



Fundraising Plan for Individual Donors to Small-Budget Organizations

This plan, created with the small arts organization in mind, outlines the giving cycle: identification, cultivation, making the ask, and stewardship. One step leads to the next, although there is no set time for how long any of these steps might take. This is the way most major gifts are obtained; while we've all heard about the surprise bequest from someone in the community whom no one knew about, that kind of gift is the rare exception.

Individual donors comprise almost 80% of all philanthropic giving in this country; if you are not seeking funds from individual donors, you are losing out on significant funds – even in small, rural communities. Many small organizations rely upon membership or admissions dollars, class fees; the occasional fundraising event or product sales; and government funds. Some organizations are lucky enough to receive foundation gifts.

No organization can succeed and sustain itself without multiple sources of income – if your organization relies too much on one source, it is inherently unstable. Likewise, if your organization spends too much time on small fundraising activities generating small amounts of money from a lot of people and never follows up with potential donors, it is not spending its time wisely and where it can be most effective. Why spend countless hours creating small fundraising events that clear \$1,000 when you can spend far less time asking one or two donors for the same amount of money? (Unless, of course, those fundraisers provide other benefits, such as marketing and branding opportunities, introduces your organization to a new audience or donor base, or is a project your most valued volunteers value.)

Donors today are sophisticated stewards of their philanthropic dollars. They are interested in investing in well-run organizations that demonstrate their impact. They wish to be asked and valued. They also enjoy building relationships with the organizations they support. Look at the fundraising process as an opportunity to build relationships with wonderful people who share your passion for the arts. These people may become ongoing donors, board members, terrific volunteers, community boosters and supporters, professional advisors; donors of goods and services; and eventually major and planned gift donors.

But fundraising takes time. Make sure you put together a strong cadre of people who will work together as partners: the executive director, board members, other community members and leadership of your local community foundation, as appropriate. Working

together, you will build a solid base of support for your organization, if your organization stays true to its mission and serves the community, you have built your case for support, and the community recognizes the organization's value.

Remember: fundraising is an art – not a science. But if you follow these steps, are friendly, brave, willing, kind and passionate about your organization, you will succeed.

Identification

1. Identify top-tier donors: those members who contribute \$100 or more or potential donors you wish to cultivate
2. Invite them to a special reception at a private home to thank them for their ongoing contributions.
 - Serve wine and cheese or specialty desserts and nice coffee – something a little special and not too expensive.
 - Allow time for mingling, then have a 15-minute program planned.
 - At the program, board president thanks the host, thanks everyone for coming and talks about the value of your organization to the community. Feature children performing or briefly talking about what the arts mean to them.
 - Board members mingle with guests, thanking them for coming.
3. The day after the reception, send a hand-written note to all attendees from the board president or someone on the board who knows them, thanking them for coming.
4. After a week or so (don't wait too long), invite the top prospects to lunch or for a cup of coffee to discuss their ideas for your organization. Ask them for their input on how it can grow. If they know a board member, the board member should be present. Otherwise, it can be a designated board member and the executive director, if possible (but not necessary).
5. Send a thank you note immediately after the meeting.

Cultivation

1. Keep in touch by sending them notes or emails, inviting them to events, meeting them again to discuss latest developments, sending them clippings from newspapers of something they are interested in. Enjoy their company and get to know them. After every single meeting, send a thank you note.
2. When you return to the office, write down notes on your donor database (index cards or an Excel spread sheet will work fine when getting started). Record the major points of conversations and the next steps (i.e., “Joe expressed an interest in children's programs; remember to send a note inviting him to the next children's concert.”)
3. While visiting with donors, learn about their families, their interest in the arts, their other interests and other charitable and religious activities. Learn what

makes them tick. That way, you will be able to target your ask appropriately in an area that interests them and for an appropriate amount.

- If they ask questions, take out a small pad to write their questions down. You may wish to carry with you a small, pocket-size spiral pad to write down notes and take it out only when appropriate; otherwise, don't take notes as then the meeting turns into a business meeting rather than a personal visit. Let them know you will get back to them – and then do get back to them.
4. Think of them when something happens that might interest them. If they invite you to visit, visit with them. If they need a ride to an arts event, get them a ride.
 5. Be patient – it takes multiple visits before making an ask.

Making the Ask

By the time you have visited with the donor several times, you should have identified what the funder is passionate about and the appropriate amount of money to ask for.

- Do not ask in a public place: reserve the ask, if possible, for a private meeting.
- Be ready to present them with a brief proposal, a case statement, and different funding mechanisms.
- Have the right people in attendance. If they are a peer of a board member, have that board member there.
- If you anticipate that it might be a planned gift, you may wish to be accompanied by a staff member from the local community foundation – or tell them that next time you see them, you will invite someone from the community foundation to attend.
- Say something like this:
In the last few months, you've told us so much about why you care about our organization. We too love this organization and what it means to our community.
We would be honored and thrilled if you would consider making a significant gift so that this program can continue. Might you consider a gift of \$_____? (Don't ask for too little! Set the bar high, but not too high – at this time, you should know what other gifts they have been making and what their capacity for making a gift is.)
- Then wait. Let them consider. Don't say anything. Let them respond.

- Respond to their questions honestly. If you don't know something, tell them that you don't know but that you will find out.

If you have gotten this far with a potential donor, and they say no, it really means, "not now." That could be for a number of reasons: they are otherwise obligated at the moment; they want to wait and see how things pan out at your organization; you haven't found the right project for them to support; the wrong people made the ask. Continue to cultivate them and you will have other opportunities.

If they say yes, then you begin the process of making the gift happen. We recommend a contract or pledge form. Make sure to send a thank you note once you've received the gift – and the board president does so as well. You can never say thank you enough.

Stewardship

1. Once the thank-you notes have been written, make sure the gift is acknowledged appropriately. You should already have recognition benefits in place (name in the printed programs, name on the gallery wall, tickets to a reception, etc.). Make sure you follow-up with appropriate recognition.
2. If the donor prefers to remain anonymous, honor that preference.
3. Keep them as engaged in your activities as you had when you were cultivating them. The first gift won't be the last.
4. If they truly have been remarkable donors, thank them publicly at a recognition event. Perhaps create an award for them that you bestow at a dinner; nominate them for a chamber of commerce event or for a Governor's Arts Award. Find ways to honor their gifts and to allow them to serve as examples to others.

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