The Best-Case Document®

The Problem: Decreasing Revenue-Increasing Needs!

Small and medium nonprofits (those with annual revenue below $500,000) are more challenged than ever when raising funds to support their mission. Although for the most part, we have seen growth in giving to nonprofits between 2014 and 2017, not all organizations have benefited equally. There is a wide discrepancy in the rate of revenue growth between large and small organizations. The "2017 Fundraising Effectiveness Survey Report" by the Urban Institute and the Association of Fundraising Professionals found that organizations that raised $500,000 or more saw a median rate of growth of 8.6%, while organizations that raised less than $100,000 realized significantly less growth -10.4% (see the table below).

Organization Size & Growth Rate	2014	2015	2016	2017
-0-to $100,000	**-2.4%**	**-7.8%**	**-11.8%**	**-10.4%**
>$100,000 to $500,000	**1.9%**	**3.1%**	**0.6%**	**1.2%**
$500,000 or more	**10.5%**	**10.4%**	**10.7%**	**8.6%**
2014-2017-Fundraising Effectiveness Report				

Although most organizations are challenged to raise more funding to support their missions, smaller organizations are particularly under pressure. Clearly, financial sustainability has been found to be the number one issue for nonprofit leaders and recent research reveals that 80% of nonprofits leaders intend to increase grant-seeking efforts to meet their mission and address the increasing needs of the communities they serve.

The increasing needs of constituents

The demand for the services offered by nonprofits is increasing, and research confirms that many nonprofits are not able to meet this demand, consider that:

- ✓ 76% of nonprofits see an increase in demand for services
- ✓ 52% could not meet demand
- ✓ 71% said the needs will continue to go unmet

There are several trends which may work against the desire and intention of nonprofits, particularly small nonprofits (those under $500,000) to increase revenue and keep up with the demand for services. One is increased competition

Competition for available funds have increased significantly

The significant increase in competitors competing for existing funds are exasperating the problem:

- According to IRS data, the number of registered charities grew by 28.4% between 2005 and 2015 to 35,573.
- Therefore, more organizations today are pursuing the same dollars to meet the demand of their communities

In an environment of hyper competition for funds, accountability and therefore data requirements facing those seeking grants from foundations, corporations and major donors have increased significantly

Funder data requirements: A challenge for grant-seekers

In addition to revenue becoming more scarce, constituent needs increasing, and competition for available funds becoming more intense, funder documentation requirements has continued to be a challenge. Documentation can be defined as: identifying, collecting, sorting, storing and updating essential information needed to meet donor requirements

Quality documentation provides an advantage in building your case for support by providing evidence that you are getting results with your programs and services. Poor documentation places you at-risk of being seen by funders as not delivering on your promises therefore, you will not receive credit for your good work. As the old adage goes, "If you can't measure it, you did not do it".

Five factors have led to the increased data requirements found in the current fundraising environment:

1) Due diligence for the part of funders: (defined as, the process by which a funder assesses whether an organization is in compliance with their funding guidelines) requires more documentation from grant-seekers

2) Online applications are becoming more common: online applications allow funders to receive the information they need in a standardized format as well as making it easier to share the documents with a team of reviewers
3) LOI process: Letters of Intent or Inquiry are being increasingly required as part of the grant application process. Although this process can decrease the number of full proposals a donor must review, from the grant-seekers perspective, this can have the effect of being two applications
4) Many donors are preferring to fund specific programs over general operating grants; program applications are usually more data intensive than general operating grant applications
5) Outcome and evidence-based programs require more data. Donors increasingly are demanding proof of impact and results. Proving results requires data!

We expect these trends to continue to create continued challenges for grant-seekers and data requirements will continue to be a strategic issue.

Donor Data Requirements: Challenge and Opportunity

Donors expect documentation, but many grantees or potential grantees struggle to meet that expectation due to lack of resources. A 2008 report revealed that many grants are not "right-sized," meaning that the same amount of documentation is required to apply for a $10,000 grant as a $200,000 grant. What's more, for one grant application, a nonprofit can invest 10–20 hours and receive no payoff if they are not successful. This is a significant investment of time considering that only approximately 10% of grant submissions are funded.

These factors lead to producing what we call the documentation gap. The documentation gap is the difference between what donors want and expect and what nonprofit organizations can provide. The documentation gap has led to several consequences, including nonprofits foregoing potentially promising opportunities due to lack of resources.

As we said, an individual agency cannot control all the factors associated with the fundraising environment, but documentation can be improved. The documentation gap is a challenge but it also presents an opportunity. As we have seen, documentation is a process; and like any process, it can be improved, leading to the opportunity to increase revenue for your organization. But how do you leverage the opportunity?

Leveraging the Opportunity

One of the greatest opportunities available to nonprofit leaders is to optimize and leverage existing resources to improve the fundraising process and outcomes.

You cannot control all the factors which create barriers to fundraising due to lack of available resources, but with your existing resources your documentation process can be improved by:

> Closing the documentation gap, your effectiveness at meeting donor expectations will lead to increased capacity and revenue for nonprofits while leveraging existing resources: administrative staff, volunteers, and boards

The opportunity exists because data and revenue are linked! Looking at data management as a process and processes can be improved-a critical process that can be leveraged to produce more revenue to support your mission!

