

# **A Culture Of Philanthropy:**

**What does it look like  
(and how can you cultivate it)?**

March 21, 2026  
Rhode Island Land Trust Council Summit  
Kevin Essington

## Workshop outline:

- Purpose and outcome
- What is a “Culture of Philanthropy” and why is it valuable to your nonprofit organization?
- What does a “Culture of Philanthropy” look like?
  - Five indicators
  - Exercises for each one
- Your next steps
- Plus/Delta

## Workshop purpose and outcomes:

- Purpose:  
To introduce principles of a “Culture of Philanthropy.”
- Outcome:  
Changes you can begin next week, next month, and next year, to create a culture of philanthropy at your nonprofit organization.

# How would you describe your organization's approach to philanthropy, fundraising, or revenue?

- "It is the development director's job."
- "We all have to find our own funds."
- "Our director is a great fundraiser."
- "I have no idea where our money comes from."
- "The program staff have unrealistic expectations of how much I can raise."
- "We just need more money."
- "We need our board to fundraise."
- "We all work together as a team to raise funds."
- "We rely on a big event for funding."
- "We avoid fundraising by having no major expenses."
- "We can't seem to keep fundraising staff around."

# What is a Culture of Philanthropy?

“A culture of philanthropy is one in which everyone—board, staff and executive director—has a part to play in raising resources for the organization... Nonprofits with a culture of philanthropy see fundraising less as a transactional tactic and more as a way of operating.”

~Cynthia Gibson, *Beyond Fundraising: What Does It Mean To Build A Culture Of Philanthropy*

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

~Peter Drucker

# Why create a Culture of Philanthropy?

“Building a culture of philanthropy can help break what they referred to as the ‘vicious cycle’ in nonprofit fund development. Instead of placing all the blame for fundraising challenges on [capacity and staffing] nonprofits should pay more attention to the deeper issues of building the capacity, systems and culture to support fundraising success.”

~Jeanne Bell and Marla Cornelius, *UnderDeveloped*

# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like? You...



Prioritize relationships over transactions.



Put the mission first, always.



Effectively communicate "Why."



Understand your skills and capabilities.



Your systems track relationships.

# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You prioritize relationships over transactions.

Your donors are your partners and friends. Everyone is a potential supporter and you make it fun and meaningful for everyone to increase their commitment to your organization over time.



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You prioritize relationships over transactions.

## EXERCISE:

Think of an organization that you are only “aware” of.

What do you want to know to be “interested” in the organization?

What do you want to know to “experience” the organization?



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You put the mission first, always.

Your culture is donor-centric, but always in service of the mission.



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You put the mission first, always.

EXERCISE:

What is your mission?

How do you evaluate whether a new program is within your mission, or demonstrates “mission creep”?



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You effectively communicate “Why”.

Everyone on your team has stories and knowledge to describe “why” your work is critical. When people hear your “why” they will want to know about “how” or “what.”



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You effectively communicate “Why”.

EXERCISE:

What is your organization’s “why” statement?



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You effectively communicate “Why”.

EXERCISE:

What is your organization’s “why” statement?

Does your “why” statement make the listener say, “That’s unacceptable?”

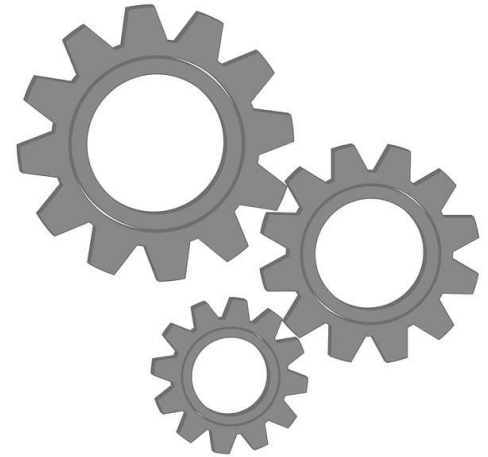
Are you actually saying “how” or “what”?



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You understand your skills and capabilities.

You pursue fundraising activities with clarity about your strengths and weaknesses. Successful fundraising programs have an “all of the above” approach but your skills may not allow you to pursue them all...yet. You lean into your current skills now, and build others over time.



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

You understand your skills and capabilities.

