

## Use an Impact vs. Effort Matrix to Prioritize Your To-Do List

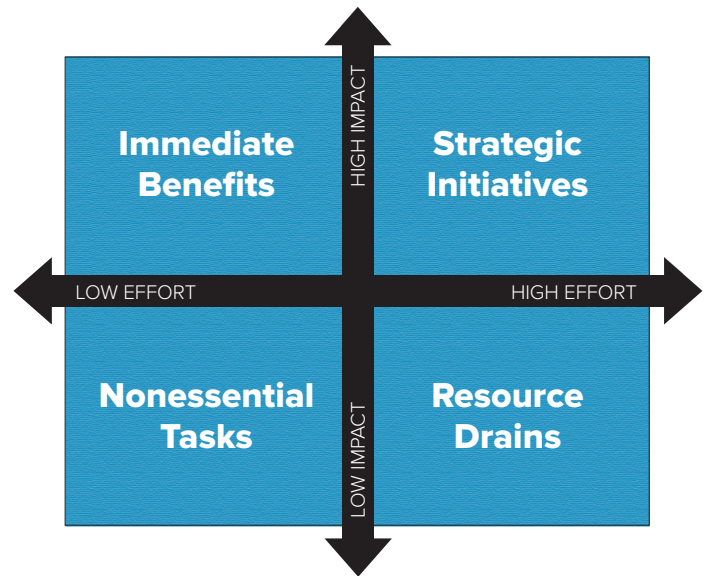
As an advancement professional, there's little doubt that, at some point, you've looked at your ever-growing to-do list and wondered, "Where do I even begin?"

The sense of feeling overwhelmed is often a nonstarter. We may jump from task to task without completing a project. Or we may focus on the item we think we can accomplish the quickest, even if it's not the most important.

One tool that may allow you and your Advancement Team to be more strategic is an Impact vs. Effort Matrix. The matrix allows you to contemplate the true value each initiative has in the context of the resources required to achieve it, and what the benefit will be. Using a grid similar to the one pictured here, gather your to-do list and place each item on the grid. Each of the items you plot should directly correlate with your school's strategic initiatives. For example, if you are considering launching an inbound marketing program, how will that support your school's enrollment management goals?<sup>1</sup>

The four quadrants are:

- **Upper Left (Low Effort, High Impact):** These are items that are easy to implement and require less labor, while also providing immense benefits for your school's strategic initiatives. For example, as the Development Director, part of your goal is to improve your stewardship program. You may create a weekly goal of sending school news stories to donors, aligning with their interests and values;
- **Upper Right (High Effort, High Impact):** These tasks may require a great deal of time and energy to accomplish, but reap rewards that make the project worthwhile. An example would include establishing a Parent Ambassador program to support your admission and marketing goals.<sup>2</sup> These tasks are ones likely to have antecedents in your strategic planning and strategic financial planning documents;
- **Lower Left (Low Effort, Low Impact):** These items may be simple and consume little time, but, in turn, offer minimal gain. For example, browsing competitor school websites and social media channels to gauge the marketing messages and strategies; and
- **Lower Right (High Effort, Low Impact):** These tasks monopolize human capital while offering little to show for it.



Special events may fall under this category. Events that drain human and financial resources while providing little return should be carefully examined. The ultimate questions are "Why are we doing this?" and "How does this connect to our mission?"

With your to-do list now represented on the Impact vs. Effort Matrix, re-examine your priorities. Those projects that cluster in the lower-right quadrant (High Effort, Low Impact), should be put on the back burner and their value reconsidered.

Items that live in the upper-left quadrant (Low Effort, High Impact) deserve your immediate attention. Consider items in the lower-left quadrant (Low Effort, Low Impact) as "fill-in" tasks. Focus on these initiatives as time allows. Projects in the upper-right quadrant (High Effort, High Impact) require tremendous planning and attention, but ultimately pay dividends that make the challenge well worth it. [I&P](#)

<sup>1</sup> See "The Link Between the Spheres of Influence and Your Enrollment Management Plan," *I&P*, 43-2-8.

<sup>2</sup> See "Marketing Communications and the Parent," *I&P*, 40-9-35.