

Fundraising Tips

Never Let 'em See You Sweat

Fundraising is an ongoing challenge even in the best of times. Add in the worst recession this country has seen in generations, and it's easy for your fundraising efforts to take on an air of desperation. After all, contributions may be drying up at the very time your organization's services are needed most.

Desperate vs. Compelling

It's critically important to stay "on message" during challenging times. People don't give to agencies they perceive as desperate; they give to agencies they believe are successful in meeting a need that's important to them. Here's an example:

Desperate: "Without your support, we won't be able to house our clients tonight."

Compelling: "With your \$100, a family will have a place to sleep tonight and access to telephones and the Internet to continue their job search in the morning."

Communicate to donors in a compelling way that, recession or no recession, your charity's needs continue.

Here, you'll need to sharpen your "emotional hook" — your organization's story. This is what makes donors give to you. And tough times provide the perfect opportunity to refine your story into a compelling case about what your organization does and where donor dollars go.

Ask your board members, your clients and individual funders for their thoughts on what your organization's emotional hook truly is. Then, hone that message razor-sharp!

As you communicate with donors and potential donors, keep these points in mind:

- **Don't apologize for asking.** Not asking — or backing into it timidly — is a sure way to not raise money. At the same time, understand that the recession is probably impacting many of your donors. Being compassionate and understanding about their reduced capacity to give can pay off later, once the economy recovers.
- **Make the case for good stewardship.** Now is the time to tout your fiscal responsibility. Make sure donors know you are cutting costs where you can, that you have good controls in place, and that you are examining the effectiveness of all your programs.
- **Look for niche groups.** Women are expected to control half of the personal wealth in this country by 2010. Think carefully about potential donors such as these, as well as groups of people who may only be marginally affected by the sour economy.
- **Use the Internet.** Online solicitation costs less, so even smaller donations can have a larger impact. The key? Make online giving convenient — and secure. Make sure your website makes a good first impression, and collect e-mail addresses of current donors/prospects so that you can communicate with them online.

- **Set a challenge.** Ask higher-end donors to jump-start fundraising efforts with a challenge or matching grant (a contribution of \$100 for every \$50 raised, for example). Matching campaigns send a powerful message to other donors that their contributions could actually go much further.
- **Start a monthly giving program.** Donors who are already giving you \$100 or \$1,000 a year are prime candidates for a monthly giving program. Simply give them the option of monthly credit card or checking account debits.
- **Use care with corporate donors.** Corporate donations are the first to fall off when the economy heads south. While it's tempting to go after big corporate gifts rather than lots of smaller individual gifts, in truth, corporate giving is often less reliable. You may be better served focusing on individual donors, who provide more than 80 percent of charitable donations anyway. But keep your corporate contacts strong. It's hard to get back on the corporate charitable list once you're dropped.
- **Put the "big guys" to work.** Encourage your board members to become true team members by actively participating in fundraising efforts. Your president and executive director need to set the tone and clearly communicate organizational vision and goals during these uncertain times.
- **Team up.** Maximize fundraising resources by partnering with other organizations. These partnerships can be in the form of one-time fundraising campaigns or ongoing relationships. Even nonprofit organizations with differing missions can pool administrative resources. Just be sure to clearly define the scope of the relationship, including the resources that will be placed into the joint enterprise, the expected outcomes and the anticipated length of the relationship.

Keep the Fires Burning

Ultimately, uncertain times demand clear communication. Make the scope of your conversation with prospective donors much larger than our troubled economic times. Challenge them to seize the opportunity to invest in a solution. Communicate this message with enthusiasm and optimism about your cause to ensure your success.

Sidebar: Don't Give Up on Foundations

Created for the sole purpose of supporting philanthropic causes, foundations must provide funding — regardless of the economy. Foundations are required to annually distribute 5 percent of the fair market value of the foundation's net investment assets or risk an additional excise tax. It's interesting to note that foundations may actually increase their funding in challenging times to make up for decreases in giving from other sources.

Even during this economy, routinely seek out new sources of foundation funding. Challenge yourself to send out queries and grant requests on a regular basis. For a 2009 Foundation Giving Forecast, visit <http://foundationcenter.org/focus/economy/forecast.html>.

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