**Mentored Fundraising Overview**

**6-Month Mentored Nonprofit Fundraising Certificate Program**

**Center for Sustainable Development.** <https://nonprofit.csd-i.org/nonprofit-fundraising-training-certificate/>

**This week’s resources:**

Class Home Page for Mentored Fundraising

Fundraising Assignment 1 Homework Instructions

Magee Example of Fundraising Assignment 1

Fundraising Discussion 1

**Assignment 1. Introduction to Online Fundraising.**

**Introduction: Nonprofit to Nonprofit**

The Center for Sustainable Development decided to develop this course due to our own learning experiences with Online Fundraising. We felt that we probably weren't terrifically different from many other nonprofits. We felt that we probably had something appropriate to share with our fellow not-for-profit organizations.

A few years ago we incorporated online fundraising into our websites. We were surprised as to how quickly this took off—thousands of people visited our site and made different kinds of contributions. Back in the office, we would meet to craft copy that was sometimes sophisticated, sometimes funny, and sometimes compelling. We thought we were very clever. After a couple of years we had dozens of pages covering a number of different kinds of programs that the Center offers—where people could donate, volunteer and enroll in courses.

But at one point, I began to see how powerful this could really be—and I felt that it was time to really begin seriously investigating what could be done with our website, blogs and newsletters.

The first thing that I learned was that we really didn't know what we were doing—on several levels. First, we didn't have a specific goal. Were we after subscribers, donors, volunteers? How many? How quickly? We had never really nailed that down.

We also didn't understand what the different indicators were telling us about the success of our campaigns. What was the significance of the number of people that clicked on our pages? What was the significance of the contribution rate? What were a reasonable number of contributions? Should these be donations, volunteerism—or purchases?

And finally, we didn't really understand the specificity of the interrelationship between our website and search engines. You can really drill down to a highly specific target audience and convert them into buyers/donor/subscribers of highly specific things that you offer. However, what we had were a whole lot of very clever pages: we had a disorganized mess. Sigh.

So I began reading articles, handbooks, and attending webinars. I learned a lot, but I also began to realize that many of the authors were highly experienced SEO professionals—and although their information was very interesting—it was sometimes more complex than I needed: they frequently offered solutions to problems that large corporations had—not solutions for substantially smaller nonprofits.

So over time I picked and chose simple things that we could do to begin improving our campaigns. Armed with these ideas we quickly went into our campaigns and made a number of major changes designed to turn in our campaigns around and head us in the right direction. Big mistake. What we learned by making major changes quickly, is that you really don't learn from your actions what did and did not work. Some of the things that we did actually did not work and some of our indicators plummeted.

**Make small changes to one or two campaigns; watch and learn.**

However, after a steep learning curve and a couple of months of hard work we were able to vastly simplify individual campaigns and begin to see positive change. We also slowly learned that by making a few small changes at a time we could observe their impact on our results—positive or negative—and therefore we could decide to do more of the same or take corrective action. At the end of two hard months, we began to realize that we had almost doubled the number of people visiting our site. It would have taken less time and been a lot easier if we had just started out right: doing the things that you are going to learn in this course.

Through this process, I realized that there were several learning stages for online donations. One could start off with a couple of very simple campaigns, learn the ropes, see some positive impact, and wind up with a couple of sound, stable campaigns. This would not take an extraordinary amount of time and you wouldn't have to be an IT genius.

Then, after developing a sense of comfort with your stage 1 campaigns, you could move into stage 2 and begin doing slightly more sophisticated tweaks to improve your pages. Since you would be starting with simple, functional campaigns—you wouldn't wind up in the complex situation that we had found ourselves in after a couple of years of unbridled creativity. You could slowly expand upon your simple campaigns with new techniques that would allow you to improve more sophisticated parts and pieces within the world of webpages, SEO and donors.

You could then choose to move on to stages three and four as you develop comfort and confidence.

Or you could stop. Perhaps for your nonprofit organization, stopping at stage one or stopping at stage two would be perfectly appropriate for your goals and resources for managing the account.

So we decided to develop this course based upon our learning experience of what we would've done differently if we were to have started over from scratch. Each of the six months in this program represents six stages of sophistication. You can focus on the first three months—and perhaps be very happy with the result—and stop there—or continue moving forward. Your choice.

The approach is to start very simply and to develop some very simple campaigns which you can fully understand immediately. You will learn to make small adjustments slowly and learn to interpret whether those adjustments are moving you in the direction of your goals or not.

Although we present this over six months—and that may seem like a long time—you will wind up with something that you understand—and that works—and that will take substantially less time to improve upon than if you were to rush into a series of new campaigns over a couple of weeks. You will also have something which is producing for you. And—very importantly—you would have a set of real templates for introducing new campaigns.

So let's get going. Here's what we're going to do in Assignment 1.

**The First Step in Assignment 1**

**Assignment 1.** Step-by-step:

* Get specific about your goals for new individual supporters.
* Do you want supporters that are donors, volunteers, subscribers?
* How many?

Everything will be done initially in Microsoft Word and Excel which will give you time to set goals, identify target audiences and begin organizing keywords and copy for your campaigns. If you want to see the important things that we will be doing in the first few weeks you could take a peek at the syllabus again here:

[https://nonprofit.csd-i.org/nonprofit-fundraising-training-certificate/#SYLLABUS](https://nonprofit.csd-i.org/nonprofit-fundraising-training-certificate/%23SYLLABUS)

**Getting started**

The Assignment One Homework will guide you through a simplified process. Enjoy!

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