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It's More Than Money:

Building a Culture of Philanthropy in Your Organization

A 60-Minute Webinar for Nonprofit Leaders, Board Members & Staff

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About Atrómitos



Who we are

A boutique consulting firm specializing in healthcare, housing, and social services nonprofits. Woman-owned and operated.



What we do

Organizational strategy, fund development, communications, capital planning, and capacity building, done fearlessly.



Why we're here today

We've worked with dozens of nonprofits. One theme surfaces again and again: strategy fails when culture isn't ready.

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What We'll Cover Today



01 The Two Traps

Why organizations get stuck, and it's not what you think



02 What Culture of Philanthropy Means

A definition that goes beyond the development office



03 The Readiness Spectrum

Where does your organization sit today?



04 The Five Pillars

Leadership, board, staff, community, and shared ownership



05 Staffing Structures That Support the Culture

Matching your people to your size and goals



06 Your Next Steps

Tools, resources, and Q&A

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POLL

When you think about asking individuals for money, your gut reaction is...

A) Uncomfortable: it feels awkward or intrusive

B) Resistant: that’s not really what we do

C) Confident: I know how to do this

D) Confused: I’m not sure where to start

SECTION 01

The Two Traps

Why organizations get stuck, and it's not what you think.

TRAP 1 OF 2

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The Avoiders



“We don’t ask people for money. That’s not who we are.”

Sound familiar? Here’s what’s really happening:

Philanthropy feels like begging, but it isn’t. It’s inviting community members into your mission.

Leadership discomfort signals to staff and board that fundraising is shameful, not strategic.

The organization stays grant-dependent and fragile, one funding shift away from crisis.

Staff who want to fundraise have no permission or structure to do so.

TRAP 2 OF 2

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The Oversimplifiers



“We just need to hire a development director. That’ll fix everything.”

Here’s what usually happens next:

They hire someone, often underpaying, and expect immediate results.

The new hire has no internal champions, no board support, no donor relationships to inherit.

Within a year or two, they’ve turned over. The cycle repeats.

Leadership concludes: “Fund development just doesn’t work here.”

DEFINITION

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What Is a Culture of Philanthropy?

A culture of philanthropy exists when an organization believes that inviting community members to invest in its mission is a natural, valued, and shared responsibility, not the job of one person or one department.

It shows up in three ways:

Mindset

Everyone sees themselves as an ambassador for the mission, not just the development director or the ED.

Behavior

Philanthropy is woven into how the organization communicates, hires, plans, and celebrates.

Structure

The right people, resources, and systems are in place to support philanthropic efforts at every stage.

THE CORE ARGUMENT

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Why Culture Must Come Before Structure

Culture

Shared belief that philanthropy is essential and everyone's role

Strategy

A plan that reflects your values, stage, and capacity

Structure

Staff, systems, and resources aligned to execute the plan

Results

Sustainable, growing philanthropic revenue

When organizations skip culture and jump straight to structure, they build a philanthropy program on an unstable foundation. The structure collapses, and they blame the strategy or the staff instead of the culture gap underneath.

SECTION 03

The Philanthropy Readiness Spectrum

Where does your organization sit today?

THE READINESS SPECTRUM

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Four Stages of Philanthropy Readiness

1

Stage 1: Avoidant

Leadership resistant to individual fundraising

Almost entirely dependent on grants or government funding

Early-stage organizations with no fundraising history

2

Stage 2: Willing but Unprepared

Leadership open to fundraising but lacks confidence

Board not engaged in giving or getting

Organizations that want to build but haven't started culture work

3

Stage 3: Emerging Culture

Leadership models giving and donor relationships

Staff understand their storytelling role

Organizations in active transition

4

Stage 4: Embedded Philanthropy

Philanthropy is organizational identity, not a department

Multi-stream revenue with strong donor relationships

Mature organizations with healthy programs

SECTION 04

The Five Pillars of a Philanthropy Culture

What building the culture actually looks like.

