



Fundraising consultants: who needs 'em?

Chances are the minute you read the headline of this article a response popped into your head automatically. Consultants, like most things, are often judged by the lowest common denominator. If consultants have a mediocre reputation, it's because there are mediocre consultants. However, a mediocre consultant will only survive if organisations continue to hire them, thus perpetuating the space for a mediocre consultants to fill.

Whether your experience has been positive or negative, one thing is for sure: there are times in the life of almost every organisation when fundraising consultancy is an option to be considered. Working with a fundraising consultant is fundamentally a partnership or relationship. Like all relationships, it can either be one that grows and develops or it can end badly in divorce. It is in the best interest of both organisations and consultants that an organisation knows how to choose a fundraising consultancy that is right for them. Here are some of my tips for 'falling in love' with your consultant and a happy marriage.

Choosing the right consultancy for your organisation comes down to understanding what it is that you need out of the relationship. Do you need capital campaign management, major gifts strategy, fundraising program analysis or general fundraising counsel? Smaller projects may well be better suited to a smaller consultancy. Whereas larger projects probably require the additional resources a larger consultancy team can provide. Before 'getting engaged' you need to know what this new partner will bring to the table.

You hire a consultancy because your organisation lacks the collective experience to succeed completely on your own, so make sure you look for a long track record. As you do your research, you'll be amazed at the number of

people who market themselves as consultants despite having only a modicum of experience. Qualifications can be an indicator of experience. Do they hold Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) accreditation? What level of recognition do they have from Fundraising Institute Australia (FIA) or Fundraising Institute New Zealand (FINZ)?

Questions worth asking

- What resources will you allocate to this?
- What's the depth of experience on your team?
- What happens if the consultant gets sick or has an emergency?
- Are you sub-contracting any of the work?
- Are fees inclusive of all other expenses?
- Do you have professional indemnity and other insurances in place?
- How many other clients do you have?
- Do you have any conflict of interest with other clients?

While fees are always a factor, comparison on cost alone is not a true comparison. The adage 'you get what you pay for' generally holds true. Make sure that the consultant's fee structure

abides by the code of practice of FIA and FINZ. This clearly rules out payments based on a percentage, commission or contingency basis. When contracting an individual, it's important to check whether you may be obligated under Australian Taxation Office guidelines for Pay As You Go tax and superannuation and, in some cases, payroll tax.

In any relationship 'quality time' is important. Remember that in addition to providing a service to you every consultant needs to be managing and marketing their business. They need time to develop and innovate resources. They need to be undertaking professional development. They need time for other clients. Make sure they have the time for you.

My final piece of advice is, don't sign up for a long-term relationship until you know you have found the right partner. It may be love at first sight, but getting married straight after the first date is not a wise choice. Always ask to see examples of a consultant's previous relationships – preferably on a similar type project. Don't be put off by "it's confidential". It is not a difficult process to maintain confidentiality while illustrating quality of work.

So, there you have it. It may occasionally be a case of 'you can't live with them, you can't live without them' but if chosen wisely a good fundraising consultant should meet your needs and help you achieve your goals.

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