

RAISING MONEY, RAISING EXPECTATIONS



Fern Tiger Associates | 201 Clay Street, Suite 290 | Oakland, California 94607 | 510.208.7700

Helping parolees with the transition after prison or juvenile detention is rarely a priority of donors. But the worthy work of Volunteers in Parole (VIP) – mentoring formerly incarcerated young adults and exposing them to healthy life options – was clearly deserving of a stronger funding base in 1997, when the agency first approached Fern Tiger Associates to discuss a plan for expanding and stabilizing its funds.

FTA not only identified potential funding sources; it also assessed VIP's ability to reach these funders, helping staff and board look critically at how its structure might be inhibiting development efforts. The agency's reliance on an executive director to oversee all general operations – from managing program staff around the state to outreach and fundraising – was re-examined, as were other traditions in the 26-year-old program, such as having only attorneys and judges as mentors. The latter became the subject of an FTA-facilitated debate at a board retreat, capitalizing on board members' courtroom skills to spark discussion about challenges facing the agency.

To gather testimonials about VIP which could be used in approaching donors, FTA interviewed criminal justice officials, mentors, and parolees throughout California. The resulting plan included concrete ways to reach funders and tangible tools for improving and increasing fundraising and making the organization sustainable.

*Emotional accounts of the relationships formed between VIP mentors and their parolee protégés were eye-opening, revealing that many parolees had never applied for a job, eaten in a sit-down restaurant, or attended a ball game before their mentors began opening doors. Volunteers also offered essential help with rehabilitation – providing jobs, assistance with school applications, and once even acting as the best man in a parolee's wedding.*

*VOLUNTEERS IN PAROLE is a nonprofit organization that pairs attorneys and judges with newly-released parolees to smooth their transition back to society.*