

## Fundraising

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### ***Opening music***

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### ***WGVU's Jennifer Moss:***

Your'e listening to Tilting the Earth's Praxis, a weekly discussion of important issues that impact civil society. With host Salvatore Alaimo.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Hello and welcome to Tilting the Earth's Praxis, where each week we talk about a different subject that impacts the ideal of civil society. Our topic this week is fund raising. Now I'm going to introduce our wonderful guests. First up, we have Jeff Brooks. He calls himself a fundraisingologist at Moceanic. He's coming into this discussion from Seattle. Welcome, Jeff.

### ***Jeff Brooks***

Hey. I'm glad to be here. Thanks.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

We also have two Grand Valley State University alumni, which is part of our format. First up, we have Katie VanDoeselaar. She's the senior donor relations director for the Grand Rapids Public Museum. Welcome, Katie.

### ***Katie VanDoeselaar***

Hello. That was a very long commute over here.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Was it two blocks?

### ***Katie VanDoeselaar***

Two blocks. 2 to 3.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Wow. All right. Next time, we'll try to just come right to your office.

### ***Katie VanDoeselaar***

Love it.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

And we also have Steven Nicolet, Director of Development for Home Repair Services of Kent County. Welcome, Steven.

**Steven Nicolet**

Welcome. Always good to see you.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So nice to see you, too, Steven. So, the average listener out there may be wondering, what does fundraising have to do with this ideal of civil society? Many people think of fundraising simply as a profession or as more of a transactional exercise. So we're going to start with you, Jeff. Help us understand the art and science of fundraising and how that thing that most people treat in a transactional way really has larger implications for civil society.

**Jeff Brooks**

Yeah. Okay. Well. In my mind. But, you know, fundraising is first. It's about funding nonprofit organizations to do the good work they do. That's, that's sort of the easy answer to that question. And that is, that contributes to civil society. Nonprofit organizations do things that need to be done. But the other side of what they do and this is often neglected. You don't really think about this. Donating transforms people. It makes them better people. It releases, you know, pleasure chemicals in your brain. It makes you feel more empowered. You know, donors feel more empowered about their state of the world. They feel like, well, I could, I can do something. They, they feel less fear and helplessness that, you know, it's very common. And that's huge. I almost feel that, that side of what basically if you were raising funds, you're making people better regardless of what that those funds go to do. Now here's what we kind of get wrong as fund raisers. We forget that. We forget that donors are part they're not just, you know, ATMs, that we push buttons and money comes out. They are human beings and we are connecting them with the world, with the work we do with themselves, as has its people. So I think that's part of it. I think the other part is and this is maybe really high level. You know, some people say it's sort of tragic that we have nonprofits doing things because shouldn't we build a just society that takes care of that? And I halfway agree with that. It's. Look, let me take food banks, for example. Food banks are a huge category of nonprofits here in the U.S. I think it's absolutely horrendous that we need food banks, that we have a society that's so broken that people don't get the food they need and that there has to be and that you have to donate to make that happen. But. That doesn't mean don't do it. You know, I think nonprofits need to do the things that the government neglects to do that society can't pull itself together enough to do. Or are things, you know, that maybe things the government shouldn't do or things that are just kind of outside of the scope of, you know, the way society is running. So. So I think that might be the other part of it. And that allows people to voluntarily step in and help create justice and goodness and all the things we want to happen, even when our society's not succeeding at that.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So before we go to Katie and Steven, I have a follow up to that. Am I reading you right in thinking that if everything was maybe provided by government or everything was prescribed, we would lose some of the creativity and innovation around addressing society's issues and problems?

**Jeff Brooks**

Probably. Yes. Yes. Yeah. It's maybe sort of a way to say let a thousand flowers bloom, you know, by saying, hey, go out there and find solutions. And, you know, and the fact is, we live in a broken, justice deficient world where it's not happening. It's, you know, capitalism and government. And the culture is not creating the kind of world we want and we deserve. We should have. So we need to do that. We need to fix that in any way we can.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So, let's build off of those thoughts and let's now find out how our other two guests are dealing with these issues and engaging in this profession of fundraising and the challenges you have in raising funds for your organization. We'll start with you, Katie. Anything that Jeff talked about that resonates with you and terms of how you apply it to your work at the Grand Rapids Public Museum?