You will create an opportunity and advantage for yourself by having all the information you need in one place, saving time normally wasted searching for and requesting information and being able to use that time to respond to emerging grant opportunities and strategic mission-driven activities to serve your mission. But it will not happen by itself. What is needed is a systemic solution which is not resources-intensive but is easy to implement.

The Best-Case Document Program Solution

When we first developed the Best-Case Document tool, we found leaders and program people did not understand the purpose of the tool, the content that should be included and how to collect that content. We know that in order for the Best-Case Document to create the value for the agency, grant-seekers must not just collect information but collect the right information.

The Best-Case Document features tools to help you increase your capacity to manage the documentation challenge. It will enable you to leverage one of your most important assets: information about your program and organization Since much of the data requested by donors is redundant, grant seekers need to change their approach. Instead of applying to each grant with a blank sheet of paper, you could use a case file of data about your program to populate the application. This file is called a case document. Grant-seekers would only have to provide content that is unique to the specific application they are responding to because the rest of the information has been completed---saving time completing fundraising documents (proposals, letters of inquiry and grant reports).

The Best-Case Document Course is a ten-module eLearning course founded on evidence-based adult learning principles. It focuses on the seven areas of inquiry most commonly found on grant applications. For each area, you will develop a case document using the principles and process of the Best-Case Document process. The process includes identifying the right questions, developing responses, evaluating content, and finalizing the document. Again, because data and revenue are linked, improving the process will increase revenue.

The Course Agenda

This comprehensive ten-module course was designed to be completed in 4-6 weeks culminating in a finished product, your own Best-Case Document.

1) The Introduction (the rationale and strategic justification for the Best-Case Document)
2) The Organization and the Capacity
3) The Problem/Needs Analysis
4) Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes
5) Methods and Implementation Plan
6) The Evaluation Plan
7) The Budget and Financial Report
8) The Sustainability Plan
9) Personal Workshop (to walk you through the four-step process of creating your Best-Case document)
10) Leveraging the Best-Case Document (Using the BCD to increase fundraising effectiveness)

Also, the course includes learning Tools: Best-Case Document Template, Worked Examples, Concept Maps, Procedural Guidelines, Evaluation Guides

Return on Investment

You will realize significant benefits by having all the essential information you need in one place—saving you time and a lot of stress.
***Saving time*:**

Through saving time, you will also create more capacity to generate quality grant applications and reports utilizing existing resources which will in turn lead to more revenue

Engagement of staff, board and volunteers:

The completed Best-Case Document will provide you with a valuable tool to help you engage your board and volunteers in the fundraising process. As your share the content of the Best-Case Document with them through training, meetings and online and off-line communications they will better understand your programs and services tools thus becoming more engaged in your fundraising activities.

Improving productivity:

After you develop your own case document, you will have the capacity to complete fundraising documents (proposals, letters of inquiry, and reports) faster and with less resource investment, resulting in more revenue. Consider the following example:

- ✓ Funders normally only approve 10% of the grant application they receive
- ✓ If a nonprofit submits 10 proposals per month, it will yield 120 grant applications per year
- ✓ A 10% approval rate for those submitted proposals will yield 12 awards annually of $20,000 each (assuming a average grant size)
- ✓ Twelve grants of $20,000 will produce $240,000 per year

Finally, responding to data requirements from funders can produce a lot of stress for leaders and staff; having more control of your data will reduce that stress, and improving your documentation capacity make you a more cost-effective organization, therefore more attractive to funders and supporters. The bottom line is, you will build within your organization an increased capacity to generate funds to support your mission!

What will it cost you to achieve these outcomes? Because we anticipated working with organizations with limited budgets, we have intentionally kept the financial cost of the course at a modest amount. In addition, we have designed the course so that it is on-demand learning that will fit into your schedule. Consider:

1. Your **financial investment** is $299 for the first person and $100 for each additional person from your organization
2. **Time investment** for you or members of staff, board or volunteers (10-20 hours—the time it takes to complete one typical grant application) which can be completed at their own pace
3. You will need to commit to use the system
4. Mobilize and engage staff and supporters to commit to this model

Most of all, we are here to help!

About Us

Second Shift Productions LTD. Motto: Better Living Through Learning

Principals: Rudina A. Johnson, B.A. Communications, Licensed Minister, Certified Nouthetic Counselor--Leonard T. Johnson, M.A. Organization Management, Certified Grant Writer®

- Over 2000 leaders and staff have attended our workshops
- Designing of workshops in personal and professional development
- Creation of e-learning programs to increase productivity
- Fundraising and program development
- Strategic Planning and Marketing
- Communications, Change and Conflict management
- Leadership and professional and training
- Self-Care Workshops

Past Clients include: YMCA of Chicago, UnitedHealthcare, Chicago Youth Development, McCormick Center Leadership Connections, Chicago Youth Centers, Black Childcare Development Institute, Good Shepard Center

Most importantly, the principals have been married for 31 years and are the proud parents of two grown daughters, Lauren and Lynne, a cat Pippa, a dog, Ayana