Editor's Note

As the new year quickly approaches and we reflect on what we have accomplished, we must also begin planning for next year. And while I can't recommend New Year's resolutions for you personally, I can recommend 14 New Year's Resolutions for your nonprofit. For fundraising-specific goals, check out Timothy Morral's article Preparing for a Prosperous New Year. Happy Holidays!

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Fourteen New Year’s Resolutions for Your Nonprofit

Once again, it’s time to list all the things we would like to change, work on, or eliminate from our lives — such as quitting smoking, cutting out sodas, or getting more exercise. This year, remember to create a resolution list for your nonprofit as well. If you take action on even half of your list, your organization will benefit. To get you started, here is a list of 14 possible resolutions for your professional life — some easier than others, but all of them doable. Happy New Year!

Resolution #1: Make a gift to your organization.
This makes asking for donations from others a lot more genuine.

Resolution #2: Clearly identify your objectives.
Target where you want to be and why. Then you, as well as everyone in your office, need to own that target. Ground your objectives in the past and aim them at the future. How can you improve to do better this year? Clear fundraising objectives will help determine what you can and cannot do in the time available. This will help you to focus your strategy on how to achieve your goals.

Resolution #3: Put your objectives into a detailed fundraising plan.
Take concrete action to form your ideas into a business plan that spells out roles and goals along with detailed instructions on how you’ll get there. Break your objectives into useful and reachable targets throughout the year, and don’t make too many demands on any one facet of your organization. The more detailed you are, the easier it will be to monitor and analyze over the coming year. Create a cycle of evaluation, planning, implementing and review. Return to the plan
weekly to remind yourself what you should be doing.

**Resolution #4: Welcome change and new challenges.**
Don't just react to change. Initiate it yourself and you will have better control over your environment. This will give you a greater sense of power and arm you with the tools you need to see your objectives through. Plan a staff meeting and invite your entire staff to brainstorm how they can use their resources to further the mission. Giving your staff a sense of ownership of the mission will make them more productive and valuable to you.

**Resolution #5: Use your Web site.**
If you don't have a Web site, you need one. If you do, make sure that you are using it to its fullest potential. Are you taking donations online? If not, you should be. Recently, online donors contributed $2 billion yearly and the average online gift is two to three times larger than those made through traditional means. Nearly 60% percent of Internet users report they use the Internet to find information about nonprofits online. Use the Internet to communicate your goals to your donors. Inform the public about upcoming events and campaigns. Use your Web site as a forum to publicly thank your volunteers and donors. Make sure that all of your materials have your site address printed on them.

**Resolution #6: Get to know your donors.**
Maintain a sharper focus on donor retention. Call and thank them. Be a better steward by letting them know what their money is being used for. Keep track of their likes and dislikes, other affiliations, interests and hobbies. Gather outside information about their wealth and potential. Knowing whom to target and as much as you can about them will help you make a connection. In the end, your mission will be a lot better off.

**Resolution #7: Actively recruit volunteers.**
This year, go after volunteers! Don't wait for them to come to you. Determine what kind of skills you would like to have within your volunteer pool and recruit people with those skills. Advertise for volunteers in newsletters, church bulletins, and community newspapers. Then give your volunteers job descriptions. When they have a clear view of your organization, its mission and their roles, they will be happier and more productive. Then thank them.

**Resolution #8: Take care of your staff and volunteers.**
Let them know they make a difference. Take an interest in their lives and support them. When you support them, they will support you.

**Resolution #9: Engage your board.**
Give board members assignments and hold them accountable. Have your board members personally call and thank your donors. This will make a huge difference in the eyes of your constituents. See your board as a resource and let incoming board members know, up-front, that your organization's board of directors is a "working board."

**Resolution #10: Read a book on fundraising and visit other nonprofits.**
Find out how others run their organizations. Identify a few ideas that you can bring back to your organization and implement.

**Resolution #11: Brainstorm constantly.**
Look for more creative ways to increase interest and support of your organization. List non-traditional sources of promotion. Keep a journal. Write down ideas about how to improve your fundraising whenever you get them — day or night. Add to the good ones and laugh at the bad ones.

**Resolution #12: Spend some time volunteering for an organization other than your own.**
You know the old saying, “What goes around, comes around.”

Resolution #13: Reduce operational costs by 3%.
Look at expenses regarding office supplies, marketing, postage and other little things that add up. Redirect that money to another program in need.

Resolution #14: Embrace technology for what it can do for your organization.
The tools are out there. Things that will make your job much easier, from software to technical gadgets. Use them. Save time. Further your mission.

Preparing for a Prosperous New Year
by Timothy Morral

The new year is quickly approaching and with it comes the daunting task of laying out a fundraising plan for the next twelve months. Truthfully, most of us would rather endure another of Aunt Edna’s fruitcakes than even THINK about a fundraising plan. But with a little effort, you can minimize the pain and maximize the results for your organization’s bottom line.

Set vision-based goals. Many fundraisers set fundraising goals based on the organization’s bare-bones budget; i.e., the amount of funds it will take to meet payroll and keep the lights on. The result is a de-energized fundraising program that operates in perpetual crisis mode. Why not try something different this year? Block out some time with your organization’s president or executive director and find out how much it would cost to take your nonprofit to the next level. In other words, put a dollar value on your nonprofit’s future vision and then begin to incorporate that vision into the fundraising plan. The result will be a fundraising program built around vision — which donors love — versus a program built around the boring daily operating expenses most donors loathe.

Set deadlines. Let’s face it, nobody likes deadlines. Yet without them, you have about as much chance of making it as a snowball in a microwave. As you put together your annual fundraising plan, set realistic deadlines that will help you meet your goals — not give you heart palpitations. Again, rely on your nonprofit’s vision as the cornerstone of your goal-setting agenda. If the deadlines you set reflect your organization’s priorities, then it is easy to use them as tools to organize your priorities as a fundraiser. It also becomes easier to motivate your staff to meet deadlines because they are more than just numbers on a chart — they are milestones on the path to your organization’s future.

About the author: Timothy Morral is a freelance writer and editor living in Rochester, New York. When he is not writing, Tim spends his time leading HopeTogether International, a U.S.-based relief and development organization that creates partnerships with the developing world. For more information, visit www.hopetogether.org or email Tim at tim@hopetogether.org.

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