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

Yeah. So I first of all, I love hearing being called an art in a science because there are certain things that are best practices. But you always have to be willing to be flexible and to try new things and to work with people. And I agree, like donors aren't ATMs. And I think that's the easiest thing for us to forget is because you're looking at the bottom line and you'd need money to do your work. But you also have to involve donors in your work. They are important pieces of it. And so how can you bring donors along? How can you bring them? In my case, bring them to the museum. How can you bring them to see all the things that we have that we own and we store for the good of the community but aren't on display? You know, how can they see the education efforts that are going in and the joy on a child's face when they come and they see a mastodon for the first time? Just being able to bring donors in and being really intentional about those steps, I think is really huge. And just so remembering that it's a relationship and not just, please give me your money and go away.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

You know, I'm hearing you talk about that and I'm thinking about my own childhood. And even as a big kid of 58 today that museums have played such an important complementary role to the formal education I received from K all the way through Ph.D. and I can't imagine my life. You know, sometimes you realize the value of something by imagining that it's not there. And I just can't imagine my life without museums and thinking about how I grew up. So Steven, tell us about home repair services, what you do for them and how what you do connects with some of the points made about civil society.

**Steven Nicolet**

Now, home repair services on a small local nonprofit right here in Grand Rapids has been in existence since 1979. So 40, almost 44 years of providing critical home health repairs. Our mission is to help vulnerable populations remain in their homes. And so that while there's a lot of nonprofits that help move people into homes, get a home, move

from renters to homeowners, we're kind of filling the holes in the bucket that create people that cause people to lose their homes. So we're trying to, to fill those holes. And we also have we have multiple programs. So not just repairing, doing those critical home repairs, but we also have a self-help program, a fix at school. So we have open to the public. People can come in every Saturday, and we rotate subjects, whether it's electrical or plumbing, drywall. We teach people how to fix it themselves. And in our other side of our organization is our housing and financial literacy programs, where we teach credit building and first time home buying. And we teach those housing, we teach those financial classes to people as well. So we're doing a lot of different programs, but all. You know, all to the same mission of keeping people in their homes. And and so what's, what's interesting about my career, my job now is that I've had a career and it's where actually you and I have met. Or when I worked at Grand Valley, I worked at a number of, of institutions of higher education. And so it was a different type of fundraising than what I'm finding working in a, you know, a local smaller nonprofit. Yeah. Where a lot of different hats. You were all the hats and the small nonprofit in the larger institution, its shared responsibilities with a large staff. And so that that's been the biggest change, the biggest difference for me moving to this smaller shop.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

But I like how you described your work because someone might look at the name home repairs services and really isolate on those words and think, well, this is just about making home repairs. And you eloquently connected the dots that this is a housing issue. At a time when we have a housing shortage in the United States, we have an affordable housing severe shortage here in Grand Rapids and enabling people whose income is slowly getting worn away in post-retirement. The ability for them to stay in their homes is going to be increasingly important. So, similar to museums, it's not just going to the planetarium to see the space show or getting the kitchen redone. These are these are larger and more important issues. So, I want to bounce it back now to Jeff. I was reading one of your blogs, Jeff, and I think this is an interesting path for us to take here. You say here that fundraising that gets donors to take action focuses on the why for that action, not the what or the how. Can you elaborate a little more on those points?

### **Jeff Brooks**

Yeah, maybe another way of saying that and this might surprise you, this is a maybe an odd way to say that is. Your donors don't support you because your organization is amazing. They support you because they are amazing. And if you're fundraising builds from that starting point. I'm tapping into the amazingness of my community, of the people who want the museum in Grand Rapids right there. There's a special group of people who do or who could support you, and they're amazing. And that's what you need to tap into there. And with the home repairs, there's people in the community who get it and love it and want to make it happen, who already support you. And then there's another group who, who could if you can find them. Right. And, and if you go out there, as so many fundraisers do, and say, well, here's a list of the ways, we are awesome, we're really good at this. We're really good at that. We have these programs. Our staff are really educated. That's beside the point. Now you have to have all that. You have to be awesome. You're required to be awesome. But that's not why they give. They give