THE FIVE PILLARS

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Building the Culture: A Five-Pillar Framework



PILLAR 1

Leadership Modeling



PILLAR 2

Board Alignment



PILLAR 3

Staff as Storytellers



PILLAR 4

Community as Partners



PILLAR 5

Shared Ownership

Each pillar supports the others. You can start anywhere, but all five must eventually be in place.

PILLAR 1

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Leadership Modeling

“The tone at the top sets the culture at the bottom.”

1

Be visible in your giving

Leaders who give personally, at whatever level, signal that philanthropy is a shared value, not a burden.

2

Get comfortable with the ask

You don’t need a script. You need to be able to say: “Our work matters. Will you be part of it?” Practice that.

3

Show up at fundraising events

Attendance is modeling. When leadership cancels or skips events, it communicates indifference to the whole organization.

4

Talk about donors in staff meetings

When you mention donor relationships in team settings, you normalize philanthropy as culture, not a side project.

PILLAR 2

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Board Alignment

The board's role is often unclear

- Board members don't know what's expected of them in fundraising
- Many feel they were recruited for expertise, not to solicit donors
- "Give or get" policies exist on paper but aren't enforced
- The development director is left to manage board engagement alone

What aligned boards do instead

- Fundraising expectations are set during board recruitment and onboarding
- Every board member gives at a level meaningful to them
- Board members open doors: introductions, events, community presence
- Fund development is a standing agenda item at every board meeting

PILLAR 2 IN PRACTICE

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Three Questions for Your Next Board Meeting

1

What do we expect of every board member when it comes to fundraising, and have we said it out loud?

Most board members want to help. Many have never been told what help looks like.

2

Who do you know who should know about our work?

Opening doors is a role every board member can play, whether or not they ever make an ask.

3

What would make you more comfortable talking about our mission with people you know?

Naming the discomfort tells you what support your board actually needs.

Make fund development a standing agenda item, and start with one of these.

PILLAR 3

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Staff as Storytellers

Program and operations staff are the organization's most credible voices, yet they're rarely trained or empowered to speak up.



Train staff on the mission narrative

Every staff member should be able to answer: "What does your organization do, and why does it matter?" in 60 seconds. This is a team skill, not a development skill.



Create channels for story sharing

Build simple ways for program staff to surface client stories. A monthly story form or standing segment at staff meetings keeps material flowing to development.



Give staff visibility at donor events

Hearing directly from the people doing the work builds trust that no development director can replicate alone. Brief program presentations, site visits, and co-authored reports make that possible.

PILLAR 4

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Community as Partners

“We are not asking for money. We are inviting people to partner with us in the work they already believe in.”

“Can you donate to us?”	→	“Will you invest in this community?”
“We need your money.”	→	“Your gift does exactly this. Here’s the evidence.”
“Please come to our gala.”	→	“Join us for an evening with the people your support made possible.”

PILLAR 5

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Shared Ownership

A culture of philanthropy has no single point of failure. Donor relationships belong to the organization, not to one person.

Multiple relationships

More than one person at your organization has a real relationship with each of your major donors. If one person left tomorrow, the relationship would stay.

Engagement before the ask

People can connect with your mission through volunteering, events, site visits, or advocacy before anyone asks them for money. The pipeline is relational, not transactional.

Distributed responsibility

Fund development shows up in job descriptions and performance expectations across roles. Philanthropy is discussed in program and operations meetings, not only development.

A COMPOSITE EXAMPLE

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Putting the Pillars Together

Where they started

Stage 2: Willing but Unprepared

Most revenue came from two government contracts and a few foundation grants

A few board members gave; none opened doors

The development director worked alone, the second in three years

When a contract was cut, the board asked her to “raise more”

What they changed

Four decisions, no new hires

The executive director held four donor conversations a month

The board set fundraising expectations for every member

Program staff shared a client story at every staff meeting

Appeals were rewritten as invitations, not needs

Where they are now

Stage 3: Emerging Culture

Every board member gives and makes introductions

Major donors know more than one person at the organization

When another contract was reduced, individual donors helped close the gap

The development director stayed, with partners instead of a to-do list

None of these changes required a bigger team. Each one was a decision about who owns philanthropy.

