



HBCU CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

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Higher education fundraising hit an all-time high in 2019, topping out at a record \$49.6 billion for the year. Of course, that was before it became clear that COVID-19 would sweep the globe and leave a teetering economy in its wake.



MY OPTIMISTIC THOUGHTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDRAISING AFTER COVID-19

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Now the question that remains is: how will donor relations recover from this pandemic? When can gift officers hope to return to some semblance of normalcy, will there be lasting impediments to higher education fundraising that result from this crisis?

There are no definite answers at this point, but some blurry outlines about the future are beginning to emerge.

Schools Have to Remain Flexible

The good news is that technology and fundraising were working in lockstep long before COVID-19 made it a necessity. In fact, the majority of charitable donations are made online.

Right now, gift officers have to prepare to ramp up their digital efforts for the foreseeable future. Giving Days, engagement centers, and other events have to be fluid—Plan A may not happen, so a virtual Plan B should be in the works.

Each community is different and some responses to appeals might not be favorable in the current climate; however, people who have the means appear to want to help out wherever possible in light of the outbreak. Schools should carefully gauge the sentiment of their own donor base before sending out any appeals; the whole world is in flux at the moment, and strategies need to remain similarly flexible.

There Are Liable to Be Funding Shortages

At this point, nothing is certain, but schools must prepare for the possibility that corporations and foundations may not have funds on hand to distribute as previously intended.

Many companies, even large ones, are grappling with the reality of layoffs, declining sales, or complete standstills forced by necessary stay-at-home orders.

As the country works to find a way to safely reopen, gift officers must adjust their goals and understand that while 2019 may have been a banner year, 2020 is bound to look a little bit different.

Hope Is Far From Lost

To say that there won't be lasting effects on higher education fundraising from COVID-19 would be an outright lie, but times of crisis have a funny way of bringing out generosity of spirit.

Of course, there are bound to be lean months that lie ahead. Just how long will this relative famine last? That remains to be seen, but the important thing to note is that it will certainly end.

Schools are likely to find, once the country emerges on the other side of this pandemic, that donors are more willing than ever to share what they can spare.

What's more, COVID-19 presents the perfect opportunity to reach out, check-in, and open up frequent lines of communication. When all is said and done, this virus has created a global community: each and every person on Earth will have endured the same trauma to varying degrees.

As painful and scarring as this experience is, the camaraderie that will result may prove more beneficial than harmful to higher education fundraising at the end of the day.

I am a "multipreneur" who thrives on identifying opportunities to leverage over 17-years of leadership experience in corporate America human capital management and higher ed fundraising and branding to develop strategic solutions that advance individuals and organizations.

About Central State University

Central State University, located in Wilberforce, Ohio, is a regionally accredited 1890 Land-Grant University with a 133-year tradition of preparing students from diverse backgrounds and experiences for leadership, research, and service. The University, which has been named HBCU of the Year by HBCU Digest, fosters academic excellence within a nurturing environment and provides a strong liberal arts foundation and STEM-Ag curriculum leading to professional careers and advanced studies globally.

About the HBCU Center of Excellence for Corporate Engagement and Leadership

The HBCU Center of Excellence for Corporate Engagement and Leadership was founded in September of 2020 by Dr. Zillah Fluker, vice president of the Division of Institutional Advancement at Central State University. The vision of Dr. Jack Thomas, president of CSU, is to identify and develop key partnerships that develop, expose and place CSU students. The pillars of the Center are Outreach, Development, Placement, and Research that support the establishment and development of sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships.
