Fundraising for Hippotherapy Non-Profit Organizations

Building an effective hippotherapy non-profit organization through fundraising methods and production of a photographic calendar to benefit Mane Stream, Inc.

Tag Words: charity; donor; equine therapy; fundraising; hippotherapy; horses; Mane Stream; non-profit; NPO; philanthropy; photo calendar

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Summary:
Raising funds for hippotherapy programs in non-profit organizations is an essential component to success, yet many non-profits overlook its complexity. Hippotherapy programs necessitate fundraising for many reasons including the general lack of coverage from insurance companies for hippotherapy programs. When faced with the task of fundraising there are many aspects that a separate management team for fundraising must undertake. There are different levels and types of donors that must be integrated and investigated in order to run a successful program and carry out the organization’s specific mission. Mane Stream, Inc. of Oldwick, New Jersey does just that and we aided in one level of their fundraising efforts by creating a photographic calendar product to benefit the non-profit organization.

Video Link: https://youtu.be/bZQseK3a79Y

The Issue: The Need for Fundraising
Fundraising for a non-profit organization is not only a complex, but also a necessary element for a successful organization. Success in a non-profit organization is generally defined as the organization’s degree in which they fulfill their mission (1).

Complexity:
Fundraising is a key component of a prosperous non-profit organization (NPO). There are hundreds of books and publications on the shelves today which detail the intricate steps to a profitable and sustainable fundraising campaign. Running a business, an NPO, in which a large portion of its budget is often required to come from fundraising efforts is no small task. One person cannot simply be in charge of coordinating everything from establishing a client base to providing the service to managing the financials; there is not enough time in the day. This is why the complexities of fundraising warrant its own department and management team within a hippotherapy not-for-profit organization.

Insurance Issues:
Repeatedly, there are issues with insurance refusing to cover hippotherapy sessions, which adds to a hippotherapy NPO’s demand to fundraise. It is often quoted by insurance companies that hippotherapy is experimental. For example Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield state in their policy that “based upon our criteria and review of the peer-reviewed literature, the following services have not been medically proven effective and are considered not medically necessary: Hippotherapy, Equine Movement Therapy, Horseback riding” (2). However, the reasons behind why the majority of insurance companies will not pay for hippotherapy are cloudy. Is it possible
that they are hiding behind the current lack of definitive medical research findings because anything related to a horse is considered too high of a risk and will cost them too much money or because they do not feel responsible to provide therapy to certain subsets of disabled people? Either way, lack of insurance coverage means that hippotherapy NPOs must fundraise to aid their clients in making their services affordable.

Since the majority of insurance companies will not provide payment for hippotherapy, this means that the cost of these sessions fall entirely on the client. When an NPO has a mission to “improve the quality of life for individuals with physical, developmental, emotional, and medical challenges”, as is true for Mane Stream, it dreads turning away possible clients who are in need of their services (3). A frequent measure of success of an NPO is how effectively they carry out their mission and the amount of funds raised reflects that. It reflects how much support they have and the amount of need that there is in the community for their particular service provided (4). The entire idea is to be able to provide this service, hippotherapy, to those in need, which means that if someone is unable to finance their own sessions they should be offered a lower price or pro bono sessions. In order to do this, provide the service of hippotherapy to those who are in need yet unable to pay, the NPO must raise enough funds to cover a portion of or the entire session for that client. As the saying goes, money does not grow on trees; someone needs to pay for the horse’s feed, upkeep, and the therapist’s time.

**Grants:**
A small number of grants, both private and state provided, are available for hippotherapy NPOs to receive. Grants on the state and federal level fall under the same predicament as insurance issues do. Since there is not what is considered as a significant amount of conclusive medical research, there are limited state and federal programs that offer grants.

In order to obtain a grant, the NPO must write a grant proposal. Grant proposals are time consuming because they not only require a detailed description of a proposed project and budget, but they require superb persuasive writing techniques. Due to the time consuming mannerism of grant writing, a director of fundraising will simply not have enough time in the work week needed to obtain a grant. One person cannot be expected to perform all of the fundraising efforts and write, submit, and receive grants, which is why it is beneficial to have a separate person or management team dedicated to grants (5).

