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Foreword to The Essential Fundraiser's Handbook by Lisa Greer

By Dr Beth Breeze, Director, Centre for Philanthropy, University of Kent, UK

As Jane Austen almost wrote: It is a truth universally acknowledged that a nonprofit in possession of an important mission must be in want of individual donors. Yet despite the essential role that private individuals play in supporting every type of nonprofit activity across the world, our understanding of what these donors need and want – and just as crucially what they don't want – in order to gain and sustain their support, is often sadly lacking. The collective value of donations from individuals far outstrips the value of funding from corporations and philanthropic foundations (collectively known as 'institutional donors') by a ratio of 3-to-1, yet these latter sources of voluntary income get far more attention from scholars, practitioners and the general public. This is partly for practical reasons: institutional donors may only provide around a quarter of total nonprofit funding but they create a paper trail which makes them much easier to find, to quantify, to study and to pass comment on. They might have a website, issue press releases and have staff with easily accessible contact details. Institutional donors are often keen to be visible because their motivation includes achieving business benefits or securing legitimacy and the right to operate. Such is the domination of institutional philanthropy in the public imagination that when philanthropy, is being discussed - and especially when it is being criticized - what commentators and critics usually have in mind is foundations and corporations not individuals.

Yet it is *people* who contribute three-quarters of all donations and therefore bear the greater burden and kudos for keeping good causes in business. Individual donations mostly come from living donors whilst legacies written by people into their wills are constituting a growing share of total donated income. Surely then, understanding the perspective of people who are making gifts today and pledging them for the future is crucial for all fundraisers and nonprofit leaders? Yet the actions, experiences, desires and bugbears of individual donors are much harder to grasp than that of institutional donors. There is no easy way to identify generous people, no convenient database or public record listing all individual donors which can be analysed and surveyed. Many are keenly private and prefer not to discuss their giving, (or to 'virtue signal' as the critics would have it), and most are too busy getting on with their lives - working, socializing, raising their families – to have time to donate their insights on what it feels like to be a donor in addition to donating their hard cash.

As an academic who studies philanthropy, the absence of the individual donor perspective in discussions about the health and future of the nonprofit sector has long bothered me. How can we understand acts of giving without meaningful insights from those who give, and how can we improve fundraising without factoring in the experiences of those who are on the receiving end of fundraising communications and activities? The individual donor community is, of course, not the only important perspective - thankfully great strides have been made in recent years to bring the beneficiary perspective front and centre. Serving beneficiaries is, of course, the reason that nonprofits exist. But nonprofits cannot fulfil their missions if they cannot pay the rent, utility bills, staff salaries, volunteer expenses and governance costs. Donors matter because nonprofits cannot run on goodwill alone.

So I was delighted to encounter Lisa Greer's writing in which she clearly, passionately, and often humorously, conveys the individual donor perspective. Lisa's experience is especially interesting because she landed on the potential major donor radar overnight when the start-up run by her husband and a friend became a successful publicly listed company. Coming to the sudden attention of fundraisers in every organization that she had a connection with (and plenty that she did not) created a unique opportunity to share what it feels like to be at the centre of fundraisers' hopes, and

to convey constructively and empathically what does and does not land well when fundraisers try to reach potential donors. Lisa's voice is worth listening to because she is a generous giver – she pledged her first \$1m donation before her husband and friend rang the ceremonial bell at the New York Stock Exchange - and she is now a full-time philanthropist and advocate for better fundraising. We need to listen when she recounts what it is like to be on the receiving end of large quantities of badly worded asks and misjudged solicitations because she is sharing these accounts in order to help nonprofits learn from those mistakes and do better.

We live in a time of multiple, simultaneous crises including the climate emergency, ongoing social and racial injustice, war in Europe, and inadequate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In the face of these immense global challenges, and in light of the ongoing quotidian needs in every community to improve local facilities and ensure that everyone has a chance to meet their potential, we need more – not less – philanthropy. This means that we also need more skilled and successful fundraisers who understand how to find and inspire donors, how to build meaningful and sincere relationships with them, and how to provide an accessible and enjoyable opportunity to use private wealth for public good.

Lisa's willingness to help this work be done better, despite her personal needs for privacy and time spent with loved ones, is a testament to her commitment to improving fundraising so that nonprofits can thrive and make a bigger positive difference in the world. Lisa's insights have helped me and my students to better understand and relate to individual donors, and I'm sure this new book will prove equally valuable to all who care about the health and impact of the philanthropy sector.