The Chief Advancement Officer & The AVP, Development: Stakeholder Engagement Guide

How to Use This Guide

This Stakeholder Engagement Guide belongs to the "Chief Advancement Officer Onboarding Center," an Advancement Forum initiative that helps incoming advancement leaders hit the ground running in their first six months and beyond. See the end of this document for further EAB resources on this front.

This document outlines key questions, relationship milestones, and mutual interdependencies that undergird the effective relationship between a college or university chief advancement officer ("CAO") and the AVP, Development. Incoming CAOs should consult this guide to plan how they will engage this individual and to develop the agenda for their initial meetings. The AVP, Development position varies dramatically across institutions and CAOs should adapt this guide to their specific situation.

Initial Meetings

Either before they formally take office or in the early weeks, CAOs should ask their senior development officer to prepare a set of thorough briefings on the function's strategy to date, calendar and tempo of appeals, and its emergent challenges and opportunities. This can be prepared either as a written plan or a series of slides with accompanying documents. The reports or subsequent conversations should encompass the below baseline elements:

Philanthropic Context and Culture

- How would you tell the recent history of development efforts at the institution? When did our program begin in earnest and what milestones toward maturity and sophistication have we achieved in the last decade?

- What is our history of campaigns? How much did we raise in the last 2-3 campaigns and what was the campus perception of their success?

- How are we perceived in our local and regional markets by philanthropists and benefactors?

- What are our top 15 biggest gifts/biggest donors in history? What is the narrative of each of these gifts and how would we assess our institutional relationship with them now? Who are our prominent non-alumni donors and how did they come to engage with the institution?

- What are the top-level metrics we typically report to the president and board on development success (e.g., cash, total production, number of major gifts)? What have we reported as our success for the last 3-5 years, and what is our reported goal for the next 2-3 years?

- If there is a current campaign going on, what is the story of its development? What did the feasibility study and planning stages reveal about our readiness? What phase are we in? What is the gift table and timeline to completion? What high-profile initiatives or projects can we point to?

- Who are the institution's 10 biggest "white whales" – the prospects or donors we have long monitored or cultivated and believe will someday make large gifts, but have not yet done so?

- How would we assess our historical "gift utility" – while we may bring in large gifts frequently, do we bring in gifts for which the institution has real and stated need?

- What are our biggest philanthropic priorities and how have they changed over time? How compelling or interesting are they to our marketplace?

- What are our particular strategies, goals, and policies around the following types of gifts:
    - Endowment generally
    - Scholarship funds
    - Endowed professorships
    - Capital projects
    - Unrestricted giving

Organizational Model and Structure

- How has the organizational structure of advancement changed in recent years?

- What is the level of involvement and engagement of foundation boards and/or governing boards? At what level do their members give? What are our processes and criteria for nomination, reappointment, and term length/limits?

- Beyond the foundation and/or governing boards, what are the major volunteer leadership boards, councils, and committees? How are these managed (i.e., identification and nominating processes, communication of philanthropic expectations, term reappointment)? Among them, which are considered the most – and least – effective?

- What near-term principal gift opportunities do we have?

- What is the budget of the advancement division? How are these line-items shared between the central office, the colleges and schools, and other units? How has it changed in recent years? Does the development office/foundation rely on gift fees, endowment "taxes", or other variable sources of revenue?

- How do alumni affairs and development teams collaborate with one another? To what extent?

- How – and to what extent – do we employ specialized strategies for the following constituencies:
    - Non-alumni friends
    - Parents
    - Alumnae/women
    - Alumni of color
    - LGBTQ alumni
    - International alumni
    - Young alumni/graduates of the last decade

- What are the institutionally-related and independently-incorporated fundraising engagement vehicles (e.g., foundations, alumni associations, athletics support organizations?) here?

- How strong is the partnership between these groups? Are there any issues of contention among the groups?

Personal Collaboration with the AVP, Development

- How much time/what level of relationship has the AVP, Development historically had with the president or board members?

- Has s/he traveled with the president? Does s/he enjoy that aspect of their role or are they eager to serve as the "COO" instead and relinquish the staffing of the president and the board to the CAO?