because you put their values into action. And I think that's the thing that's so important to remember. And that's why it took you're going to succeed more in fundraising by saying this is what this means to you. This makes something you want to happen, happen. So, you're going to find and you know, there's people who probably give to both of your organizations. Right. And there's some who give to one and not the other. And we're just out there kind of in the market situation trying to find the right people. And there are the right people. And you're going to you're going to succeed when you basically say, hey, here's a problem or an opportunity. And it's something you want. Here's how you can make it happen. Send us 50 bucks. You know, that's, that's basically is, it's always about action and it's not about. You know, your processes, the excellence of your programs, which are absolutely critical. But this not what activates somebody to give.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

I want to, want to continue on that civil society connection for a moment. Uh, can we all talk about all of us to how fundraising involves the act of giving, which we know, creates gratitude, which we know helps develop relationships which we know helps develop trust and social capital, all of which have been framed going back to the days of the philosopher Seneca, to the current people like Jeff, that study this as the glue that holds civil society together. So what can we say about that? We'll start with you, Jeff.

### ***Jeff Brooks***

Hmm. Right? I guess. I mean, here's here's my struggle with this. I'm a practitioner. I just do this stuff. And my, my entry into the science of it has to do with what can we do that's going to work a little bit better. Right. So, so and kind of the revolution that has happened in the last couple of decades is we've sort of started to realize. If you want to stir people to action, you have to study people and. That, of course, is how it connects to civil society, because civil society is people living in harmony together. It's not just what that means. And there's, there's trust and there's belief that when things go wrong, they can be fixed and that when people break the contractor consequences, it's you know, it's all that happening. And under that is people are having the homes that they need to live in. And then people have experiences with the arts in meaningful ways. And that's, that's what it's all about. But it doesn't happen. It's different from paying taxes. It's like, you know, you have to pay taxes. Taxes are a fee on living in a society. Right? It's just you have to pay it. And some of those stuff you don't want to happen. Some of it does. And that's not the point. The point is you just have to pay that. Donating is where you get to make some choices and you get to direct some of your money toward specific things that matter to you. And I think and that means that means you build a stronger relationship. You know, I believe somebody who donates to a museum is more hooked into the community than somebody who doesn't. Right. Because they're participating. And that makes them a different kind of person. Stephen You want to build off of that? No.

### ***Steven Nicolet***

I mean, it's. What I find interesting is that we look at the charts over the years since we've measured philanthropic giving and whether it's a recession or depression or

whatever happens in the economy, that none of the charges keeps going up and up and up like we have is really rarely ever downtick in giving. And but but that's and I think that's a powerful statement, too. And it makes me wonder even now and 2023, I think the the top 50 philanthropists in the United States gave a combined \$19 billion. You know, and it's like this large amount of money is it has to be it has to be able to change things in our society for good, for the better. And so, I mean, I guess I'm more of an optimist when I think that things can be better and improved. And I think the gifts and the fundraising, it's a good system. It works. And, and the existence of all of our nonprofits are doing things to better society. So I don't know if that ties in with the question that you asked, but that's like my view of the good that's happening and the continued good. And I see, you know, I guess I like to always look at the, the glass is half full.

***Katie VanDoeselaar***

Yeah. I mean, you guys have said it so eloquently. It's, it's almost hard to add on to it.

***Salvatore Alaimo***

Did we suck the life out of at that point? Is there anything left? Any scraps left for you, Katie?

***Katie VanDoeselaar***

I keep going back to a discussion I had in one of my classes when I was working on my master's degree, and it was about looking at the fundraising and support that a lot of. I don't know if the correct word is outsider, but minority groups do to support each other and to lift each other up. And I think going back to your original point of is this a failure of government or not like government is for the majority of people? And so I think there's always going to be a need and that support required to help build in for people who don't fall under that umbrella and to just help support it. So, I mean, donors are key everywhere because they help lift the society up. And where they choose to give their money helps show their values. And it helps them feel like they're making a difference because they are without the money, there's no mission and there's no change.

