

Fundraising Challenges for Land Trust Organizations: A National Survey

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The ongoing challenges associated with the economic downturn in the United States are significant for nonprofit organizations facing declines in government grants and foundation support, as well as challenges in attracting and retaining individual donors. Fundraising may mean the difference between fulfilling a mission and closing operations. The purpose of this study is to identify best practices for fundraising and donor recruitment/retention based on a national web survey of land trust organizations in the United States.

This research has implications for other small nonprofit organizations without professional fundraising staff that are looking to expand or improve their fundraising practices since the global economic downturn. This research not only contributes to the academic literature on nonprofit management in difficult economic times and fundraising/donor best practices, but will also be of use to land trust practitioners looking to improve their current practices.

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive economic climate, nonprofit organizations often struggle financially. In 2008, at the beginning of the economic recession charitable giving fell by almost 6% compared to the previous year (Wasley 2009). The challenges facing many small nonprofit organizations in such an environment can be significant; and insufficient experience, lack of time, low public interest, and an economically depressed region compound the difficulties (Turbide and Lurin, 2014; Medina-Borja and Triantis 2014).

With a decline in government grants and foundation support, fundraising—in particular attracting and retaining donors—may mean the difference between fulfilling a mission and closing operations. The purpose of this study is to identify best practices for fundraising and donor recruitment/retention based on a national survey of land trust conservation organizations in the United States. Land trust organizations are nonprofits organizations committed to conserving land by undertaking or supporting the acquisition of land or conservation easements. This research has implications for all nonprofit organizations that are looking to expand or improve their fundraising practices since the global economic downturn. Land trust organizations must compete not only with each other for an increasingly smaller share of potential supporters, but also with other nonprofit organizations; pitching conservation against the arts against social issues. This research not only contributes to the academic literature on land trust organizations, nonprofit management in difficult

economic times and fundraising/donor best practices, but will also be of use to land trust professionals looking to improve their current practices.

Fundraising

For most nonprofit organizations, fundraising is an important part of their mission and daily operations. Fundraising in the United States is now a multi-billion-dollar industry - in 2012 an estimated \$316 billion was given to nonprofits by individuals, corporations, and foundations (Blum and Hall, 2013). Individuals are the largest source of philanthropic giving. In 2013, individuals, as the largest source of philanthropic giving, accounted for 80% while foundations accounted for just 15%, and corporations for only 6% (Blum and Hall, 2013).

One of the major challenges for nonprofit organizations is that they must be constantly engaged in the practice of fundraising in order to be successful. Fundraising is an investment in an organization's future that requires long-term planning, personnel, and resources to succeed (Bray, 2008). Whether it is planning events, nurturing relationships with donors, seeking out and writing grant applications, or creating a social media campaign, for most nonprofit organizations fundraising needs to be at the forefront of operations and planning. Too many organizations believe that having a compelling mission and purpose is sufficient to attract funding dollars, but the literature does not support that belief; an active fundraising program is imperative to actually receive funds (Higgins and Lauzon, 2003; Orr and Weiss 2012).

According to Brooks (2006), "a nonprofit's "mission service" (e.g., feeding homeless people) is inherently a loss-making endeavor, the organization must divide its energies and resources between activities (such as selling a more profitable service or fundraising) that raise net revenues and core services that lower them" (p. 306). This raises the question, how does an organization balance the need to raise revenue—a time intensive undertaking—with the demand for its valuable services, also time intensive. Unfortunately, many nonprofit organizations, particularly those with limited or no full-time staff, focus almost exclusively on program/service delivery thereby compromising their long-term sustainability as an organization (Bielefeld, 1994; Burk, 2004). As a result of the financial downturn, there is heightened competition for grants and donors, and nonprofit organizations are using up important cash reserves (Hoefler, 2012).

While the evidence for the need for fundraising is compelling, many nonprofit organizations struggle with this essential task. In fact, a 2010 study of nonprofit organizations found that 25% of nonprofit organizations that were surveyed did not anticipate breaking even financially (Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2010). Respondents to the survey of land trust organizations presented in this research identified many reasons for failing to adequately fundraise including lack of time, too many failures in the past, staffing constraints, concerns about losing sight of the mission, and most importantly, insufficient knowledge. This research is an effort to identify best practices for small nonprofit organizations in the current economy to help overcome these challenges.

