ASKING FOR MONEY

Coming out from behind the relative anonymity of the proposal-writing process and requesting donations from people face to face can be difficult, but mastering some basic techniques can make it easier.

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In times past, when grants were plentiful, agencies asked for financial support primarily by writing proposals. And there was always something essentially nonthreatening about doing this. All you had to do was draft the proposal, get it approved by the board, get your friends and co-workers to review it, type up the final version, and mail it off to some distant site. Chances are you’d never even see the person to whom it was sent—and because the proposal was rewritten by others and passed around to others, success and rejection alike were shared by everyone who participated in the process.

Now, all that has changed. As agencies are being forced to rely more and more on nongrant sources of financial support, the ways in which they must ask for such support are becoming far more complex and challenging. Today we must actually meet potential donors face to face, get to know them personally, look them in the eye, and ask them for specific sums of money. And in doing so, we must be prepared to answer their questions and to understand exactly why they might want to give to us to begin with. Asking for money, in other words, has become a highly individualized process whose success or failure frequently rests on the shoulders of the person who is doing the asking. Obviously, this can often be difficult. But there are some ground rules that you can follow both to facilitate the process and to increase your chances for success.

ASK THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The more you can target your prospects, the better will be your chances of getting the response you want. This can be done quite systematically. Begin by taking a large sheet of newsprint and drawing three concentric circles. Then go through a “brainstorming” session with your board, staff, volunteers, and development committee, and perhaps with
DEALING WITH FEAR

The first step to asking is dealing with fear. To do this, bring your solicitors together and let them discuss their fears of asking. Get out some new print, put it on the wall, and brainstorm. Ask the question "Why are we afraid to ask?" Keep asking this question and writing down solicitors' responses. You will get answers like "I'm afraid the prospects will say no," "They will ask me back," "I don't know how," and "My own commitment is unclear." Don't criticize any of these responses yourself, and don't let anyone in the group do so. Instead, keep pushing for responses until you feel that each solicitor has fully expressed his or her anxieties.

After all of these fears have been recorded for all to see, ask the solicitors what happens when they are actually rejected. Let them recall their feelings of embarrassment, their headaches and stomach aches, their feelings of failure, and their feeling that everything will fall apart. Then ask them what happens to them permanently when they are rejected. As they respond, repeat the answers and note each time a solicitor's condition is not a permanent one. Eventually, someone (perhaps you) will notice that nothing happens permanently when we are rejected. In fact, no one can tell by looking at us that we have been rejected. More important, we can survive rejection. It won't feel good, but we will get over it. And remind the solicitors that getting no rejections means getting no acceptances, either.

GET INSIDE YOUR PROSPECTS' HEADS

After you have cluttered your office with flat lists, you should begin to evaluate each donor in an effort to determine his or her giving potential. Remember that each donor must be considered individually. To solicit everyone in the same way is, in effect, to lose thousands of dollars in gifts.

Now do three things. First, record each name from your flat list on a donor profile card. These cards (which can be easily transferred to a computer or a word processor) will become your confidential record of prospect solicitation at giving. Second, form a screening committee composed of board members, volunteers, and community people who know the prospects and who are willing to help you evaluate
their potential to give. Third, select a time and a place for the screening committee to meet and set up the meeting. We find that the early evening works best. Pick a quiet place where phones will not be ringing. Get some wine, cheese, coffee, and cookies. Then assure your screening-committee members that the meeting will last only two or three hours, and begin by giving a copy of the flat list to each.

Be sure to bring your donor profile cards to the meeting. Then, as each member speaks, write down pertinent information about each prospect as rapidly as you can. Do not tape the meeting! Just keep writing, and keep the committee on track. Do not let it become a gossip session. And ask questions such as:

1. How much can the prospects reasonably be expected to give?
2. What has been their past giving pattern, both to us and to others?
3. How do their concerns relate to the work of our agency?
4. In what causes have they shown an interest?
5. Who should solicit each prospect?
6. When should the prospects be solicited?

All of this information should be recorded on the donor profile cards in pencil so that necessary changes can be made in the future. Make sure, too, that members of the screening committee understand how the information will be used, and emphasize that this information will be kept in strict confidence. When the meeting is over, review the cards to make sure you got all the information you need. You will not remember very much on the following day, and you will remember even less a week later!

Now that you have evaluated your prospects, separate them into different categories based on the benefits that they seek from your agency and on the sizes of their potential gifts. You will find that some people need only see your newsletter or direct mail piece to become attracted to your agency. Others will require a personal solicitation. Still others will need several visits, both from you and to you, before they decide to give. Some will give to special projects, some to operating costs. Some will wish to give one lump sum during the holidays, while others may prefer to pledge a small amount, to be given several times over the course of the year.

