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Inclusive Fundraising: Strategies to Qualify, Cultivate, Solicit, and Steward Alumnx of Color

Brandon Majmudar

Support from alumnx of color is increasingly important to universities due to loftier capital campaigns goal, and ever-increasing university tuition. Analyzing literature on giving patterns of multiple communities of color themes emerge on why alumnx of color do not give back to their alma maters. The issues of alumnx invisibility, trust and tangibility, and the importance of community are central among communities of color and what often inform their desire to donate. When these areas of focus are given the proper attention, universities can change how alumnx of color view the university and increase the significant gift potential of alumnx of color. Note: The use of alumnx instead of alumna/ae is intentional to be inclusive of all on individuals on the gender spectrum.

In recent history, federal and state governments began to pull funds away from higher education, which left a significant gap in operating costs and current income to the institution (Drezner, 2013). This trend forced professionals to seek out private support for all areas of the university to continue to function with the increasing cost of educating a college student. Universities began to expand the base donor pool of alumnx from which they solicit donations to ensure the longevity of the institution. This expanded donor base opened the research and understanding of philanthropic giving patterns of communities of color and other marginalized identities. Many Communities of color have a history of giving back through financial and volunteer support, but often universities overlook these communities as individuals who do not have the capacity or desire to give (Drezner, 2011). Giving patterns of alumnx of color are unique, and major gift officers and foundation professionals must adjust the donor cycle of philanthropy to better accommodate alumnx of color and increase the possibility of receiving a major gift. Using Joan Mount's 1996 Model of Personal Donorship, I hope to situate the needs of alumnx of color within Mount's theory to increase the probability a solicitation is met with a financial commitment to the university (Mount, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

The Model of Personal Donorship was created in 1996 when Joan Mount wanted to look at different driving forces behind alumnx's philanthropic support

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to the institution. Using a Likert scale questionnaire based on 15 different motives, Mount identified five criteria on which donors base their philanthropic contributions (1996). The first criterion in the model is involvement, which posits that the personal psychological reward for giving can inspire philanthropic contributions without concern for personal gain. For a donor to consider making a major gift, the fundraising staff must provide reasoning for why the donor's gift will make a difference. A donor's internal belief and understanding is a key precursor to major gift giving and involvement.

Donors also take into consideration, as a criterion, how well the mission of the university aligns with the donor's interests and values. Having an array of priorities for a donor to provide support to, such as scholarships for students of color is how universities can effectively match donor interests and provide values aligned options. The focus of the fourth criteria is how much money an individual possesses. Donors are often identified as having "capacity," or ability to give, by a team of researchers in advancement offices who figure out how much someone can donate based on their total assets. The names and contact information of people who meet the threshold of having the capacity to give $25,000 or more are provided to a major gift officer who then contacts those individuals and cultivates a relationship with the goal of soliciting a major gift.

The final criteria for understanding how much an individual is willing to donate based on their past philanthropic behavior. Mount (1996) stated, "It should hardly seem surprising that satisfaction and joy derived from past donations generate an expectation of satisfaction on each new occasion, and that this positive expectation reinforces one's inclination to say yes again" (p. 11). Mount also stated that self-interests such as tax incentives are influential enough to be mentioned as a criterion but do not hold much weight compared to the other four criteria. The Model of Personal Donorship is still relevant today in understanding how some individuals choose to give back to the university (Drezner & Huehls, 2015). However, the Model of Personal Donorship and almost all other donor models do not account for a diverse giving population and cater specifically to the giving patterns of white male philanthropists.

Needs of Alumnx of Color

Fundraising theory and university practices largely ignore alumnx of color. Drezner (2013) provides a reason for this observation stating that "institutional racism, both historical and contemporary, that impede the ability for the accumulation of assets in communities of color contribute to the stereotype that people of color are less generous than the majority" (p. 9). Currently, there is very little literature on philanthropy among communities of color. Within the research that does exist, each community has its nuances, but three overarching themes

emerge when the current literature is cross-examined.