Land Trust Organizations

According to the Land Trust Alliance, the national association of land trust organizations, there were 1723 land trusts in the United States (national, state and local as of 2010) with more than 100,000 volunteers and 5 million members, conserving 47 million acres of land in the United States (Land Trust Alliance, 2014). Working with landowners and the community, land trusts may accept donations of land, purchase land directly, or negotiate private/voluntary conservation.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement negotiated between a landowner and a nonprofit or government agency that permanently restricts use of the land. Conservation easements are a valuable mechanism to protect public values in land, such as aesthetics, recreation, wildlife habitat, open spaces, water, or the future productive capacity of the land. A landowner who participates in a conservation easement with a land trust relinquishes certain rights to the land, as specified in the contract. The landowner may give up the right to build on the land for example, but still retain the right to grow crops. Easements are developed to respect the rights of the landowner, while ensuring conservation goals are met. These agreements are not tied to the

landowner, but to the land itself, so conservation easements also apply to future owners of the land (Sundberg 2006).

Land trust organizations are dependent on donations, grants and general fundraising to support their operation costs, as well as the cost of acquiring land and overseeing easements. Many land trust organizations are operated solely by volunteers, making day-to-day operations a particular challenge (Moore and McKee, 2012; Sundberg 2006). The challenges facing land trust organizations are not unique to their field, they are shared by many small nonprofits across the United States.

Methodology

This research is based on both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, but is rooted in a quantitative epistemological position. The entire population of nonprofit land trust organizations in the United States (1,113) were identified through the Land Trust Alliance website (Land Trust Alliance, 2014), and contact emails were sourced from that website or through Google searches. Organizations were contacted via email with a link to the survey, which was developed in Qualtrics. The survey included a mix of both close-ended and open-ended questions. A series of demographic questions (e.g. budget, size, staff numbers) were also asked in order to get a better sense of the makeup of the organizations that were responding. The questions were developed in consultation with a local land trust organization to ensure that questions were appropriate given their scope of work, and to ensure that all terminology was correct. The final response rate of the survey was 14.02%, based on 145 responses out of the 1,034 invitations successfully sent (79 invitations bounced back as undeliverable). The response rate was predicted to be a challenge given the fact that so many of the land trust organizations rely on volunteer staff and do not check their email on a regular basis. The survey invitation was sent three times over a period of three weeks to encourage responses. Those who were interested could request a copy of the final results.

The demographic background of the survey respondents highlights the challenges facing these nonprofit organizations. Many organizations reported having no or few paid staff: 37% of the organizations do not have any full-time paid employees at all, and 75% of the rest of the organizations have five or less full-time paid employees. 41.5% of organizations have twenty or less volunteers or unpaid staff in their organizations. In terms of volunteers, 11.1% have one hundred or more volunteers or unpaid staff that work with them, although most of these are on an infrequent basis. With respect to budgets, most of the organizations are quite limited, 39.4% of organizations have an annual budget of \$10,000 or less, and 48.5% of organizations have an annual budget of \$100,000 or less. Only 8.4% of the organizations indicated an annual budget of greater than one million dollars. In terms of land, the vast majority of organizations (71.8%) have 10,000 acres of land or less under their responsibility, while only 17.6% of organizations indicated total easement acre more than 10,000 acres.

Fundraising Practices

Overview

The results of the survey paint an interesting picture of nonprofit organizations struggling to formalize their fundraising. Of the respondents, most relied on the Board of Directors (29%) or the Executive Director (24%) to do their fundraising. Fifteen percent of organizations relied on staff that had other duties, and 13% used volunteers/interns. Only 7% reported having full-time development staff, and 5% indicated part-time development staff. Surprisingly, only 3% used external fundraising consultants. Indicative of the need for fundraising, just 1% indicated that they did not need to fundraise at all. Ninety-one percent of the respondents indicated that fundraising was important to their organization; yet clearly successful fundraising is a challenge.

When asked in an open-ended question about the biggest fundraising challenges for the organization, the most overwhelming response was lack of staff time to get it done, as well as the lack of ideas and knowledge of how to fundraise. Many also indicated that the economy was an issue, particularly given the

competing demands from other organizations. Many organizations specifically cited the challenge of recruiting new donors and members, while retaining donors seemed to be less of an issue. Interestingly, many indicated that they had significant challenges getting board members to support the organization financially, or to take the lead in fundraising and promoting the organization. It was clear from these responses that while some organizations are highly professional and excel at fundraising to meet their needs or goals, many more organizations are struggling with a lack of time, resources and ideas.