Remember, however, that each prospect, regardless of his or her giving potential, must be cultivated. Walking up to someone and asking for $5,000 is simply not enough. Prospects and donors alike must have the opportunity to become aware of your organization's work. As prospects become acquainted with your agency, they will give you signs of their interest in you and clues as to their reasons for wanting to share in the work you are doing. Those clues are very important for you to catch, for they can become the connection, the mutuality, that leads to a donation.

Think about ways you can provide opportunities for prospects to develop a sense of ownership in your agency. Ask yourself what your agency has to offer people, how it can provide opportunities of involvement, and how it can help prospects satisfy their own needs and concerns. Some obvious ways to do this are to appoint prospects to committees or to enlist them as volunteers. You can also ask for their advice (honestly, of course), help them with something they are doing, or honor them for some effort that they have made either on your behalf or on behalf of the community. Yes, all of this will take a lot of time. But developing a donor's sense of ownership in your agency is the best way to build the kind of ongoing support that you are seeking for your organization.

Finally, ask yourself why people give. To answer that question, look at your own giving habits. What motivates you to give? Some of us give because it feels good. Others give because someone gave to us, and we feel that we owe them one. Some seek immortality, others seek tax benefits, and many give out of guilt, fear, or a "there but for fortune" attitude. Competition, habit, tradition, or having extra money when asked are other reasons. Usually, though, we give because the right person asked us to do so in a way that struck a nerve or answered a need. People give because they trust the person who is asking or because they believe in what the person's agency is doing for its clients. And the best way to find out why people want to give is to ask. Then relate their concerns and needs to the benefits that your agency provides. And then...

GO FOR IT

The reasons people give money may vary with each donor, but there is one very common reason prospects do not give: because no one asked them. How, specifically, were they not asked? With words like these: "We would appreciate your gift"; "Your support is needed"; and "All gifts are tax deductible" (our favorite). Asking is looking at the other person and saying, "I would like you to make a gift of $1,000 for the museum." It is asking directly for a specific amount of money. In business terms, it is called "closing the sale."

So now that you have created lists, determined what each prospect is capable of giving, and matched that prospect's needs and concerns with your agency's services, all you have to do is call and ask. Remember, though, that when you ask, you must always say the words check and dollars. If you are reading this alone, you might try saying these words out loud. See? You can do it! Remember, too, that letting your fear of those words overwhelm you means no donations—or very small donations—for your agency.

Being prepared will make the asking process less difficult. If you have done your homework, you should not get any big surprises from your prospects. If you have evaluated them properly, have followed your evaluation with additional research, and have cultivated them because you genuinely want them to share a sense of ownership in your agency, your chances of getting your gifts are very high.
You may also want to take someone with you in case you are stricken by that dreaded fund raiser's disease, the "chicken-out syndrome." Inasmuch as it does not seem to attack two people at the same time, one of you can always do the asking in the event that the other falls ill. You may also find that board and staff members can work quite well together; one can talk about the agency while the other does the asking. Indeed, this is a very good way for an experienced fund raiser to train a beginner.

The best person to do the asking is the person who was designated by your screening committee, the person who gave you the prospect's name in the first place, or someone who is a friend or a business acquaintance of the prospect. But even if none of these people is available to you, you can still do the asking yourself. Just do your homework, take two people (preferably a staff or board member or another volunteer), and work out your scenario ahead of time through the use of the following guidelines:

1. Call the prospect and set up a time and place to meet. Offices usually have too many distractions (yours as well as the prospect's), and homes may be too busy. Consider a quiet lunch place. You may want to meet at your program site so that the donor can see what you are doing. However, we think it's better to invite site visits during the cultivation stage rather than at the time of asking. What you want most now is a comfortable and calm environment.

2. Dress appropriately for the donor. How you sit, shake hands, and deal with people will always make a difference.

3. At the start of the appointment, give the prospect a chance to relax and get to know you a little better. Let the person talk about himself or herself as well. Talk about some common interests. In short, set yourself at ease.

4. Establish your mutuality or common interest as it relates to the work of your agency. Remind the prospect of his or her interest in the agency's activities or benefits. That interest may be based on (a) a relationship with a board member, a staff member, or a volunteer; (b) a shared interest in the agency's cause; (c) a family member's or relative's hardship that is similar to the difficulties that your agency tries to alleviate; or (d) a need to do something out of guilt, gratitude, remembrance, a desire for immortality, or any number of other personal motives.