***Salvatore Alaimo***

These are good points. I don't want us to lose sight of the fact that in addition to being art and science, fundraising is a profession. The three of you are professionals that engage in this activity. So we know that technology has impacted the profession significantly, particularly in the last two decades. What do you see as some of the ways that technology is molded, shaped to change the profession in your approach and how you have to go about this?

***Jeff Brooks***

Well, a couple of things, and I've got to give a less obvious answer. The big one is use of data, and that's not particularly new that, you know, that kind of goes back to the seventies. But the very fact that you can have a lot of information about your donors and the group of people you're going to, that absolutely revolutionized our ability to raise funds. We kind of moved from, you know, standing on a street corner with the cup and

hoping people will put money in or passing the plate in your house of worship. You know, it's like you don't know anything and you're just kind of hoping people will give will now. And, you know, for a long time now, we've been able to say, okay, who's giving how much did this person give? Because chances are they're going to give again and they're going to give about what they gave before. And that really guides how I talk to that person. So, we actually we get just massively better at our job when we use data. Now, it kind of has exploded with, you know, with the digital world, which kind of gives us more options on how to use data and how to put it out in front of them. Increasingly, money is moving from coming in envelopes and checks in the mail that say money is now coming in through the web. Interestingly, the best way to get somebody to go on the Web and give you some money is to send them a piece of mail back up. By far, that's the biggest driver of that. I think we sometimes get overexcited about the shiny new objects online. We are a lagging indicator of use of those things. Fundraising tends to adapt things late because donors are on the whole, older people. So it took a while before email started to kind of work because, you know, think about your grandma. Maybe she never got to email. But yeah, everything that comes in, we want to look at, you know, we all look at social media. Is that going to work? So far, it's not really working. It's kind of working. It does have bright spots, but on the whole, it's not really that promising. But yeah, look at everyone. Look at every new thing that comes in and give it a shot. Just remember, you're talking to 70 year old and up people for the most part. I can see your faces. You know what I'm talking about? And they're sometimes not dealing with the world the same way we are. And it can be a little bit a little bit frustrating at times.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

Katie, how has technology impacted your work?

### **Katie VanDoeselaar**

Yeah. So I was nodding along with you were talking about like the donor's age sometimes. So I mean, I'm lucky enough, like I've used technology for most of my life. So for me, a lot of that's just natural. But I mean, you know, like you were mentioning, we have to try out the new thing. So just text to give resonate with our audience. Do QR codes work? And it's interesting. Like sometimes it does and sometimes it was a fun experiment and maybe we'll try again later. I think I've noticed a lot with the ability to have more virtual meetings, Zoom meetings. I think it's easier for some times to have just an introductory meeting with people because it's less of a time commitment. That's what I've noticed recently. I don't know if it's different for other people.

### **Jeff Brooks**

Can I just comment on that? You brought up sort of two things that are actually bona fide working shiny new objects in fundraising and that is Zoom, having meetings with donors via Zoom is massive in the impact it can have. And I think the pandemic brought that to life, but it's continuing, it's still getting and probably will get better and better. And then QR codes probably then pandemic may have encouraged that as well. But you know, years ago we, we played around with QR codes and every time you tried it, it crushed response. You put it anywhere in your package and the people who got

that version would like ignore you. So it was like it was like poison “QR code, stay away.” Well, now they work. Now you put them in. There's a science show where you put them in, how you use them, but now they work. So, you know, things do change. They just come. And it has a lot to do with, well, when we first test that you had to have an app and you had to like grandma was not going to do that. Right. Well, now she is doing that because it's easier to do.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Any of this resonate with you, Steven, in terms of how technology is shaping your work?