When asked whether or not the respondents met their fundraising goals last year, 35% met their fundraising goals, 27% indicated they exceeded their fundraising goals, 17% did not have fundraising goals but do fundraise and 16% did not meet their goals (5% did not respond). When asked if respondents were satisfied with their fundraising last year, 24% indicated some level of dissatisfaction, 23% were neutral and 52% indicated some level of satisfaction, which includes those who do not need to fundraise. Organizations were asked which sources of funding were most important to them (respondents could select multiple responses). Ranking in order based on the sources selected as "very important," organizations indicated the following:

- Donor Retention (60%)
- Individual memberships at all donor levels (54%)
- Medium individual donors (\$251-\$1000) (39%)
- Board giving (37%)
- Small individual donors (\$51-250) (34%)
- Government grants (31%)
- Micro individual donors (less than \$50 per year) (30%)
- Foundation Support (26%)
- Fundraising events (22%)
- Endowments (20%)
- Landowners (19%)
- Corporate donors (14%)
- Planned giving (10%)
- Fee for service (9%)
- Non-cash gifts (8%)
- Employee giving (3%)
- Merchandise Sales (0%)
- Land levy (0%)

This suggests that individual donations are the most important source of funding for these organizations. One of the challenges of relying on individual donations is that they are time intensive to identify, recruit, and retain, and can be unreliable in times of economic downturn or shifting public priorities. More corporate-based fundraising initiatives such as fee for service or merchandise sales were very low on the list. When asked which general fundraising efforts were most effective, the following options were highlighted as being "very effective" (respondents could choose more than one response):

- Writing grant/foundation proposals (29%)
- Major gifts (28%)
- Face-to-Face solicitation (24%)
- Special events (22%)
- Direct Mail (17%)
- Accepting credit card/pay pal donations via the website (13%)
- Planned legacy giving (7%)
- Partnering with other nonprofit organizations (4%)
- Gifts in kind (4%)
- Automatic payments (3%)
- Social media (1%)
- Telemarketing (1%)
- Media advertisements (1%)
- Donor boxes (spare change collection jars) 0%
- Sale of goods (0%)

When asked for other effective fundraising methods, the organizations suggested an interesting range of ideas, which could be adapted by many other organizations. Many indicated that building an active Board of Trustees and requesting that the organization be in their top three donations was highly effective, as well as asking board members to reach out to their own networks by sending personal appeals. Many cited the

importance of a personal touch, for example having Directors write personal notes on annual appeal letters, and thanking donors personally by phone/email or note for their donations. Many also indicated that they had not thought strategically about fundraising, but have come to realize that this is important for the long-term sustainability of their organization. These ideas and others will be discussed in greater detail below.

Attracting New Donors

Respondents to the survey were asked to identify how to attract new donors, and those responses were identified as follows:

- Board referrals (17%)
- Member referrals (15%)
- Public speaking opportunities (14%)
- Direct mail (10%)
- Volunteer events (10%)
- Free public events (9%)
- Landowner referrals (8%)
- Tabling at events (7%)
- Newspaper/Magazine advertising (3%)
- Radio advertising (1%)
- Facebook ads (1%)

Table 1 highlights the best practices identified for attracting new donors based on type of donor (size of donation) and broad general categories. Donor categories include micro/small donors (less than \$250 per year), medium donors (\$251-\$1000), and finally major donors (\$1001 or more). Solicitations indicate methods that do not have direct person-to-person interactions but are more impersonal such as newsletters, both digital and direct mailing, and social media sites like Facebook. Attracting interest is marketing the organization by drawing attention to the organization or cause through initiatives such as open invitations to visit the lands, media interviews, and publicizing the benefits and/or accomplishments of the organization. Personal interactions indicate fundraising methods that involve person-to-person interaction such as personal calls and thank you letters, setting up tables at public events and giving public presentations. Incentives are any form of reward or benefit for donating to the organization such as tote bags or t-shirts, membership to the organization, or other form of recognition (such as on a plaque or the donor's name in the newspaper). Friend referrals are word of mouth recruitment of donors from supporters of the organization, and outside refers to external agents including fundraising contractors.