**Levels of Fundraising:**
Throughout the development of a hippotherapy NPO, the fundraising efforts made by the management should increase in size and complexity. The School of Philanthropy at the University of Indiana suggests that at inception, the organization usually begins at what is called the formative stage where they are mainly selling their service in the market place. From there they move onto the second stage, referred to as the normative stage, which involves fostering relationships with donors and soliciting donations from them. The final stage of fundraising growth, the integrative stage, is a multifaceted approach to fundraising where donor relationships are cultivated and the organization’s growth is ensured (6). It is a good idea when the organization begins to fundraise for the first time to start off small and build their way up. Otherwise the task can turn out to be daunting and overwhelming.

**Donor Profiles:**
There are different categories of people that an NPO will need to target in their fundraising efforts. In general, the different categories of focus include individuals, corporations, and foundations (4). Within these categories lie different levels of cash flow and abilities to donate. Due to differences in abilities to donate, an NPO needs to adjust and offer lower level contribution options for those who want to help, but do not have grand or unlimited means. For example, the single mother with three children earning minimal salary should not be disregarded as a potential donor. Although she may not have very much monetary capital to offer, she may have a family member whose life was greatly improved through hippotherapy and therefore is greatly eager to help in any way that she can (including but not limited to: donating small denominations, spreading the organization’s mission, and volunteering).

At all levels of donation, particularly at the corporation and foundation levels, there must be an emphasis on the fostering of relationships. A good fundraising team will have organized lists on hand of people, corporations, and foundation levels that have supported the NPO’s mission in the past and can be called upon at any moment. Development of relationships between the NPO and the donor are vital in order to sustain a steady flow of funds for years to come.

**Fundraising versus Providing the Service:**
As previously mentioned, there are many complexities to raising the necessary funds to develop a thriving NPO. Understanding how to fundraise is a large piece of the puzzle, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. Two large, but separate functioning sides of a successful NPO include the fundraising side and the service-providing side. Both must work together in a symbiotic relationship and understand that one cannot operate without the other, yet remain with separate management teams. Embracing and prioritizing fundraising is what aids an NPO in having a secure financial base. With this, they are able to provide the service (of hippotherapy) to those in need and spread their mission.

**Virtual Fundraising:**
Virtual fundraising has risen to new levels in today’s era of technological advancement. A common way to fundraise through use of the Internet is to have a ‘donate button’ directly on the NPO’s website. When the donor clicks the button, they are redirected to a third party website such as PayPal, where they can use a credit card to donate directly to the organization.

Other methods to fundraise virtually include using AmazonSmile and donating American Express Card Points to a charity of choice. AmazonSmile allows its clients to access the same prices as the normal Amazon, but will donate a portion of the purchase to a charity of choice (7). This is an easy way to contribute to your favorite charity without even having to think about it. American Express Card Points can be simply donated to a chosen charity with a click of a few buttons directly on the American Express website as long as the charity is registered in their system (8).

Mane Stream has employed all of the mentioned methods of virtual fundraising and they have also undertaken ‘Giving Tuesday’, just as many forward thinking NPO’s have, as their main day of the week to focus on marketing their fundraising efforts. When most people think of Giving Tuesday, they think of December 1st or the day after Cyber Monday. It is a relatively new national holiday to celebrate generosity and encourage giving back to our communities after what usually is a shopping and present-buying filled weekend after the Thanksgiving holiday (9).
Mane Stream has used this holiday as a way to engage their donors not only on December 1st, but year round. Every Tuesday, Mane Stream uses social media or email to make contact with possible donors.

**Fundraising Events:**
Another way to fundraise for NPOs is to hold fundraising events. These can include, but are not limited to: live auctions, silent auctions, benefit dinners, and yard sales. Mane Stream has a separate, volunteer committee solely focused on the planning for each event. They work to have local caterers and venues donate their services to offset costs. Annual barbeques, barn dances, auctions, and gala dinners are held by Mane Stream and generate a large portion of the funds needed to sustain their organization. Their benefit gala this past November at the Hamilton Farms Country Club in Gladstone, N.J. raised well over $100,000 alone (10).

**Physical Fundraising:**
physical donations are also a key part of a fundraising effort for an NPO. Mane Stream advertises on their website as well as with signs on their property, that are near the main road, that they take physical donations. Every Spring and Fall they collect equestrian tack and equipment donations from the community and have a large sale on property with all proceeds going directly to the organization (11).

Mane Stream also makes use of third party organizations to accept car donations and shoe donations. The organization that takes shoe donations gives Mane Stream a certain monetary amount per pound of shoes that is donated (12). Mane Stream then uses that money to fund the horseshoes that their horses need, calling the program “Shoes for Shoes”. In the past they have partnered with local schools and Girl Scout troops to collect shoes (and general monetary donations) for the organization.

