2018 Upstate Institute Summer Field School Fellowship

Title: Creating a Donor Profile for Effective Fundraising with a Nonprofit Organization
Community Partner: Friends of Rogers Environmental Education Center, Inc.

Research on donors and potential donors to a locally-based nature center that will appeal to any student interested in nonprofit work in general, especially with nonprofits that focus on environmental education.

Project Description:
Friends of Rogers Environmental Education Center wants to learn how to improve their engagement with donors and potential donors, and how to utilize donor acquisition software to do so. The creation of an ‘Ideal Donor Profile’ is much like conducting market research at a non-profit grass-roots level, and having an ‘Ideal Donor Profile’ is essential to crafting unique messages specifically for new donor outreach and current donor stewardship. An ‘Ideal Donor Profile’ is not a wealth-screening “donor profile," but rather a “persona” used to aid in donor communications. An 'Ideal Donor Profile' has many facets, and may include a generalized description of a donor’s daily life, likes and dislikes, vehicle preferences, even demographic background. An ‘Ideal Donor Profile’ reaches the very core of donor-centered fundraising, and is the most ideal way for an organization to ultimately reach long-term, sustainable funding. Due to the time-consuming nature of such research, it is often one of the lowest priorities for a small non-profit organization. Defining an organization’s most loyal and dedicated donor prospects requires careful insight, observation, and study. Once a profile is created, an organization like Rogers needs to determine how best to engage with a donor once a connection is established. With so many strategies available for creating and maintaining donor relationships, research is required to determine yield for optimal return-on-investment. Finally, there is a wide variety of donor acquisition software available in the marketplace. Discerning the most ideal product(s) for an organization to invest in is challenging. Nature center development professionals like those that work at Rogers do not currently have a professional development organization which conducts donor research specifically for this niche, unlike arts administration, higher education, health and welfare, and social services.

The Fellow will use external resources for this project, such as professional organizations like the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA), the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFL), the CNY Philanthropy Center, the New York Council of Non-Profits (NYCON), etc. A variety of development consultants publish free, web-based resources that could also be used for this project, including Clairification (Claire Axelrod), Cygnus Applied Research, Inc. (Penelope Burke), and Get Fully Funded (Sandy Reese). As acquisition software and other data systems (DonorSearch, GeoFencing, etc.) are identified, obtaining those resources would also be beneficial for conducting research. For specific market research, using free on-line survey tools such as Survey Monkey and/or Facebook tools are recommended.

As a grassroots non-profit, similar in many ways to other Upstate organizations, Friends of Rogers has un reached potential regarding outreach to individual giving prospects. This research project will provide Friends of Rogers with important new data needed for cultivating donors, as well as information required for future grant proposals. Rogers Environmental Education Center will be able to utilize the results of this research to significantly build capacity and advance their mission.

About the Community Partner:
Friends Environmental Education Center provides Central New Yorkers with outstanding educational opportunities that excite, inspire, and motivate people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to enjoy, understand, appreciate, and protect the natural environment. As a source of community pride and a
Regional eco-tourist destination, Rogers is a vital resource for schools and families, and a welcoming and accessible environment for people of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds, race, religion, gender, and abilities. They serve visitors from Broome, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, and Otsego counties. In 2017, nearly 15,000 guests passed through the Visitor Center – not including those who hike the trails at Rogers on a regular basis. Field Trips reach children in nearly thirty nearby communities. Early childhood initiatives bring hundreds of pre-schoolers and caregivers to Rogers Center every week. Free annual community festivals are seeing record attendance. Day camp programs during school vacations host hundreds of children for hands-on environmental education and socialization. Their programs form the core of a community-wide respect for and understanding of the natural environment of Central New York. Augmented by over 100 volunteers who provide a variety of services, approximately 75% of Rogers’ initiatives are free of charge. To achieve their mission, they rely on the generosity of private businesses, foundations, and individuals to sustain operations at Rogers Center.

**Required Skills:**
The Field School Fellow should possess excellent organizational skills, an interest in non-profit and/or small business, and solid oral and written communication skills. The ability to juggle multiple tasks and operate standard office equipment is necessary. The Fellow should be detail-oriented as well as skilled in a variety of computer applications, such as Microsoft Office, Google, etc.. The Fellow will gain extensive market-research experience, as well as individualized, daily coaching and guidance in non-profit advancement work. Beyond the transferrable applied learning skills that the Field School Fellow will develop, a highly-organized and motivated individual has the opportunity to leave a lasting impact on a beloved Upstate community landmark through this project.

**Logistics:**
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and Friends of Rogers. Friends of Rogers executive director and development staff will provide supervision. Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500 plus reimbursement for any costs associated with transportation for this project. A car is not required for this project, but may be helpful. A Fellow will need a U.S. drivers’ license to complete this work.