Table 1: Best Practices for Attracting New Donors

	Micro/Small (Less than \$250)	Medium (\$251-1000)	Major (\$1000+)
Solicitation	36%	19%	5%
Attract interest	34%	25%	12%
Personal Interaction	12%	38%	49%
Incentives	6%	4%	6%
Friend Referral	2%	2%	4%
Outside	1%	1%	6%

N=145; Values rounded to nearest whole number

One of the most striking observations about Table 1 is that it highlights how different the best practices are depending on the type of donor. For example, to attract micro/small donors, solicitations and attracting interest were identified as the most effective. Personal interactions, however, were identified as far more important for medium level donors, and even more so for major donors. What this suggests is that organizations need to not only develop a fundraising plan, they must also think carefully about the type of donor they are trying to attract, and plan accordingly. As the size of the donation increases, the level of

personal interaction and attention goes up accordingly. Table 2 highlights more specific ideas provided by respondents for attracting donors at all levels.

Table 2: Attracting Donors

Micro/Small Donors	Medium Donors	Major Donors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Special events that match the mission ● Creating volunteer opportunities to engage those with shared interests ● Small incentives (e.g. tote bags or reduced program fee) ● Database of leads ● Membership program to create identity for donors ● Website with valuable services not just information about the organization ● Annual newsletter ● Buying conservation donor list ● Public name recognition (e.g. website, newspaper ad, outdoor plaque) ● Always have donor forms available at every event and online ● Participate in community events such as fairs and farmer’s markets ● Tell different stories about the organization to forge connections with people with different interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Annual mailing ● Hosting events ● Face-to-face visits ● Establishing business connections in the community such as joining community organizations ● Direct mail ● Demonstrating progress and achievements of the organization ● Using board members to make connections ● Asking for referrals from other donors ● Large scale events ● Developing a publicity campaign to ensure high profile coverage of the organization and its successes ● Asking micro/small donors to upgrade their donation ● Providing special events just for donors ● Using a county property owners list to identify those with high property values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invite potential donors to lunch ● Connect donors with the board and executive ● Highlight successes of the organization and ability to successfully meet goals ● Publicize a long term vision for the organization ● Emphasize the importance of the organization to the community ● Create a planned giving campaign

Retaining Donors

Retaining donors is important to an organization’s efficiency. It takes less effort to retain the same donors and develop long-term relationships, compared to searching for potential donors, and getting them to commit to a donation or other form of support. The most effective strategies for retaining donors were identified as follows (respondents could choose more than one response):

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thank you card sent in the mail (23%) ● Email newsletter/magazine (18%) ● Renewal reminder via mail (15%) ● Thank you phone calls (10%) ● Donor only events (6%) ● Thank you gifts (e.g. water bottle) (4%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public recognition of the donation (4%) ● Renewal reminder via email (4%) ● Automatic payments (3%) ● Social media (3%) ● Discounted or free event tickets (2%) ● Renewal reminder via telephone (2%) |
|--|--|

What is clear from these responses is that retaining donors requires personal outreach and communication. Donors want to feel appreciated and are trying to establish a connection with the organization, and that connection needs to be reciprocated. Donors are highly discriminating and selective; they want to get a sense

that their donation is meaningful and will have an impact on both the organization and the mission. It is up to the organization to convince them of that achievement. Table 3 highlights some of the specific ideas that non-profit organizations shared to successfully retain donors.

Table 3: Retaining Donors

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Thank donors immediately after their donation● Remind them of their donation periodically throughout the year● Ask them to renew their donation● Personalize correspondence● Make donors feel special● Keep them informed of organizational successes● Have new projects or events on the horizon to keep donors interested● Maintain an accurate database of donors so it is easy to stay in contact● Provide plenty of opportunities for donors to be involved in the organization● Make donations/renewals easy● Share impact stories about how donations have helped to make a difference● Use social media to keep people informed and engaged with the organization● Have a media/publicity plan to ensure that the organization has a high profile

Best Practices Recommendations

Attracting Donors

Based on the responses and recommendations of the land trust organizations that participated in the study, it is clear that successful fundraising is a time intensive initiative that requires consistent effort to maintain. The first step is setting goals based on how much money is needed and a timeline to achieve those goals. The next step is to establish a plan of action. The organization should focus on either micro/small donors, medium donors, major donors or a combination. Next it is important to identify the target audience based on who has money to give and would be likely to have an interest in the organization, and how best to reach them. A number of respondents stressed the importance of collecting a database of all of those who express an interest in the organization whether it is through phone calls, website visits or stopping by a table at a public event. That database of people can then be contacted with a personal letter for a donation or invited to future fundraising events.