**Steven Nicolet**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, well, you know, in the in the fundraising world, we like to Yeah. Segment right segmentation. So we always have our, you know, your annual fund, your annual gifts, your major gifts, you know, so. And just like Jeff said, you know, a lot of this is the larger donors are going to be the older constituents. And, and so what works with them doesn't work with another. And so, these the new technology does resonate with younger groups. And so yeah, in our organization we use QR codes, we have our we're happy with our Facebook page, which draws in, you know, marketing for us, lets people know about events and things that they can attend. So, we've gotten a lot of good mileage out of that. It's, it's real helpful, but it is also for a certain demographic, it is for a certain age group. But, you know, even thinking about the Zoom meetings, I just had a potential donor. We talked, spoke and or email and we're trying to set up a meeting and she recommended or suggested, hey, let's do a virtual we can zoom in. And I said, well, if possible, if you're okay, I'd I'd be happy to drive up and see you at your office just Oh, okay. Well, we can do that too. So if I get the choice between the two, I'm definitely going to default to in-person meeting over a Zoom call. So, but I think a lot of people, you know, it's easy to do. Let's just zoom while I guess what you're like, you know, a few blocks away, why don't I just drive over there and see you in person? Because I and, you know, is for fundraisers, if we can see people face to face. Yeah, I tell you, you do get better result.

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

Oh yeah, much preferred. But if it's between no meeting or a zoom meeting, I'm taking the zoom every time.

**Steven Nicolet**

It's a good tool.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So Jeff mentioned the importance of data, and I've heard all the ricochets around nonprofits with data where data rich but information poor, we're drowning in data were overwhelmed. We don't have good data management systems. We don't use it effectively enough in our decision making and so on and so forth. So. I'm the type of donor that I do find how many people you serve interesting and your financials interesting and all of that. But what's going to trigger me to give you money is going to be an understanding. So this is the data that's important to me, an understanding of how



effective you are in serving the people you are serving according to the covenant or promise, inherently embedded in your mission. And if it's to change the life of a person in some way, are you doing that? So given all that, what do you say to a donor like me who wants to? Know that information and use that to make their decision and whether or not they're going to give to you.

### ***Jeff Brooks***

Well, I'll jump in. And I. So you sound like more than average data driven donor. And there are such there are such people. But I'm going to guess that even so, the thing that's really going to get your attention is a well-told story about, you know, a problem or an opportunity. And that persuades you that you can make a difference in that situation and that the data that you kind of mentioned is embedded in that story and is used is kind of you'll use it to maybe submit your decision. I mean, we know this is the human thing is we make all of our decisions with the emotional side of our brain, all of our no matter how, you know, even when we shouldn't do that, we do that. But most of all, when we make charitable donations, because if you actually purely look at it rationally, nobody would donate because you have less money. You know, you had some money, you have less. And if you only looked at rationally, you would not be a donor. Well, fortunately, our hearts know something about that, and they know that know better. So you have to win with the heart. And in fact, the MRI research about decision making is when you ask somebody to make a decision, the emotional parts of the brain, the deeper parts of the brain get all active. And then they say, okay, yes, I'll do that. And then the rational part kicks in. And, and what apparently is happening is the rational part of your brain is talk is talking you into or out of the emotional decision you made. And, and so, yeah, you do need facts. Donors do need facts. But that's basically to ratify the decision they already made now. And sometimes the facts are really bad, you know, it doesn't really work for them and it can, you know, they could use it to talk themselves out. But if you try to walk through. Their rational side. You're rarely going to connect with people because it's not interesting and it's not it's not relevant almost even though it's totally relevant.

### ***Katie VanDoeselaar***

So the impact that the museum can have on lives is more longer term. So we've, we've struggled with the outcomes versus outputs. So, you know, we're really great at tracking and reporting our numbers. You know, we serve 30,000 students annually. Any staff member can tell you that. And we're very proud of it. We love that number, but it's harder to get to what difference did that make? So, when we find those stories, we love them so much and we really love to share them. So, for example, we actually there was a student that came through in their third grade program. They saw the Roger Chaffee exhibit. They saw a planetarium show, and that just ignited something in them. And today, this person works for NASA and they credit their experience at the museum for sparking that interest in space. So it's finding those stories. I mean, that's kind of an outlier, but finding those stories of how something that they learned at the museum impacted them in sharing that I think really helps people who look at it with that rational brain because it. You have the numbers and then you can show that impact.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

How about you Steven?

