



Chapter 5

Filling Your Toolbox—

Strategies and Tools for Fundraising

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There are many ways to ask—by letter, via the Internet, by phone, by mass mailing, via a proposal, in person, and at events. Which strategy or tool you choose depends on many factors—for example:

- What expertise you have
- How many people you have on your team
- The characteristics of your donors and their preferences for being asked
- How much you can outsource to consultants and others who can serve as temporary help
- What is appropriate for the size of gift you are requesting

Before you determine which strategies are most appropriate for your fundraising program, first consider the tools available, and then decide which ones work best for you. PSI can provide much information on any one of these strategies; this is just an introduction to each tool you might use.

Events

Events are suitable for a variety of reasons. If you want to acquaint others with your organization and what it does, if you want to reach large numbers of people, if you want to have the opportunity to bring together donors as well as members or recipients of your organization's assistance, if you want to celebrate someone's achievements or a special day, and if you want to just have an enjoyable time, an event may be appropriate as a fundraising tool. It's important to remember, however, that events take much time and expend human and financial resources. Often they aren't the best money-makers because of these expenditures. Therefore, it's best to have several purposes or goals in mind when planning an event.

Many types of events are possible, ranging from dinners to walks. The important thing to remember is what is most appropriate for your organization and the intended audience. Some events can be carried out with minimal work and expense, while others take months of preparation and are expensive to put on.

Mail

The use of mail ranges from mass mailing to several hundred or thousand people, to letters sent to segmented groups on your mailing list, to individual or small group letters that are highly personalized. This is still one of the best ways to reach large numbers of prospects who may become donors, and an excellent tool for requesting repeat or upgraded gifts.

The more personalized the letters, the better the return. Through computer capability, programs can be designed that will personalize the letters (e.g., the most appropriate greeting and use of name for each prospect, such as Mr. and Mrs., versus first name use). Caution should be taken that the letters aren't too long, have content that applies both to the heart and the mind, are specific about what is needed and requested, and capture the interest of the reader because they are well written and readable.

Phone

A common use of mass phoning is the "phonathon." This involves several phones in one room, trained callers, a script, methods for recording the prospect's information and for record keeping and follow-up. The phonathon is an excellent way to make mass requests more personal, and allows for conversation and discussion, including answering questions and addressing concerns. It isn't a technique that can be used frequently or with very large groups because of the manpower and costs involved, but certainly ranks with one of the strategies that should be reserved for ongoing donors, requests to upgrade gifts, and donors who prefer to not be contacted personally.

The phone, of course, can be used to make personal appointments and also for follow-up after a personal visit, as well as a means of keeping in touch with donors.

Variations on the use of the phone continue to increase as technology advances. Some organizations are now sending text messages that are funding appeals. The wise fundraiser will match advances in technological use to preferences and practices of donors and prospects.

The Internet and social media

A good Web site is highly important. Through this means, donors can learn of the organization on their own time and in their own preferred way of researching an organization and cause. Web sites should also make it possible for donors to give easily.

Without a doubt, the many uses of the Internet should be part of a fundraising program's strategies, and continual changes make this tool an exceptional one, full of opportunities, as well as a challenging tool because of the knowledge and investment of time and money needed to use it wisely and effectively.

Social media strategies increase steadily and changes occur just as rapidly. Please contact PSI for the latest information on this part of use of technology. Books, articles, consulting advice, and other resources are readily available.



The face-to-face request

A personal visit by the right people matched with the prospect or donor is the most effective method of asking for a donation. Most people believe this is what fundraising really is and fear this method for a variety of reasons. However, if the askers are well prepared, committed to the cause, and have made donations themselves, often the fear is reduced or eliminated because then it becomes a conversation with the prospect or donor and is focused on mutual interests.

Preparation is key, and that includes knowledge of the prospect and donor, details about the cause, information on why the prospect might be interested and might give, what mutual benefits can be promised, and what outcomes can be expected if the donor gives.

Usually it's best to go in pairs—someone from the organization and someone who knows the prospect or donor or is in some way linked to that person. The one who knows the prospect best should be the one to make the appointment.

When on the call, remember to have an introductory section to your visit during which you establish rapport and subtly remind the prospect why you're there. You might make reference to previous events or visits, or bring greetings from some personality important to the prospect and the cause, or a reference to common interests. This part is the shortest part of the visit, although, of course, it depends on how well you know the prospect and the personality of the prospect.

Next, you move into a discussion of the project, giving details, answering and asking questions in such a way that you ensure this will be a conversation and not just a monologue, and, in general, sharing the aspects of the project.

Then you summarize, focusing on the features of the project and the mutual benefits, and again ask if there are questions—and then wait an appropriate amount of time to make sure the prospect has a chance to think and focus on what you're saying.

Finally, come to closure—here is where you help the donor focus on the outcome or result of his or her donation. Reiterate what a defined amount of money will accomplish, suggest to the prospect that he or she could make a major difference when giving within that range, and help the donor see emotional as well as rational satisfaction.

Although the length and type of visit are sometimes dictated by culture, be careful to make this a conversation and not a one-sided visit. Don't stay too long, focus, and try to adapt to the personality and communication preferences of the prospect.

Persons conducting face-to-face solicitation often fear rejection and therefore are reluctant to make such visits and requests. However, preparation is the key, as is the principle of the right person asking the right prospect. This extends to mutual respect, perhaps similar professional level, social ties, and other common characteristics. Also, a person making a face-to-face solicitation must ascertain if the donor is ready to consider a gift, or even if the campaign is sufficiently in progress to ensure trust in its success. Finally consider whether a “no” is really a rejection. Perhaps the donor needs more information or time to think about this. Perhaps there is something else going on that



has distracted the donor. And, every donor has the right to decline making a gift, if their interests and relationships to the organization are not considered.

The selection and use of your fundraising tools is the most practical part of fundraising, but it very much depends what you have already done in terms of developing the case and finding possible donors. This is the step where you match your potential donors with the right way in which to make your case.