

by Bob Jones, Ph.D., Chair of the Resource Development Services Advisory Committee



Ahead of the Curve

Proving Worth of Fund Development Programs

In thinking back over the past eight years of our Alliance for Children and Families fund development community of practice (a.k.a. Resource Development Services) it becomes clear to me that the Alliance was, and continues to be, way ahead of the curve in advancing its members' fund development capacity and needs.

Volunteers and Alliance staff have taken the basics of development and translated and applied those concepts to member agencies' culture and the challenges we face in our local communities. The information, templates, and best practices advanced by the Alliance RDS initiative are both cutting edge and most timely for our members who are operating in fiscally daunting times. And most importantly, members are harvesting real results we can take to the bank.

Outcomes matter. The field is moving swiftly toward an outcomes-oriented, evidence-based practice culture with revenues increasingly tied to performance. This is true with most foundation grants and government contracts, and increasingly it is, and will continue to be, the case with our individual donors. In the spirit of this trend, the Alliance felt it was important to undertake an evaluation of this fund development program and the impact it has had for member agencies.

The RDS initiative was evaluated by Dr. Tom Lengyel, director of research and evaluation services for the Alliance, and his staff. The study focused on participation between

2000 and 2004. In that period the RDS effort had reached more than 347 individuals from 221 Alliance member agencies. The evaluation demonstrated the following positive and impressive outcomes:

"In the case of fundraising outcomes, the research found participating Alliance member agency changes that were statistically significant. For example, the number of current donors increased from a mean of 1,604 to 2,102. Similarly, the mean amount raised by an organization increased from \$405,422 to \$568,810 for a net increase of \$163,388.

The number of individuals in an organization's lapsed donor base as a proportion of current donors decreased from 47.3% to 39.2%. Since fundraising costs rose 16.3% while funds raised increased by 40.3%, fund raising efficiency appears to have improved as well."

More simply put, the member agencies who participated in the RDS trainings and/or workshops have increased their fundraising capacity and results. They have seen an average increase in their net results of \$163,388—in some cases substantially more. Not only are the participating agencies

more effective, they are also more efficient.

RDS success has been accomplished via two pathways: (1) in generating organizational change and prompting agencies to adopt and implement better development practices in those areas that were previously not highly evolved; and (2) in encouraging universal adoption of certain best practices that are already widespread in this network. In other words, the culture of philanthropy for our member agency boards and staff is expanding and improving. Agencies are investing in their development process, and it is yielding tangible results at ever more efficient rates of return on their investment.

Services to the Alliance members. In past years, RDS has offered many different training opportunities ranging from regional training workshops and conferences to distance learning broadcasts. This year the Alliance hosted our First Annual Fund Development Conference, specifically targeting the needs of development professionals, chief executives, and board members.

Held this past April, it was a major success with attendance exceeding our expectations (as well as room capacity). Ninety-four percent of the evaluations rated it excellent to good. It was attended by a mix of the entire agency development team: board members, chief development professionals, and executives. Save the date for the Second Annual Alliance Fund Development Conference, April 19-20, 2007 in Chicago. (See more services in box on next page.)

RDS TODAY

- A COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING MANUAL for board and staff available free on CD to member agencies. It includes everything from the basics, to major gifts, to relationship management strategies
- 21 INDIVIDUALIZED SEVERSON CENTER RESOURCE PACKETS on a variety of important board and fund development topics, including executive summaries written by members of the RDS advisory committee
- A CURRICULUM-BASED WORKSHOP SERIES at every national conference
- REGULARLY-SCHEDULED TELECONFERENCES on timely topics
- INFORMAL CONSULTING OPPORTUNITIES with member/peer executives and development professionals
- A DEDICATED RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT LISTSERV
- A COLUMN ON DEVELOPMENT in each *Alliance for Children & Families Magazine*
- AN ANNUAL FUND DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE focused exclusively on the philanthropic capacity of our Alliance member agencies

Brief history, with gratitude. How did all this start? Resource Development Services initially began as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Governance Committee in March 1998 in response to a capacity building grant obtained by Alliance President and CEO Peter Goldberg and former Alliance employee Russ Raker. In 2000, the effort became volunteer/member driven with generous financial support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, the Packard Foundation, the Board of Child Care in Baltimore (an Alliance member), The Ethel G. Toan Charitable Gift Fund, and individual donations from our volunteers.

Today there is an RDS advisory committee which exists to provide professional guidance and support to the overall program and to members. As a whole, RDS is a network that includes all of us, as members, who wish to be active in enhancing our philanthropic capacity. It is the Alliance's community of practice for fund development.

I think it is important to acknowledge the many member-volunteers and staff who worked on behalf of this initiative. Peter Goldberg's vision and Susan Dreyfus' tireless support continues to be a strong foundation.

Our committee volunteers have put enormous personal and professional energy, time, and resources into taking a dream of enhancing the development capacity of child- and family-serving agencies to a reality. It has been a great privilege and honor to work with the past and current active members. They are a very impressive group of professionals, including: Lisa Brooks, Tom Curcio, Janet Emery, Don Goughler, Ruthann Howell, Len Iaquina, Dan Magnuson, Marie Palagonia, Barbara Ritchie, Pat Showell, Betsy Vander Velde, and Mary Riordan, director of member services for the Alliance.

Former members of the committee include: Russ Raker, Bob Semple, Dan Fox, Krista Larson, Nancy Dimond, Rhona Frazin, Simone Joyaux, Edie Olson, Mark Dennis, Tom Harvey, Yvette Johnson-Hagins, Rosemarie Stiegele, Robert V. Docherty, Bruce W. Jamieson, Judith E. Besette, Jack R. Childs, Nancy A. Nuss, Patrice Heinz, and A. Gerald Erickson.

Words from a member. One of our member agency executives recently sent me a summary of his agency's development journey and experience. I think it captures both the experiences many of us have had,

and the reason the effort matters to our agencies and communities.

"Our organization has embraced the philosophy, strategies, and tactics of RDS wholeheartedly. We have really focused on building unrestricted support from individuals in order to strengthen the organizational capacity under girding our programs and services. This has meant that we revamped our board in terms of composition, size, and philosophy; made long term investments in development and communications; and stressed the role of community advocacy at the board level (which goes hand-in-hand with sharing a dream/vision for a strengthened community—the centerpiece of a development initiative). The results after 2 1/2 years? Individual donors have increased 100%, special event revenue has increased five-fold, board giving is at 100% participation and has doubled in actual dollars, we are positioned to do a capital campaign, and the board is engaged and energized."

In summary. The strength of this fund development community of practice effort in developing the philanthropic capacity of our members truly reflects the strength of the Alliance family of agencies and our shared capacity, as well as our commitment to our communities and to each other. It is one of the finest examples of membership networking creating synergy, positive energy, and meaningful product in support of members and our missions.

If you haven't been involved in any of the RDS activities to date, I invite you to get involved. Where ever you and your agency are on your philanthropic journey, I believe you will enjoy and benefit from the involvement. Sign up for the listserv, contact the Severson Center to obtain a resource packet, attend one of the workshops at the National Conference in St Louis, and attend the Second Annual Fund Development Conference next year.

If you have questions or want to learn more, please call me directly at (201) 261-2800 or call Mary Riordan, director of member services at the Alliance at (414) 359-1040, ext. 3678, or via e-mail at mrrior-dan@alliance1.org. ▲



Bob Jones is president and CEO of Children's Aid and Family Services, Inc., in Paramus, NJ. To find out more about Children's Aid and Family Services, visit their Web site at www.cafsnj.org. He is also a member of the Alliance Board of Directors