Yeah. Those are I can. I can understand and relate to needing the. The end of the story, likely the outcome because on our side home repair services may. We do a lot of different home repairs. For example, a bath modification or a bathroom modification. So there's a tub and an elderly person or someone disabled can't get in to take a shower because of the obstacle. So we'll go in, remove that and remodel, put in a shower. And. And so you're, you're you're doing this great work so that people don't have these accidents or falls. We build ramps, you know, wheelchair access ramps in front of homes and, and grab bars and all these great, great items. But the, the end result is how many people didn't fall? How many people didn't end up in the hospital or in the E.R. because of the work that we did? And so those are statistics that, well, they don't exist, right? Because you can't prove something, prove something that didn't happen. So you can see that I can relate to having the challenge of trying to find those other stories to, to show your good work. But it's sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes you have to really think long and hard to come up with an end result.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Well, I think some of this gets to what Aristotle said and you know, the old means and ends discussion so that the home repair itself can, I guess, be viewed as an outcome if you want. But it seems like that's the means to a higher order of thinking. You mentioned health safety. We could probably even argue one's own dignity, rate of one's own ability to have a stable life in their own home. One's ability to stay in their own home. These are life changing things. So, I think similar with museums too. We can look at it at the surface transactional level. But I think what enhances our work is when we take it to a higher order level and connect those dots. So, next question I want to ask is. Moving away from individual donors to trying to raise money from institutional or, you know, institutional sources, United Ways, foundations and organizations of that sort. So here's my question. If the three of you had the power to change something, that would make your ability to raise money easier from these institutions. What would you do? What changes would you make?

**Jeff Brooks**

Okay., this is outside of my professional area, but I have an opinion which is institutional funders should be funding back end of stuff. They should not they should be making you a more stable, more capable illness. They should pay for all the boring stuff that's hard to raise funds for. It's I think it's a kind of a crime that they snap up all the cool, sexy projects that you do. Because come on, they're professionals too. We should be able to talk to them about our copier and our electric bill and our staff get paid. You know that. That's all necessary stuff. You can't raise funds on that. And I just want to slap some of these institutional funders that won't fund the capacity building, things like that. That's what they should do. Because the relationship between you, and you and a corporation or a foundation is it's a much more rational discussion. They basically have a form you have to fill out. Right. But they have they've built a system where largely they are giving

you designer funds for all the cool things you do. And that leaves it up to your donors who are or don't have this power to raise, you know, cover everything else. You know, so I think that's a huge problem. And I have to say. I'm sorry, I blanking on her name. Mackenzie... Mackenzie Scott, ok. Okay. Mackenzie. Scott is doing a good thing in. She's just giving organizations on designated money. That's what they should all be doing is like make the organization stronger. And then they can then go to their individual donors from, you know, from the \$10 to the million dollar donors to say, hey, would you like to fund this really cool thing that matters to you?

**Salvatore Alaimo**

I think that's a good start. How about you two? What do you think of this?

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

I mean, that's a huge piece of it, I think is the operational funding. I mean, the foundations are so generous and. You really appreciate the support that you get from, but sometimes like the application process can be really intense. And then the funds are fairly restricted with a lot of reporting. And I mean I always try to look at it from their side. They're responsible for reporting out to anybody who's given money to them or they're looking to make a difference to. You got to be a partner in that. And I try to understand that. But I mean, sometimes you just look at what you have to go through to get that money and go, Is that worth my time? So, I guess less onerous processes would be fantastic.

**Steven Nicolet**

And the one of one of the challenges that I have is there's a lot of foundations. I mean, there's hundreds, thousands of foundations. But there are many that will say, you know, don't call us, we'll call you like we have a certain number of nonprofits that we support. And so then there's no there's no entry. There's no, you can't even submit a grant proposal or an application to try to get their attention. And then we've had we had an example of this just this year to where it's you go to their website and you send them, you know, contact us. At least there's a contact us button to press. And you put in, hey, we're just we're trying to let you know all the good work that we're doing. How can we get your attention so that we could apply? And then you get a form letter back that says we don't accept unsolicited grant requests. It's, you know, so it's just like this wall. But those are just, you know, that's the life of a fundraiser. Those are the challenges that that we have all the time.