5. Tell the prospect about your project. Take no more than 10 minutes to do so, and be very clear about what the project will and will not do. Know how your clients will benefit from it, how your community will change, what the project will cost, how much money you have raised to date, where you plan to get the rest, who has already given, and what the future will hold if the project is successful. Be specific. Invite the prospect to ask questions and to make comments. And bear in mind that you are giving someone an opportunity to share in the important work that you do. Be proud of your agency and its accomplishments. Do not apologize for needing money. You can even invite the prospect to join you as a partner and co-owner of the project.

6. Ask for a specific amount of money. Say the words "would like" or "appreciate" if you feel this is possible. Say, "I would like you to contribute $1,000 to the museum."

7. Listen and respond appropriately to your prospect's concerns. When the prospect responds, you must be prepared: be flexible and to listen carefully to what is being said. If the response is indecipherable, you may need to work on the relationship that has been established, or you may have to preface your case more clearly. Your prospect will tell you which case—so listen. If the prospect talks about all the giver that he or she already does, then empathize (don't symp-
thize). Say you are aware of the important work that he or she does, and point out how your project relates to the work. Make it clear how important the prospect's contribution is. Keep him or her on track by continually bringing the conversation back to the project, and reiterate the importance of a potential partnership with you.

If the response is positive, restate what the donor has agreed to give to make sure that you have understood it correctly. You might say, "I understand that you will give $1,000 to the museum and that you will send the check by June 1." Then give the donor a donor card. Fill out the card on each side of the perforation, sign both sides, and have the donor sign both sides as well. Then tear off the back side for the donor, and explain that the card you are now handing over will keep things straight in your business of-fices. You may also want to stress that the donor's commit-ment to is a moral or ethical one and not a legal agree-ment. The written agreement makes it easier for each of you to follow up with one another, and it also helps eliminate misunderstandings.

If the response is negative, find out why this is the case. Most potential donors decline to give either because the timing of your request was off or because the project itself seems inappropriate to them. If the issue is time, arrange a future meeting. If the prospect is still unsure about your project, invite him or her to visit your agency. If more information is needed, be sure that it arrives quickly. Follow up with whatever is needed. If the prospect does not support the project, perhaps your next project will better match his or her needs. This part of the conversation is very important to your future success and to the continued cultivation of the prospect.

Do not leave the pledge card with the prospect. You will not get it back. If the prospect needs to talk the pledge over with a spouse or business associate, ask to meet that individ-
ual. Set the date for the meeting by offering several choices. Ask if you can meet with him or her on Mon-
day at 7:00 p.m. or Thursday at 6:30 p.m.

If there is a problem with the amount of money you ask for, be flexible. Decide on the gift size that is minimal, and stay with that amount as long as you can. Remind the pros-
IV. **PERFORM ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES.**
This exercise is critical to effective asking. It should be done in groups of three, as shown in diagram 3. "Situation sheets" outlining roles for each volunteer can also be helpful.

V. **OUTLINE MATERIALS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION.** Be sure your volunteers have a thorough understanding of your organization's mission and goals as well as a clear view of the project you are currently seeking to fund. Carefully review the materials in your solicitor kits (see diagram 1).

VI. **GIVE VOLUNTEERS WHAT THEY NEED IN PREPARATION FOR EACH "ASK."** Make sure volunteers have:
A. A profile card for each prospect (see diagrams 4 and 5) with as much current information about the prospect's giving pattern as you can provide.
B. An interview return device (see diagram 6) to allow you to receive a written account of the meeting and information on any follow-up that the prospect needs.
C. A specific amount of money to ask for.
D. A scenario review indicating who will play which part and who will handle specific issues, such as project questions and funding questions.
E. A large smile, a big thank you, and a great deal of encouragement. In addition, make sure all solicitors understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Your donor profile cards should never leave your office or be duplicated. You need to get the interview card back immediately. Twenty-four-hour responses are important.

VII. **TELL VOLUNTEERS WHERE THEY CAN GET HELP.** Volunteers need to be able to contact you before and after each ask to discuss particular prospects.

VIII. **MAINTAIN GOOD COMMUNICATION.** Celebrate and share successes. Thanking volunteers is as important as thanking donors. It's never enough!

IX. **OFFER A TIME LINE OF SOLICITATION DEADLINES.** Present the volunteers at your training meeting with a campaign calendar indicating when all solicitation must be done and when committee meetings will be held. Without such deadlines, asking will inevitably be put off. Set the deadlines, and then help your volunteers meet them.