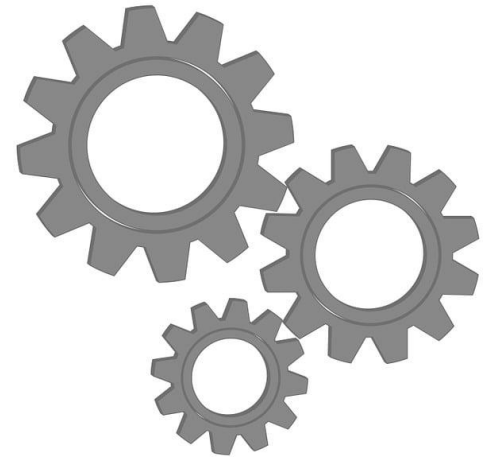
## EXERCISE

Complete the worksheet, quickly.

Where would you focus now?

What skills would you build next?

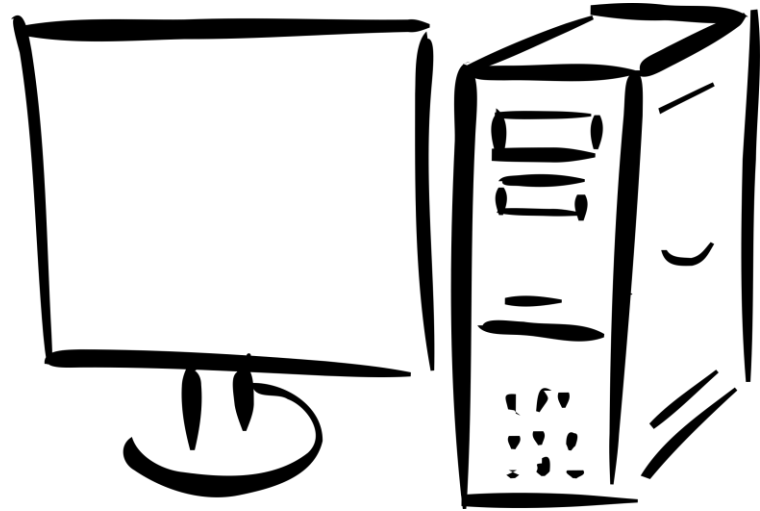
<https://bit.ly/FundraisingAssetsWorksheet>



# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

Your systems track relationships.

You build and maintain systems that manage thousands of connections, relationships, and communications. Everyone knows the systems are there and how to contribute to them.



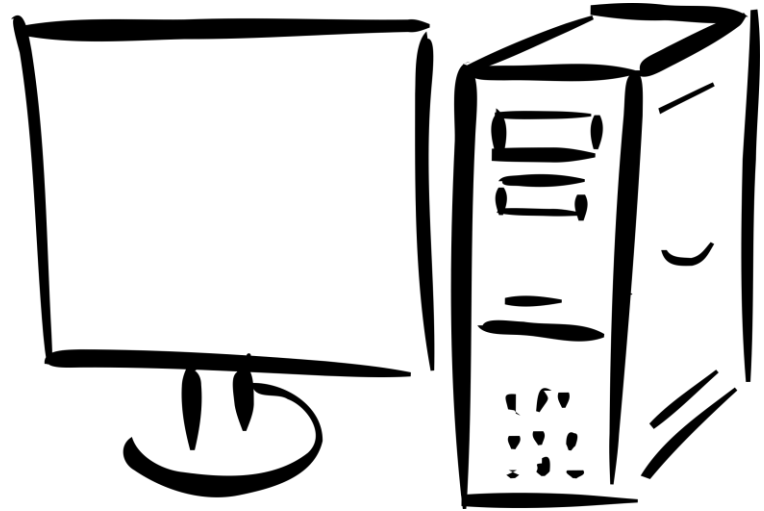
# What does a Culture of Philanthropy look like?

Your systems track relationships.

## EXERCISE:

Do you know what your systems are and how they are connected?

What do your financial, communications, donor, and other systems track?



# Take it from here!

One thing you will do next week:

One thing you will do next month:

One thing you will do next year:

## Plus/Delta for today's workshop:

One thing you liked is...

One thing you would change is...

# Thank You!

[kevin@citygreenerstrategies.com](mailto:kevin@citygreenerstrategies.com)