**Volunteering:**
Volunteers are a crucial component of fundraising techniques in a hippotherapy NPO. Not only do they aid in providing the service to the client, but they also aid in spreading the mission of the NPO. When volunteers are happy at the end of their working shift, they are more likely to tell others about their work. This consequently spreads the mission of the organization, which possibly generates new donors or volunteers who are interested. Mane Stream currently has over one hundred volunteers that work in supportive roles throughout the year (13). This includes volunteers in the barn management, therapy services, event planning, landscaping, office duties, and much more (14). With such a high number of volunteers eager to work with animals, it helps Mane Stream to provide their services with ease. Volunteers are critical to successful fundraising as well as to servicing the target population; they are a component of an NPO where it is clear that the sectors of fundraising and servicing overlap.

**Community Action: Photographic Calendar**
For my community service project, I created a product to sell with the profits going directly to Mane Stream, a hippotherapy not-for-profit organization located in Oldwick, New Jersey. Mane Stream offers hippotherapy services with their fourteen horses to over one hundred clients per year and must raise at least 18% of their budget themselves (15). Even though my project will do a small part in meeting that percentage, every dollar counts. I originally wanted to go on location and photograph clients and horses at the Mane Stream facility in Oldwick, New
Jersey. When speaking with the marketing director at Mane Stream, we decided to use photographs of the fourteen horses currently in the program to create the 2016 calendar. We determined that it would be better to create an annual calendar in the future with photographs that I would take from the entire year encompassing all of the seasons, different programs offered at the facility, and charity events held to benefit Mane Stream. As a local, professional equine photographer, I am excited to collaborate more with Mane Stream throughout the next year to create a fundraising photo calendar for 2017.

I edited the individual horse photographs and combined them into a 12-month wall calendar with the names of the horses overlaid on the photographs. The front cover of the calendar features Mane Stream’s mission statement: “our mission is to improve the quality of life for individuals with physical, developmental, emotional, and medical challenges through a diverse program of equine assisted activities, therapy, and educational initiatives” as well as a photograph of the facility (3). Below is an example of one month of the calendar together with the cover artwork:

Mane Stream would like to print one proof copy of the 8.5 X 11” spiral bound wall calendar to use as promotion. The calendar is listed in an online store on lulu.com as well as on the Mane Stream website, where anyone can order the calendar and have it shipped to their home, business, friend, or family member. The baseline price for one calendar is $9.99 and we sell them with a markup of approximately 15 dollars (16). Not only will we sell them online, but Mane Stream will also take direct orders in their office facility for calendars.

The end of the year is the perfect time to sell calendars because people are looking for gifts for friends and family and the new year is about to begin, which means that people will be buying new calendars. As previously mentioned, the calendars will be marketed and offered for sale at the farm and on their website as well as on their Facebook page and at fundraising events. The selling platform website, lulu.com, cuts a check directly to Mane Stream on the first of each month (16).

References:


**Letter to Editor:**

Erika Olijslager  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

The Hunterdon County Democrat  
RE: Letter to Editor  
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November 15th, 2015
Dear Editor,

I wish to bring some attention to the wonderful example that Mane Stream Inc., of Oldwick, New Jersey, is setting for non-profit organizations (NPO) regarding fundraising. They effectively navigate the fundraising world and raise enough funds to operate and expand their services to the community, thanks to their many generous donors.

Throughout my compiling of research, I have learned about the vast complexities, the great need for, and different types of fundraising efforts necessary to run a successful NPO. Fundraising is not a simple task, there are countless subdivisions including gifts, grant writing, and special events. It is next to impossible for one person to have enough time in a day to devote to this as well as provide a service to the community.

The amount of time it takes to carefully foster relationships with the community, businesses, and volunteers is not insignificant. In reality, it is a vital component that will ensure steady flow of donations for years to come and Mane Stream has not disregarded this. They have also attempted to maximize their reach in terms of types of fundraising efforts in sectors of virtual fundraising, physical fundraising, and special events.

As a local equine photographer I have collaborated with Mane Stream in creating an annual photo calendar to highlight their special horses, clients, and volunteers. This beautiful calendar is available for purchase on the manestreamnj.org website and would make a lovely holiday present for friends and family. All proceeds go directly to Mane Stream.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erika Olijslager