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**A CASE STATEMENT** that the donor can leave at the end of each solicitation interview

**SAMPLE QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SHEETS** for the volunteer to review (asking and answering why the project is necessary, who is involved, who else has given, who is on the board, etc.)

**AN ABBREVIATED CASE STATEMENT** for the volunteers' quick review

**PERTINENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION** about your organization for the volunteers

**YOUR BUSINESS CARD,** to be left with the donor

**A PROSPECT CARD** with pertinent information to review and return

**A DONOR INTERVIEW CARD** to be returned to your office

*provided for each individual "ask"
PREPARING AND TRAINING VOLUNTEERS TO ASK FOR MONEY

Ideal Situation: A group of 10 to 15 volunteers (who are also donors) in a relaxed atmosphere for two or three hours. The volunteers should all be in a position to ask for similar amounts of money.

You Will Need: A flip chart and tear sheets, markers, and solicitor kits (see diagram 1).

I. **UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE GIVE.** (This exercise is designed to help volunteers understand the giving process.)
   A. Ask the group to tell you the reasons they donate to different causes, and list these reasons on a tear sheet.
   B. Discuss the group's responses—all of which are valid. The most important reason people give money is that they were asked to do so. Secondarily, they give because someone asked in a way that corresponded with each donor's personal reasons for giving. The volunteers can see how varied these reasons are. Fund raising is most effective when potential donors' needs are matched with the services of the organization.

II. **ASK THE RIGHT PEOPLE.** (This exercise helps volunteers understand that certain people are more likely than others to support your organization.)
   A. Draw the center of a target (see diagram 2). Ask everyone to call out groups (not individual names) of people who have already demonstrated their involvement with your organization (e.g., board members, volunteers, and clients). Write the groups' names in the center of the target. Groups that are most likely to give to your organization should be in your inner circle.

B. Next, create the middle ring of the target. Ask the volunteers to give you names of groups that are a little less likely to give to your organization (e.g., businesses and some civic clubs). On the outer ring of the target, write the names of groups that are least likely to give to your organization.

C. Discuss why the inner group should be most inclined to give, how those who are less or least likely can be cultivated, how advantageous it would be to have the right person ask, and how to move those groups into the inner circle.

III. **TEACH VOLUNTEERS TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE ASKING.** (This exercise helps volunteers deal with their attitudes toward, and fears of, asking for money.)
   A. Ask the volunteers to hold a brainstorming session to determine how they feel about asking for money. Write their responses on the flip chart. Discuss these responses. Again, all are valid. The main reason people do not ask is fear. Volunteers need to know that asking is always difficult, but that the more prepared they are, the more they can
This exercise is designed to give each person an opportunity to ask and be asked for money. Role playing is excellent for board members and volunteers—and for anybody who will be soliciting funds.

Each person should ask for an amount of money that makes them uncomfortable! In every scene, one person should not be involved but instead should help critique. Each scene should take no more than 15 minutes.

**PERSON NUMBER ONE** (two roles):
- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- MAJOR PROSPECT

**PERSON NUMBER TWO**: BOARD MEMBER

**PERSON NUMBER THREE**: COMMUNITY LEADER

**SCENE A: THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND THE BOARD MEMBER.** The executive director asks the board member to:

A. Make a gift to the campaign or project; and

**SCENE B: THE BOARD MEMBER AND THE COMMUNITY LEADER.** The board member asks the community leader to:

A. Make a gift to the campaign; and
B. Ask the major prospect to take on the special-gifts division of the campaign as chairperson

**SCENE C: THE COMMUNITY LEADER AND THE MAJOR PROSPECT.** The community leader asks the major prospect to:

A. Make a gift to the campaign; and
B. Chair the special-gifts division

**REMEMBER:**
- Establish the relationship;
- Ask for a specific amount; and
- Listen and respond appropriately
YOUR ORGANIZATION
PROJECT '8-
PROSPECT PROFILE

RATING CODE

NAME ________________________________

BUSINESS ___________________________

TITLE ______________________________

ADDRESS _______________________________________

PHONE ______________________________

HOME ADDRESS ___________________________________

PHONE _______________________________________

REFERRED BY: _________________________

PHONE ______________________________

RELATIONSHIP TO PROSPECT: ___________________________________

KNOWN GIVING PATTERNS: _________________________________________

________________________________________

AREAS OF POSSIBLE INTEREST: _______________________________________

SUGGESTED GIFT AMOUNT: $ __________________________

SUGGESTED PERSON TO ASK: _______________________________________

PERTINENT PERSONAL INFORMATION: ___________________________________