



First Things First



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from the desk of
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A Modern Day Fundraising Dilemma

Reviewing the ethical statements now required to be accepted when renewing my Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) status last month, I was particularly struck by the following points in the International Statement of the Ethical Principles of Fundraising:

- *Fundraisers will always respect the free choice of all individuals to give donations or not.*
- *Fundraisers will not accept donations where the acceptance of those gifts would not be in the best interests of the organization or create a conflict of interest that would be detrimental to the organization's reputation, mission, and relationship with existing supporters and beneficiaries.*

Until recently, I wouldn't have thought about these statements representing donors' and organizations' rights necessarily being in conflict. However, considering recent high-profile cases of gifts being rejected, or being refused before they've even been offered, following these principles in certain circumstances can create quite a dilemma for the modern fundraiser.

On rare occasion, a donor's conflict of interest, such as their own personal gain, the burden of administering a particularly complicated gift, or a donor's desire to direct their gift for a use outside the organization's best interest requires invoking a review of gift acceptance policies or the consideration of a formal gift acceptance committee - the channels through which fundraisers are shielded from personally deciding whether an unusual gift should be accepted.

Yet, these days, institutions are increasingly facing external pressure to reject otherwise legitimate donations from individuals and families, not on these grounds, but based on perceived immorality on the proposed donor's part. As an example, numerous museums in the United States and England have recently been forced to respond to public pressure by rejecting current and future gifts from the Sackler

family, with protesters asserting the family's personal complicity and contribution to the opioid addiction crisis.

It is usually a straightforward decision not to accept a gift when a proposed donor has been convicted of criminal activity. But in recent cases, a donor's political views, their position on a provocative or hotly-debated topic such as climate change, or their legal ownership of a company with controversial business interests have encouraged bystanders to take a vocal, public position on the validity of the donor's giving and to criticize an organization's appropriateness in receiving it.

The essence of charitable giving in America relies on an individual's freedom to make a voluntary contribution to any organization or worthy cause they wish to support. These transactions of the soul can bring indescribable joy and fulfillment to the donor, while providing the resources necessary for an organization to maximize the delivery of its mission. Our job as fundraisers is not to question a donor's character or motive for choosing to be philanthropic; it is to facilitate their ability to give unless some real conflict exists that would substantially impede or damage the organizations we represent.

The values-based questions in play today supersede the function of a traditional gift acceptance committee. An organization's board of directors, with public input as it sees fit, should be the arbiter of whether a gift from a specific donor would be detrimental to its organization's reputation or mission or would harm its relationship with its constituents to the extent that the gift should be refused. But as boards diversify and represent more divergent points of view, debate about the receipt of controversial gifts is only likely to increase, further complicating fundraisers' ethical role in representing both donors' and institutions' interests.

In the end, I believe that the spirit of philanthropy and goodwill that has fueled America's nonprofit sector and provided immeasurable benefit to society will continue to thrive, reconciling the generosity of well-intentioned individuals and families with the organizations that are meaningful to them. And as far as I am concerned, it is a privilege to assist them both in this worthy endeavor.

EKU Campaign Goes Public

Eastern Kentucky University launched the public phase of its \$50 million comprehensive fundraising campaign, *Make No Little Plans-The Campaign for EKU*, at a gala on September 27 with three new pledges totaling nearly \$5 million. Eastern Kentucky is a current Client Partner of Alexander Haas.



EKU Foundation Board Chair, and campaign chair Maribeth Berman, announced that \$39 million has already been committed.

"I am passionate about this place. My devotion to this university is and will always be a part of who I am," said Berman, who along with husband Louis Berman, announced a \$4 million planned gift. "Every student who comes to this campus has a chance to change their life, and change the world. We advocate for greater opportunities for students to have this experience."

EKU President Dr. Michael T. Benson announced two other large gifts. Foundation Board member and Hall of Distinguished Alumni member Jeri Isbell pledged \$25,000 for a scholarship and made a six-figure bequest, and faculty member Jon McChesney and his wife Shellie gave a \$400,000 bequest gift.

"As president, I strongly believe that this campaign is a major step toward building a stronger pathway to Eastern's long-term growth," said Benson. "We also know that giving is personal, with many levels and just as many purposes. We know every dollar is precious and impactful."

Alexander Haas is proud to provide campaign counsel to ECU.

[For more information on the campaign, go here.](#)

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Orchestrating Student Success

While our Podcast series, *Futures in Fundraising*, is on hiatus, we offer a repeat episode with Dr. Kyle Marrero. Dr. Marrero, now president of Georgia Southern University, was at the time president of the University of West Georgia.

His background in music lends itself to planning for the future, guiding faculty and helping students achieve success. As Dr. Marrero points out, each individual is important to the overall goal, but each must be allowed to play to his or her area of expertise. In this episode of *Futures in Fundraising*, Alexander Haas President & CEO, **David King** talks with Dr. Marrero about higher education, breaking down barriers and student success, both in the classroom and beyond.

Alexander Haas was proud to provide Campaign Counsel to the University of West Georgia.



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