

# Fundraising for Metropolitan Universities

*Fundraising is a series of disappointments, sprinkled with a few brilliant successes, most of which are unexpected.*  
—Author Unknown

While always faced with economic challenges, metropolitan universities are now confronting a very different funding environment as we move into the new century.

Just at a time when higher education needs to expand to meet critical societal needs, when enrollments are on the increase and tuition costs are under even greater scrutiny, the traditional sources of support for our institutions are on the decline.

Gone, if they ever were here, are the days when higher education was one of the top priorities for state support. Health care, corrections, K-12, welfare, and workforce training are now state priorities competing with public higher education for an ever-shrinking public dollar. Gone too are broad-based federal dollars supporting higher education. More and more, metropolitan universities will have to raise funds from the private sector if they are to continue to provide the range of services expected of them.

Fundraising by metropolitan universities, while not a new activity for some, is a function of increasing import for most. We come to this new challenge with all the opportunities and uncertainties that face the balance of our institutional life. Hence, this collection of articles is a timely exploration of the many facets of institutional advancement and fundraising for our institutions.

A cursory analysis of those metropolitan universities that are most active in private fundraising reveals that they build their achievements on several of the unique

characteristics of our type of institution. First—and foremost—is location. If capitalized upon, only the unique location of a metropolitan university gives it special leverage for fundraising. The many links into the community, the special relationships between the university and city leadership, and the powerful role the institution plays in the life of the community are all opportunities that can be supportive of institutional fundraising.

The entrepreneurial nature of our schools provides yet another dimension that can be exploited in support of fundraising agendas. The capacity of a metropolitan institution to partner with community agencies, develop public/private ventures, and create joint projects, programs, or facilities are elements that can bring strength to our institutional advancement efforts.

Our mission to serve the unique needs of a metropolitan region gives us yet a third advantage in building a case for private support.

Yet, even with these unique characteristics, our institutions face unusual challenges as they seek to enhance private support. Our commitment and location in a metropolitan area can give rise to a parochial reputation and a parochial attitude in both the institution and prospective donors.

In addition, the relative youth of our schools, as compared with their sister institutions, has a direct effect on their ability to gain private dollars. Metropolitan universities report that among their graduates they have fewer professionals in advanced positions—many are just beginning their careers. Our alumni are younger and less affluent personally or influential professionally than alumni from other institutions.

The institutional mission, characterized by a willingness to enroll the less affluent, encouragement of part-time student attendance, a welcome to the commuter student, and little attention to wide-ranging social clubs and Greeks, can create a campus experience that creates few ties to the institution upon graduation. These alumni may be less inclined to be annual givers to the institution.

Finally, our roles as public institutions, our perceived lower institutional status, and our historical underfunded condition of experiencing ever-increasing needs are additional challenges facing the metropolitan university seeking larger amounts of private dollars.

This issue includes seven articles describing various dimensions and experiences of metropolitan universities as they have moved into private fundraising activities. Brownell and Shrader (University of North Texas) begin with a broad overview

of the application of what they view as “traditional” fundraising efforts at their institution. The importance of an institutional infrastructure to support fundraising activities, a strong alumni base, and team leadership all receive a thoughtful analysis.

Five of the articles, Luck and Walling (University of Massachusetts Boston), O’Brien (University of New Orleans), Pattenau and Goettel (University of Southern Maine), Ramaley and Withers (Portland State University), and Walker and Lee (University of Arkansas at Little Rock), present case studies of institutional advancement strategies in these metropolitan universities. In sum, six strategies emerge as significant.

First, all use their metropolitan locations as an advantage in making the case for private funding. Because each city is different, no one strategy emerges. The proximity to other public and private institutions is one consideration. The nature of the state system of higher education is yet another defining aspect of location. However, all the contributors view their institutions as an “institution of the city”—a central point in their case statements.

Second, institutional advancement activities, marketing, public relations, and development are all enhanced through the process of seeking private support. Conversely, without a long-range plan and activities to position the institution as a unique contributor to the community, fundraising is made more difficult. The “asking” for private funds is the consequence of a long, well-articulated program of activities designed to make the case for private support in the community. Each article illustrates, although with different strategies, the evolution of this most important process. Conversely, improved institutional image is a reported outcome of heightened activities in the fundraising arena.

Clear institutional priorities are viewed as imperative for successful positioning and advancement functions. Having everyone soliciting the community for different needs is a counterproductive and dysfunctional strategy. Fundraising success requires strong internal leadership to develop and articulate agreed-upon priorities. Making sure all institutional advancement efforts focus on these announced priorities is an absolute necessity.

Fourth, tying fundraising to community initiative is a useful tactic. The O’Brien and Ramaley/Withers articles provide solid examples of this advantage enjoyed by metropolitan universities at the University of New Orleans and Portland State University, respectively. Several of the cases illuminate the use of formal public/private partnerships to support institutional goals and to garner additional private support.

Finally, like politics, all fundraising is local and personal. Presidential leadership, both as community leader and institutional spokesperson, is critical. The team concept of institutional development is well documented in these articles. When public relations activities, marketing efforts, and fundraising efforts are coordinated and focused, success is evident.

The concluding article points to an important element in the development equation: alumni. Davies (Boise State University) discusses strategies for building a strong alumni base when faced with a commuter student body and the absence of a strong campus social fabric.

In sum, this issue presents the reader with a timely overview of the structure, strategies, practices, and issues surrounding this most complex and critical issue facing our institutions.