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POLL

Which pillar is your organization's biggest gap right now?

A) Leadership Modeling

B) Board Alignment

C) Staff as Storytellers

D) Community as Partners

E) Shared Ownership

SECTION 05

Staffing Structures That Support the Culture

Matching your people to your size and goals.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

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Why the One-Person Show Fails

What we ask one person to do

Cultivate and steward major donors

Write and manage all grants

Plan and execute fundraising events

Manage the donor database

Create all fundraising communications

Engage and report to the board

Write the annual fund development plan

Track and evaluate all fund development metrics

The inevitable outcome

Burnout, turnover, and the conclusion that “fund development just doesn’t work here,” when the structure was the problem, not the person.

The rule of thumb

For every $500K to $1M in philanthropic revenue goal, plan for at least one dedicated, full-time development staff member, plus leadership and board engagement to support them.

STAFFING MODELS

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Staffing Structure by Budget and Goal

Annual budget	Philanthropy goal	Recommended staffing*	Key caveat
Under $1M	Up to $150K	Part-time development coordinator, or an executive director (ED)-led model with an active board	Culture work must precede any hire. The ED leads major donor outreach personally.
$1M – $3M	$150K – $500K	One development director (with admin support) + active ED + engaged board	Allow 6–12 months before expecting results. Set expectations in writing.
$3M – $7M	$500K – $1.5M	Development director + 1 coordinator + communications support	Separate grant writing from donor relations. They are different skill sets.
$7M+	$1.5M+	VP of development or chief development officer (CDO) + development department (2–4 staff)	The CDO must have a seat at the leadership table. Philanthropy is a leadership-level function.

** All models assume leadership modeling and board engagement are already in place or in active development.*

TOOLS FOR YOU

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Your Next Steps



Culture of Philanthropy Self-Assessment

Diagnose where your organization sits across the five pillars. Use it separately with leadership, board, and staff. The gaps between how each group sees the culture are often more informative than the scores.



Philanthropy Culture Action Plan

A 30/60/90-day planning tool that translates your assessment results into concrete next steps, organized by role.



Fund Development Self-Assessment

Once culture is in place, use this companion tool to evaluate your program: case for support, funding goals, prospect tracking, stewardship, and infrastructure.

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

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Your First 90 Days: An Example

An illustration using Board Alignment. Your own plan will start from your lowest-scoring pillar.

30 First 30 days

Executive director and board chair: agree in writing on fundraising expectations for every board member.

Board chair: add fund development as a standing agenda item.

60 Days 31 to 60

Board chair: share the expectations with the full board and invite questions.

Each board member: name three people who should know about the organization.

90 Days 61 to 90

Governance committee: add the expectations to recruitment and onboarding materials.

Full board: review progress and set the next 90 days.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

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What to Take Away Today

01 Culture must come before structure. Strategy and staffing built on an unprepared culture will fail every time.

02 Discomfort with asking is a learned response, and it can be unlearned. Organizational culture is set by how leadership talks and behaves around philanthropy.

03 The board's role in philanthropy must be explicit, expected, and supported, not assumed or implied.

04 Every staff member has a role. Program colleagues tell the story that moves donors. Philanthropy is everyone's job, at different levels.

05 Reframe the ask. Invite your community to invest in work they already believe in.

06 Shared ownership is not optional. Donor relationships must live in the organization, not in one person.

07 Staffing follows readiness. Match your structure to your stage and your goals, not to what a peer organization did.

Q&A

We have time for your questions.

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Thank You

Philanthropy is not just a funding strategy. It is a declaration of what your organization believes its community deserves.

Coming to your inbox:

Culture of Philanthropy Self-Assessment
Philanthropy Culture Action Plan
Fund Development Self-Assessment (companion tool)
plus the webinar recording and slides

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