- How should the CAO be involved in weekly or monthly pipeline and portfolio reviews, prospect strategy meetings, etc.?

- What are the regular and recurring prospect strategy meetings across the institution and who is invited?

- What does the AVP, Development see as the ideal division of responsibility between him/herself and the CAO in supervising the development enterprise?

- Does the AVP, Development carry their own portfolio?

Institutional Policies and Practices

- Where do our institution's guidelines for counting differ from the industry standard Council for Advancement and Support of Education's Reporting Standards and Management Guidelines?

- What are our gift acceptance guidelines? What are the items in these policies that are controversial or have been subject to creative interpretation in recent years?

- What open naming opportunities do we have? What levels are they set at?

- How or where are substantive proposals generated and approved before they are put in front of a donor?

Human Capital and Performance Management

- How many development officers do we have? What units are they allocated to across the institution and how is this determined? Do we have any major gift officers with hybrid/blended job structures?

- How many development officer vacancies do we have and where are they? What is our average time-to-fill for development officer roles?

- Who are the top 20% of our development officers by average annualized production over the last 3 years? Of them, which do you perceive as departure risks, and should I visit with them individually to introduce myself, ask for their advice, and make them feel valued?

- What are the current metrics structures for development officers? Are they activity metrics (e.g., number of visits, proposals advanced) or outcome metrics (e.g., total dollars raised, total number of gifts)? What is their timeframe (e.g., annual, quarterly, monthly)?

- Are metrics comprised of individual goals or team-wide goals? How consistently are they applied across the university? How tailored are they to particular unit needs, portfolio strength, development officer tenure or title, etc.?

- How do gift officers view their metrics – as guidelines or suggestions, or as real performance criteria "with teeth?"

- How are metrics meaningfully linked to incentive compensation, career ladders, promotion or title change, etc.? To what extent do metrics inform these processes?

- How long have the current metrics been in place and how regularly have they been refreshed? How would you assess the level of compliance associated with performance and data management protocols (i.e., contact report filed promptly)?

- How are portfolios assigned? How does the institution utilize incentive compensation? What have been the focus of conversations on this topic recently?

- How does the annual goal-setting process for gift officers work? To what extent is goal-setting driven by university-wide aspirations and cascaded downward to officers? Or are goals first assembled at unit levels and then consolidated upwards for a top-line goal?

- What is our average retention rate for development officers? How has this changed in recent years? What do exit interviews or conventional wisdom tell us about why development officers leave and where do they go? Are our salaries and benefits seen as competitive?

- Describe our onboarding and mentoring program for gift officers?

- Describe our ongoing coaching and training programs for gift officers? What are the widely-regarded skill deficits across the staff?

Advancement Department Collaborations

- What is the division of responsibility between development officers and the stewardship team for ongoing donor relations, impact and fund reporting, etc.?

- How do development officers collaborate with the planned giving team? What is their structure? Are they viewed as frontline fundraisers or on-call resources? What do planned giving officer portfolios look like? What are our goals for planned giving?

- How do development officers collaborate with prospect researchers? What are those regular assignments or transactions?

- How does the institution manage corporate and foundation relations? What is the structure and goals for the team? How is their work integrated with units like sponsored research, executive education, career center, etc.?

More Resources

- [New Frontiers in Pipeline Development](#) (2018)

- Perfecting the Partnership (2019)

- [The Donor Investor Imperative: Engaging Academic Partners for Transformational Ideas and Impact](#) (2017)

- [Stewardship Effectiveness Audit](#) (2017)

- [The Professional Development Playbook: A toolkit to target skill building and maximize advancement staff performance](#) (2016)

- [Making Meaning of Metrics: Leveraging accountability and analytics to enhance fundraiser productivity](#) (2016)

- [Reorienting Toward the Top: Targeted Strategies for High-Value Parent Fundraising](#) (2015)

- [Gifted and Talented: What Makes a Top Fundraiser in the Age of Venture Philanthropy?](#) (2015)

- [Competing for Talent: 9 Strategies for Improving Major Gift Officer Recruitment](#) (2015)