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

I think it's amazing that there was a website with a contact us, but sometimes there's not even that

**Steven Nicolet**

Right, right, true.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So, I will avoid the temptation to get into a discussion on how some foundations on their website will say what they fund and what they don't. But when you then look at their IRS 1990, you see they fund things that they say they don't and then they don't fund things that they say they do. So well. I guess I did get into that, but we won't go any further on that point. So we're going to close now looking to the future, right? So what's on the horizon? What did the three of you see for the future of fundraising trends, things to look out for, things that the three of you have to be prepared for to continue to be so successful in your work.

**Jeff Brooks**

Probably the biggest deal, the most hopeful and important is the aging of America. That means more and more people who are in that age group that does most of the giving. That's there's like a golden age kind of coming there as, as the as that age group, just balloons in size. But it's going to bring a challenge, which is, you know, they're they're aging in to from a different place. You know, that's probably why direct mail response rates have been dropping for the past quite a few years. I think it's because that's generationally kind of ranking. It's like less important and we can look at our own selves, our own behavior and say, I don't really give the by the direct mail that randomly drops in my in my mailbox. Will I still you know, when I'm 80 years old, I don't know. But it kind of feels like just based on that, that we are the less male centric, email centric communications likely to be the thing. You know, I remember when we were kids when. We used to write letters to people and like every day there were letters in your mailbox from human beings. I mean, how often the mailbox was a different place decades ago than it is now. And that's why I'm kind of worried that we're in a we're an aging in to people who don't have that experience, that the mailbox was a positive, special place, too. Yeah. That is where you just get garbage catalogs and bills, right?

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

That's what I get in my mailbox.

**Jeff Brooks**

Right.

**Steven Nicolet**

Yeah. I mean, just to go along with what Jeff said is a lot of our larger donors, people with wealth, they, they have a new generation. And so suddenly the wealth that was concentrated in one family now goes down to, you know, for families. And then those families, it'll go down to, you know, 16 different families. You might have had that great relationship with the first oldest family. How do you continue those relationships with everyone else that the wealth gets divided off to? So I you know, once again, that's a that's a huge, huge challenge for for everybody moving forward.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

And just to follow up on that, do you find that sometimes the children and the grandchildren either don't want to give in a certain way, don't want to give to the same

causes and don't want to give maybe in the same amounts as the original founding philanthropist did.

**Steven Nicolet**

Yeah. I mean, I think that's only natural to them. It's it's just more people, more it's more diverse. They have a lot more different interests out there. And, and even the, the wealth, the wealth is divided up, too. So these maybe the gifts are even going to be smaller that, that you that you end up receiving from somebody from the family. So, you know, you just have to diversify. You have to continually look for new pockets of fundraising to support your cause.

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

Yeah. I mean, I agree. I think it's the continuing to diversify age and then also making sure that our donor base as closely as possible resembles the base of the people that we serve. So everybody has a voice in the future of the organization, I think is also something that's critical. Getting involved with more organizations in the community, meeting new people, meeting that next generation of donors and really working with them and developing those relationships is going to be really critical.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Well, that's going to do it for this week's episode of Tilting the Earth's Praxis. I want to thank my fantastic guests who were on our show this week, Jeff Brooks, fundraising ologist and Moceanic. For those of you listening, go read his books The Fundraiser's Guide to Irresistible Communications, the money raising nonprofit brand and How to Turn Your Words Into Money. Thanks again, Jeff, for being with us today.

**Jeff Brooks**

Hey, thank you. It was great.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Katie VanDoeselaar. In full transparency, a former student of mine, Senior Donor Relations Director, Grand Rapids Public Museum. Thank you, Katie.

**Katie VanDoeselaar**

Thank you so much.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

And Steven Nicolet, someone I've known for years now in many different capacities, now director of development at Home Repair Services of Kane County. Thank you for being with us today.

**Steven Nicolet**

Always a pleasure. Thanks.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

All right. That does it for this week. Please tune in next week. Take care.

**Closing music**

***WGVU's Jennifer Moss***

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**Closing music fades.**