The first theme addresses the idea that communities of color are often not viewed as givers to the university and are instead perceived as takers through scholarships and financial aid (Cabrales, 2013; Gasman & Bowman, 2013; Tsunoda, 2013). For this reason, advancement staff do not engage alumnx of color who may have the capacity to give. Advancement professionals neglected to acknowledge that communities of color have significant spending power within the United States. The Black community, according to the Nielsen Report (2011), has a reported $9 billion in spending power, and the Latinx community has a reported $978 billion in spending power (Humphreys, 2009). The Chinese community also has significant spending power (Tsunoda, 2013). Research shows that the Chinese community has major gift donors that give anywhere between $50,000 to $90 million. These numbers are often absent from the university's fundraising team because most of the theory and donor history revolves around White male donors. This immense spending power is left mostly untapped by fundraising professionals due to their lack of understanding of the other two themes of communities of color which are outlined below.

Trust and tangibility of the gift were also heavily referenced in the literature around communities of color's philanthropic inclinations and mark the second theme. Black communities have been wronged by institutions in the past through financial exploitation (Gasman & Bowman, 2013). This wrongdoing results in Black alumnx needing to build trust with the institution or organization before giving larger amounts. Latinx and Chinese communities must also feel a connection with the university to which area give, which often involves either having a personal connection or being involved in the organization (Cabrales, 2013; Tsunoda, 2013). This trust, once built, is not reason enough for a donor to give to universities. Philanthropists of color want to give to tangible priorities such as scholarships or offices that directly benefit students of color (Cabrales, 2013;Gasman & Bowman, 2013; Tsunoda, 2013). Communities of color historically were financially exploited which is why they now request tangibility of gifts so that alumnx of color can see the results of their philanthropy. With the importance put on large unrestricted gifts that the university can designate anywhere, many alumnx of color are lost in the fold due to their desire for more tangible and specific opportunities to donate.

The most omnipresent theme of all three identity groups was personal community. Individuals who identify as Black usually gives to those in their direct community through family foundations and churches (Gasman & Bowman, 2013). Latinx individuals often give to communities through extended family networks, the church, and organizations which often provide social services and activities (Cabrales, 2013). Similarly, Tsunoda (2013) shared that Chinese donors

often give to programs that lift the Chinese community. The community was also reflected in the idea of racial uplift, which is often exemplified by many Black alumnx who give back to those who come after them to help bring black youth up (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003). Community also plays a special role in gift designation from people of color. Frequently, communities of color rally around causes and give to things that directly impact their communities such as health-related issues, emergency causes, civil rights issues, religion, and education (Gasman & Bowman, 2013; Tsunoda, 2009). This finding brings to light the importance of education to communities of color and shows that historically communities of color give for educational purposes but specifically through organizations that support communities of color's access to education.

Maximizing Potential of Major Gifts from Alumnx of Color

Universities' alumnx engagement, prospect management, major gift, and stewardship teams must shift how they engage alumnx and donors of color to maximize the potential of major gifts from this population of the university. A holistic approach to engaging alumnx of color will ensure that current solicitations are met with financial contributions. It will also provide an engaged pipeline of donors and alumnx that will be willing to give a major gift to the university. In Mounts (1996) model, the likelihood of a major gift increases with a strong history of giving back that starts with alumnx engagement.

Alumnx engagement offices have a unique opportunity to attract the entirety of the university's alumnx base. Often, this means the provision of ways to contact classmates, mentor undergraduate students, participate in alumnx advisory boards, and more. Major gifts are not the focus of alumnx engagement. Instead, the focus is on small incremental giving and involvement. For young alumnx of color, the provision of engagement opportunities right out of college is crucial to ensure long and healthy alumnx relationships. Community-based engagement opportunities such as identity center reunions, mentorship opportunities for students of color, and small crowdfunding campaigns for initiatives that impact students of color are great initial engagement opportunities for young alumnx of color to stay involved and build a habit of giving to the university. Opportunities like the ones described above foster alumnx of color's desire to have a tangible impact and foster a belief that their gift will make an impact (Mount, 1996). This is also an effective way to re-engage alumnx of color who were not previously engaged but now have the capacity to give a major gift. Community-based engagement opportunities also provide an opportunity to show older alumnx of color that the university is moving towards providing a better experience for students and alumnx of color.

