The United Way’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the organization’s number one major gift officer - or should be. Just as college presidents have long seen their role as major gift fundraisers, the same should be true for the United Way CEO. Successful United Way major gift programs often require 60% or more of the CEO’s time. Increasingly, the expectation of major donors is that the president be actively involved in major gift solicitations.

**The CEO Creates the Personality and Vitality to Attract Major Gifts**

As noted, major gift consultant and author Jerold Panus said in his book *Mega Gifts*, “major givers respond to vigorous and inspirational staff leadership. It is one of the most compelling factors in motivating a gift.” Personal regard for the staff leadership, says Panus, is one of the single most important factors a major donor considers when making a large gift.

**The CEO Makes the Case to Allocate Resources to Major Giving**

In an era of flat or declining annual campaigns, there is greater competition for time, financial, volunteer and staff resources. Too often there is a demand for quick solutions that will produce dollar results by year end. However, rarely do quick solutions result in lasting results.

For a major gift program to be successful, the CEO must make the case that an investment of resources and time is needed. This means board needs to be committed and involved in supporting the major giving program.

**What Role Should the CEO Play In A Major Gift Program?**

The number one role is to be the external face of United Way with major donors and prospects. This means being actively involved in networking, cultivating, educating, soliciting and recognizing major donors and prospects. The CEO also plays a key role in the stewardship of the gift and is accountable to the donor that made the gift for the intended outcomes.

However, CEO also has an internal major gift role. The CEO needs to participate with staff and volunteers in the identification of prospects, development of cultivation strategies, and monitoring the United Way’s progress in advancing the relationships with donors.

**How Does A CEO Evaluate A Major Gift Program?**

Because a major gift can take 15 months to two years to develop, it is not easy to evaluate success based upon annual timelines. The CEO must look beyond dollars and evaluate how successful the United Way has been in advancing the relationship with the donors. This means measuring the number and quality of contacts staff have with the donor and prospect.
MAJOR GIFT CAMPAIGNS

Major gift campaigns can be the most cost-efficient and effective way for United Way to raise money. This is done by focusing on fewer donors, soliciting larger gifts, and doing so in a concentrated and dynamic campaign. While the annual campaign will continue to be United Way’s lifeblood, major giving campaigns are producing the most significant growth.

Major gift campaigns generally contain the following elements:

1. Mirror capital campaigns but typically are for endowments or initiatives rather than “bricks and mortar”
2. Grow out of a strategic plan or impact strategies
3. Prospective major donors are engaged in planning discussions and visioning
4. Staff and volunteer leadership are fully engaged
5. Appropriate financial, staff and volunteer resources are dedicated to the initial planning and execution of the campaign
6. Goals are multi-year in nature outside the traditional annual campaign timeline
7. Fund raising progress is actively monitored, and the board, staff and volunteers are held accountable for results

United Ways may be reluctant to explore major gift campaigns for three common reasons.

1. The most common concern is the fear that a major gift campaign will dilute annual giving. Experience has shown that if properly planned and coordinated, major gift campaigns actually enhance annual giving.
2. Some communities worry over donor fatigue citing the number of “capital campaign” taking place. United Ways that have conducted successful major gift campaigns were also in communities with multiple capital campaigns. This competition was taken into consideration during the campaign planning and often resulted in a more compelling case that uniquely positioned the campaign in the community. Engaging donors in the case development was a way to position United Way and involve influential volunteer champions.
3. The third concern is that United Way’s mission is to raise annual gifts and that major individual giving is the domain of other non-profits. Nothing could be further from the truth. The success of the Tocqueville program is proof. When started in the mid 1980’s some critics said donors wouldn’t make major gifts to United Way. Today over 25,000 donors make Tocqueville level gifts and over 550 are at the million dollar level.
CASE FOR INVESTING STAFF, VOLUNTEER AND RESOURCES

More wealth is accumulating in fewer hands than ever before, and successful non-profits have adjusted their fundraising accordingly. A university foundation president reported that they are raising historic levels of money by placing 95% of their effort behind major giving. “All I hire these days,” he said, “are major gift officers. The results speak for themselves.”

Consider these facts:

- Only a few years ago non-profits followed the 80/20 rule. 80% of the contributions came from 20% of the donors. In philanthropy today the ratio is reaching 95% of the gifts come from 5% of the donors.
- The Bank of America Study of High Net Worth Philanthropy documented the obvious- as a household’s wealth increases so does their giving.
- Major gift fundraising is the most cost-effective and efficient way for United Way to raise money, thus lowering your overall fundraising costs. Typical major gift fund raising costs for all non-profit organizations are between 3% to 5%, almost half of United Way’s annual fund raising costs.

CREATING A CLIMATE OF MAJOR DONOR CENTERED PHILANTHROPY

It is not about us, our needs, or goals or timeline.

It is about the donor.

Donor center philanthropy places the needs of the donor first. If done correctly, the donor feels good about giving, sees the impact their gift has made, and is passionate about their relationship with United Way.