Many organizations who self-identified as being successful at fundraising also emphasized the importance of marketing and publicity. Websites, social media, newsletters and press releases should be focused on highlighting the successes of the organization in an engaging way. For land trust organizations, talking about the number of acres conserved is not engaging, but sharing stories about the landowners and their commitment to conservation is much more likely to get people interested in donating. Every organization should have a compelling story that engages people in the work that is being done, and that story should be shared widely. Potential donors should feel that their support is meaningful and foster a sense of goodwill. Organizations must provide that narrative to the donors.

Similarly, respondents also mentioned tapping into the network of supporters to create a ripple effect of support. Asking board members to solicit donations from ten people, or requesting volunteers to invite three people to a special event are ways to share the story of the organization and identify those who may have a shared interest.

Major events such as concerts and races can be successful ways to raise money, but they also require a lot of work and have their own associated expense. If there is a disconnect between the major event (e.g. a 5K urban street race) and the mission of the organization (e.g. land conservation) it is unlikely that those participants will be interested in joining the organization as a supportive member on an annual basis which is a missed opportunity. Events that keep with the mission are a more effective way to build a database of

potential donors with a shared interest, for example nature hikes or creek clean ups to identify those with an interest in land conservation.

A special event is one of the most widely used fundraising tools for nonprofit organizations. While a successful special event can be a major source of fundraising revenue, special events can also “set the stage for huge public embarrassments” if they fail (Bray 2008, p. 240). Special events are also time intensive and it is important to assess whether the benefits truly outweigh the costs. A successful special event should align with an organization’s overall goals and strengths, and serve as a way to engage people with the mission of the organization and recruit long-term supporters. Many communities are now saturated with fundraising races, raffles, and dinners, and the challenge for organizations is to think of new event ideas that will generate sufficient revenue to offset the costs of holding the event.

The Internet and social media can be effective fundraising tools, but are often overlooked and/or underdeveloped (Bray, 2008; Miller, 2010). Online tools can be a cost effective method for reaching a wide audience. Social media can be a way to create buzz about an organization, to share success stories and to keep the organization in public consciousness. Despite evidence in the literature of the importance of social media for fundraising, social media did not appear to be of great importance to many of the organizations. It is unclear if this represents an overstatement of the literature or oversight of the organizations to fully take advantage of the opportunities afforded by social media. Based on the theme of overworked staff members, it seems likely that this represents a failure on the part of organizations to take advantage of sites such as Facebook and Twitter to reach out to potential donors by sharing the stories and successes of the organizations. With the opportunity to buy sponsored posts and tweets, it is now possible to share information about an organization to thousands of potential donors who are pre-screened based on geography, demographics and interests. Once those people start to follow or like your organization on social media, organizations can share their story and publicize for free to their captured audience.

Attracting medium and major donors requires a personal touch. Tapping into networks of people, asking board members to reach out to their networks to solicit those who may share interests and taking time to cultivate connections with those who have an interest are all important and can be highly effective. Organizing special events (in keeping with the mission of the organization) with a higher ticket price may be another way to identify potential donors in these categories, and to begin developing a relationship with them. Retention of these donors should focus on appreciation of the gift, continued engagement with the individuals and the achievements and vision of the organization. Nurturing those relationships once they are established are critical for retention, for example personal thank you phone calls, public recognition of the donation, lunch with the executive and finding varied ways to keep them informed and connected. Medium and major donors need to be convinced that their donation is being used meaningfully and that the organization is achieving its goals. Getting these donors excited about strategic planning and future projects can help with retention.

Retaining Donors

It is also important to retain donors at the same time as recruitment. Sending thank you notes and regular updates via newsletters, and holding special member events are ways to engage donors beyond check writing and help to keep the organization in mind. Every donor should also be contacted prior to the anniversary of their donation with an acknowledgement of their past donation and a request for a renewal.

Assessment

All fundraising should be done with the intention of assessment, another challenge for nonprofits that lack evaluation capacity. Staff should record the response rate for each initiative, the immediate return on investment, and total amount raised. Also taking note of what works and doesn't work in a given year and has this changed over time. Relying on the same fundraising initiatives every year because they are easy may represent a lost opportunity to engage more people with the organization and create more secure streams of funding.

