyond the financials and identify other measures of success.

Examples might include:

1. Donor retention rate
2. Donation frequency
3. Donor motivation
4. Website traffic
5. Social media engagement
6. Newsletter sign-ups
7. Number of volunteers/Number of volunteering hours

And this is just a starting point! It's worth noting that your marketing and communications form a central part of your fundraising activity, so it's a good idea to track the level of awareness of your charity and how it is perceived. We'd recommend investing in a decent CRM system to more effectively manage your relationships. There's plenty of free and low-cost options available, so regardless of budget, could be something to consider - this article by Charity Digital about [the best CRM systems for 2024](#) is a good starting point.

Developing a set of realistic, measurable KPIs and communicating these effectively across your team and stakeholders will ensure that everyone understands your targets.

Similarly, establishing a system to monitor progress is really important: it enables you to

4. Allowing your stakeholders to contribute (and buy in!) to your fundraising plans

To ensure your strategic plan is representative of your charity and its stakeholders, we recommend a thorough stakeholder consultation process. Sit down with all of your stakeholders and hear their perspectives about the charity's past activities and future direction.

Asking your staff, beneficiaries, volunteers and most importantly, your donors, a few questions about your current approach to fundraising is important for several reasons: Checking in with your stakeholders will help you to understand the state of your relationships and identify areas for improvement. Unless you regularly speak to your donors, you won't know how they feel about your activities, which may eventually cause them to feel alienated from your organisation and its cause. Effective relationship management means facilitating a two-way conversation with all of your stakeholders, particularly regarding fundraising.

Your stakeholders may identify new opportunities (or risks!) for income generation which your leadership team might not otherwise have considered. It's always worth getting diversity of input to ensure you're not missing a valuable perspective. If your stakeholders feel they have contributed to the development of your strategic plan, they are more likely to buy in to it. It is much easier to make an ask of your donors if they are on board with your strategic direction!

Ultimately...

Strategic planning and fundraising cannot be considered in isolation. A strategic planning process, if done correctly, will help you hugely with the implementation of your fundraising approach. It provides your team with confidence and clarity to assign resources and tasks to the right people. Despite the lengthy to-do list that charity leaders often face, it's worth taking the time to develop a simple strategy, ensuring all the component parts of your organisation are aligned towards your vision.

We hope you found this article useful. If you'd like to learn more about how we can support your charity with strategic planning or fundraising, don't hesitate to reach out.

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