With older alumnx of color, it is vital for prospect management teams, tasked

with assessing an alumnx's capacity, to pay special attention to ensure that these alumnx are not overlooked. As shown above, many alumnx of color can give back but often do so in smaller increments. Therefore, older alumnx of color should be re-assessed to ensure that they were not disqualified as major gift prospects due to infrequent or smaller gift-giving. Some colleges hire discovery officers to go out into the community and qualify alumnx as major gift prospects and get a better gauge on whether alumnx can give. One strategy to help provide a more holistic picture for prospect managers is to talk with alumnx of color about their giving patterns and lifestyle choices (i.e., housing, vacations, hobbies). With that information, prospect managers can then qualify alumnx of color as major gift prospects. The importance of re-qualifying alumnx of color is to help build trust with alumnx of color, which is easier accomplished on a one-on-one basis through a major gift officer.

Major gift officers engage alumnx of color one-on-one for an elongated period. When first cultivating a major gift relationship with alumnx of color, major gift officers must be aware that it takes longer than it would with alumnx of other identities to solicit major gifts from alumnx of color. The process is elongated due to the negative experiences alumnx of color potentially faced, such as racism and prejudice, during their undergraduate experience. When the major gift officer feels they have built enough trust, and the alumnx is ready to make a financial solicitation, the major gift officer must be knowledgeable of not only current initiatives on campus that relate to students of color, but also to what types of gifts alumnx of color best respond. Major gifts officers should focus on gift priorities that are tangible rather than abstract (Cabrales, 2013; Gasman & Bowman, 2013; Tsunoda, 2013). This could be a scholarship, structural project, endowed chair position, rather than general gifts to the endowment. As favorable as unrestricted gifts are, universities need to think of the benefit to the university of having strong engagement from alumnx of color and the direct and indirect impact these alumnx bring such as representation and philanthropic dollars.

Once an alumnx makes major gift, stewardship is the next critical piece of the donor cycle that keeps alumnx engaged after they have provided a major gift. This is a crucial piece to working with alumnx of color due to the desire for tangibility, and the need to know that the gift made a difference (Cabrales, 2013; Gasman & Bowman, 2013; Mount, 1996; Tsunoda, 2013). When providing alumnx with gift reports, it is helpful for a gift officer to highlight the progress of the buildings or spaces, a student impact story, or thank you letter from a director or dean that was the result of the donor's gift. Highlighting the areas above will keep the donor engaged and foster the trust that was built because the stewardship team shows outcomes of the gifts that were provided. Another beneficial way to steward alumnx of color would be to provide individuals who have given generous gifts an opportunity to sit on a board of governors or foundation leadership council

to not only steward the donor but also provide a different perspective to spaces that are predominantly, if not all, white. For those who give generous major gifts, stewardship in collaboration with the major gift officer and alumnx engagement staff is a way for donors of color to work in an advisory capacity for identity centers, colleges, or divisions to provide insight and feedback on the current experience at the university.

Conclustion

Foundation staffs that strategically engage alumnx of color can secure major gifts that were not impossible through the use of traditionally white ways of understanding fundraising. From the provision of engagement opportunities for alumnx of color to reconnect with each other and undergraduate students of color, to stewarding donors of color in meaningful ways, university foundations and advancement offices will ensure that alumnx of color will be more inclined to provide larger amounts of financial support to the institution. Further research could study inclusive fundraising practices and their effectiveness in major gift giving. Through small intentional adjustments in alumnx practices, foundations can honor the experiences of communities of color and ensure that concerns from communities of color are met proactively instead of reactively. The increase in major gifts that this intentionality will bring to the university will also impact the university's ability to continue to innovate in a time where private philanthropy is imperative to the narrative of higher education.

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