General Advice for New or Struggling Land Trust Organizations

Respondents were asked to provide advice to a new or struggling organization. While many identified themselves as being in that category, many also took the time to provide guidance in line with what has been identified above. Selected responses included the following:

- Develop a strong board that believes in the organization and will get others excited about the mission
- Go out there and ask for donations, do not wait for donors to find you
- Most giving comes from individual donors, focus on the individuals and make them feel important
- Be visible to the public through newsletters, compelling stories, the media and providing a public good
- Tangible focused projects are easier to get funding for than general support of the organization
- Develop corporate friends who can help to network and provide advice
- Put a donation envelope in everything you send out
- Have a clear message
- Keep in touch with your audience
- Friend-raise before you fundraise
- Partner with others if necessary
- Do not give up, tenacity is important because it takes time to raise the profile of the organization
- Develop grant writing expertise
- Fundraising is really awareness raising about the organization and the issue
- Tell your story in multiple mediums
- Harness the popularity of outdoor recreation and other trendy past-times
- Become a part of the community
- Figure out how the organizational mission relates to other aspects of people's lives
- Serve on community committees to network and raise the profile of the organization
- Be clear with the board about fundraising expectations
- Maintain a steady cycle of news to drive awareness through activities that encourage membership and donations
- Get community leaders on board

Conclusion

According to Brooks (2006) "many nonprofits create public goods and services — arts, education, social services — which people want, but have limited incentive to pay for voluntarily with donations, and hence the ratio of costs to revenues can appear unfavorable." As governments reduce services and programming, many nonprofits step in to fill the gap, providing valuable services for communities (Henderson, 2002), but without the steady foundation of resources necessary to be effective and financially secure.

Fundraising is not easy and requires a thoughtful approach in order to be successful. The respondents to the survey were asked to identify what future fundraising challenges they anticipate. One of the often-cited responses was increased competition with other organizations coupled with a decline in government grants and a loss of donors due to the continued economic downturn. Many also cited their own organizational challenges, specifically the lack of staff to take on fundraising and the lack of knowledge about how to fundraise effectively. A number of organizations also expressed concern about the aging membership, and the challenges associated with recruiting a younger generation of donors who may be less engaged with a direct mail campaign. One respondent commented, "our supporters are aging and we are struggling to bring the next generation into the fold." Organizations of all types are facing these constraints, and it is a challenge to find space in the community calendar for yet another fundraising initiative.

Donors' decisions to give are not random. They are the result of careful thought and long-standing relationships with an organization (Worth, 2014). Donors receive countless solicitations from nonprofits, through various methods. The variety of solicitations represents a competition in essence for donors, leading to winning and losing organizations. Land trust organizations must demonstrate that supporting their cause will bring a greater benefit than supporting another cause or organization (Silverman and Patterson, 2010). Thus land trust organizations must seek donors that are attracted to their mission and work to build strong relationships. While it may seem like a lot of effort to recruit those micro and small donors, forging a relationship with those supporters may eventually lead to a larger donation in the future or a bequest.

How can land trust organization put this advice into practice? It is clear that many land trust organizations lack a clear fundraising vision and plan. Fundraising requires year round attention with a particular attention on nurturing personal relationships, highlighting the strengths and initiatives of the organization and making donors feel like their contributions are making a difference. In the highly competitive environment of nonprofits, all of whom have compelling reasons for people to donate, nonprofit organizations must be proactive in identifying sources of fundraising revenue, planning, implementing and evaluating the results (Cohen et al., 2011). While large organizations may be able to hire professional fundraisers to further their mission, most land trusts lack the funds and resources to do so, relying on volunteers or overworked staff to do their best with limited resources and support. Organizations need to have a plan. They need to ascertain their objectives for fundraising, identify a target market of donors that matches the objectives, and develop ways to reach those donors, implement the plan and then evaluate the results. They must invest in training for their volunteers and staff to become educated about fundraising best practices, and the use of tools such as Raiser's Edge software which can facilitate the management of donors and donations

Frumkin (2004) states that nonprofits have "a set of unique advantages that position them to perform important societal functions neither government nor the market is able to match." Unfortunately many organizations will never be able to realize their full potential because of their failures to secure the funds necessary to fulfill those functions. Land Trust organizations fulfill an important function in society by protecting land in perpetuity, but their future depends on their ability to raise funding to support their mission.

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