

## Ten Scarcity Traps in Fundraising

Unfortunately, there are too many scarcity traps in fundraising to name them all. Below are ten that with a small shift to abundance could make a remarkable difference in your organization's efforts to generate the revenue your mission needs to thrive and not just survive.

Scarcity Trap	Scenario	Abundance mindset
<b>Not enough time</b>	We complain about not having enough time instead of evaluating if we are using our time effectively.	It is helpful to ask, “What are we not doing to build relationships, listen, and be more strategic in our efforts while we are doing the thing that is taking up a lot of time with little return on that investment?” Shifting our use of time is about spending our time more intentionally.
<b>Not enough people or people with skills</b>	We do not provide support or training for board, staff, and volunteers and yet expect them to magically be good at fundraising.	Fundraising is a science and an art. It is more than asking for money. Taking the time to “go slow to go fast” by learning the skills and techniques will help everyone succeed rather than hoping they don’t just fail.
<b>No plan</b>	Instead of actually laying out a plan, we have only made a list of “asks,” which leads us down a path of false starts.	A fundraising plan sets clear definitions of success and helps us distribute the work. Plans don’t have to be novels but they must start with why the funds matter, move to the source, build on relationships and stewardship, and only then focus on the asking strategy. Want to learn more about fundraising planning? Check out this <a href="#">article</a> .
<b>No connections</b>	Often teams lack systemic power and privilege to know how to advance their funding goals or the fear of this influences who is recruited for the board at the expense of other attributes and skills.	Abundance thinking in fundraising asks those with power and privilege to use it for good. The group with less power and access can ask or you can offer support. Nonprofits, this is a time when you issue joint donor letters of introduction through your mailing lists or share examples of successful efforts. This is a time when corporate and foundation funders can focus their outreach on purposeful invitations to listen, learn, and explain their process. This is a time to share knowledge and examples to save others time. These are just a few ways. Abundance thinking opens up so many options to ask and receive support.

<p><b>Focus on a single strategy</b></p>	<p>We are limited by relying on one strategy, like a single special event (no matter how large), which also is creating enormous burnout for the team and is pulling time away for anything else.</p>	<p>Shifting from a “one size fits all strategy” to the right tactic at the right time, in the right way, for the right reason, means starting with mission and values and then focusing on your current and highest potential donors BEFORE determining the strategy for the “ask.” This shift of thinking places the mission AND donor in the center of the plan rather than the event, the letter, or the asker.</p>
<p><b>Use of violent or restrictive terms</b></p>	<p>We fall into a trap of using negative, even violent terminology when we talk about fundraising such as “twisting arms, pulling legs, hitting people up,” and more.</p>	<p>A shift in mindset comes with a shift in the words we use. We move from “obligation” to “opportunity,” from “have to” to “get to,” from “making people do something” to “asking them.” Our words set a tone and a context for how we approach our work and how our values and mission show up best.</p>
<p><b>Focus on money</b></p>	<p>We forget that people and institutions are not walking checkbooks or ATMs, which leads us to consider success as only money.</p>	<p>Philanthropy, as translated from Latin, means “love of humankind.” It does not mean money. Money is a single way to express how we care but it is not the only way. This is the opportunity to create goals that recognize whole people and institutions that care about the mission and the cause. We can define success based on how we engage those who care; how we help people feel connected to something greater than themselves; and how we collaborate to do good in the world. Money is important but those who raise the most of it spend the least amount of time focusing on it.</p>
<p><b>Focus on individual programs</b></p>	<p>We forget that some work is unfunded or underfunded, and some work is easier to fund. When we focus on the “limbs of the tree” and not “the trunk,” we create instability, less resilience, and promote internal competition while instilling the scarcity mindset.</p>	<p>Consider the “trunk” in every funding decision ensuring that we are not creating our own internal programmatic Hunger Games. This means resisting the Overhead Myth by accounting for the true costs of what it takes to operate and speaking of the whole rather than the sum of its parts. This also means not getting sucked into defending or creating false narratives around overhead, and it means speaking about the intersectionality of your programs as part of a larger whole – even when a donor or funder only wants to fund one part.</p>
<p><b>Mission drift</b></p>	<p>Our classic challenge is following the money rather than following our plans and priorities. This creates a desire to jump at the “shiny”</p>	<p>If only it was obvious that scarcity is driving this thinking. The idea that some money is better than no money, even when the available money does not cover the operating costs, lessens our ability to do what we have already promised and puts other infrastructure at risk. Abundance asks us to slow down, to ask</p>

	<p>opportunities that devalue the work already underway and our promise to sustain programs.</p>	<p>ourselves and honestly answer the question: “If we get money to start this _____ where will the money come from to keep it going?” And it encourages us at every turn to consider our long-term goals and plans to drive our short-term decisions. Just because we “can” does not mean “we should.”</p>
<p><b>Overhead Myth</b></p>	<p>The Overhead Myth is the notion that nonprofits should be able to produce wonderful quality missions without any or very low operating costs. This is both done to us, and we do it to ourselves. This shows up in an unwillingness to fund operations, staff, and infrastructure that go with the mission activities the donor or funder say they care about. Or it is in the scrutiny of how much people are paid to do a job most people don’t want to do but feel the person should just volunteer for it or settle for less. This comes in low wages, low or no benefits, no retirement savings, and a revolving door of amazing people doing extraordinary work. But we do it to ourselves, too, by spending 20 hours getting something donated that we could have spent less time and money on just buying, or by spending countless hours “making something work” that could have been done far more efficiently if we had just spent a little more money. We also do it to ourselves by telling people – even feeling pride when we say that anything less than 100% of the donation funds mission. This declaration is not only untrue, but it devalues the people, space, and operations it took to make mission work.</p>	<p>Abundance thinking is pride, not apology that we pay our staff a living wage, that we provide healthcare and retirement, and that we create welcoming and safe work environments that have the materials the team needs to do their job. Abundance thinking focuses on truthful conversations about what it takes to make the mission work. Abundance thinking asks us to consider the time and effort we take to raise the money we need to do the best work possible in the community. It asks us to dream big. For example, it encourages us to talk about not just what it takes to feed a hungry person for a day but focuses on raising enough money to put an end to hunger in the first place or at least to solving the problem with a longer lasting solution. It asks us to tell the truth, even if the funder won’t pay for it.</p>