

Introduction to Fundraising

The cardinal rule of fundraising is that if you don't ask, you won't get anything. Who do you know? Ask anyone and everyone you know and don't know to contribute to your cause. One of the best ways is to actually go through the formal process of listing everyone you know.

1. Demonstrate the immediate impact of your donor's dollars: Explain how the donation will make an impact.
2. Keep it Short and Simple (KISS): Although you want to educate your donors about the type of work you will be doing, try not to tell them too much. If your information is too complicated they will get bogged down in details. Many of your donors will know nothing about third world development; they are more interested in contributing to a good cause (poverty, housing, environment, children, etc.). Too much information could alienate a potentially good donor. Keep your letters to one page.
3. Identify your support system: Some people will be extremely supportive and share your enthusiasm and excitement. Others will not understand why you or anyone else would want to work in a developing country. Still there are those who think that Westerners should stop trying to help disadvantaged people in other countries and concentrate their efforts on improving the quality of life at home. Talking to people serves as an informal polling process which allows you to investigate your potential funding sources. The various reactions you receive allow you to measure the level of interest and support your friends and family members have in your future endeavor.
4. Ask for specific amount of money: When you say "contribution" some people are thinking \$5 while others are thinking \$5,000. Make it easy for them. Tell people how much you want. Your more established professional friends or parents' friends can contribute more money than those who are still students or perhaps work in the nonprofit sector. Don't be afraid to ask your established friends for \$100, \$200, or even \$500.
5. Treat your potential donor as a purchaser or investor: Let potential donors know what they are "buying." Tell them that a \$100 contribution will cover your housing costs for three weeks, or that \$100 will cover your transportation expenses for the trip and allow you to travel to the work site where you are needed. Someone may want to pay for your plane ticket, medical insurance or vaccinations. Remember though, that by giving you money, your donors are essentially investing in you.
6. Convey a sense of urgency and immediacy: They must act now! "People are struggling every day in Bolivia where I will be a volunteer." This limits their time to forget about giving you a contribution. Instill a sense of urgency.
7. Make it convenient for them to give you money: "If you don't have the money now why don't you post date a check?" The more flexible you are, the more money you can make. Whatever you do, get a commitment for payment rather than a promise. Ask them to fill out a sponsorship form and then get back to them at a designated time. If they tell you "I'll send you the check when I get paid," chances are, you will never see that money.
8. Give incentives or premiums: Even when you are fundraising for a good cause, it can be beneficial to you to offer creative incentives in return. For most people contributing money, it often is recognition and praise they want. Host a small open house before you leave to publicly recognize and thank your supporters. Write a thank you letter which includes a printed list of your supporters' names. This makes them feel appreciated and more likely to support you in the future.
9. Promise an educational presentation: Promising to speak to groups of show slides when you return can be a great way to secure funding from religious organizations, civic groups, alumni associations and educational institutions. For example, as an incentive, one volunteer promised to send all her supporters a "newsletter" from overseas. Tangible evidence of your actions abroad helps people "see" where their dollars have gone. Other visuals, such as pictures of you in your respective country can be good reminders of how they have helped. Remember, often the prime motivation for giving is how it makes the giver feel, not how it makes the receiver feel. Hopefully, your supporters will feel good each time they look at your picture or receive an update from you.
10. Expand your base & build your network: The more contributions the better! Your fund raising resource pool is limited only to the number of people you contact. To increase the volume of your contributions it is necessary to expand beyond your inner circle of close friends and immediate family members.

11. Always follow up: You have to get on the phone with the small businesses, the civic and religious groups, even with your friends and relatives, to let them know that you really do need their support, and that you were not sending that letter just to keep the post office in business. One follow up call can make the difference between them sending a check and pushing it to the back burner and never getting to it.

Fundraising Activities

Letter Writing

One of the most effective ways of fundraising is to do a letter campaign to as many relatives, friends, former teachers and professors, former co-workers, etc. as possible. Sending a detailed letter to over 100 friends and relatives explaining the program and what you hope to accomplish while you're on it will help you reach your goal.

Ask for a specific amount of money - \$50 is a nice round figure, but for older, more established relatives and friends \$100 is not too much to ask; for peers and fellow students, perhaps \$25 to \$35. You may want to break your potential supporters into two, three or more groups, sending a custom letter to each group based on your relationship with them or the amount of money you are requesting.

If you send out 100 letters asking for \$50 on average, and one-half respond, you have raised \$2,500. Often a few people will be very inspired by what you are doing, and may give much more.

"Buy - A - Something" Campaign

Another way to request for general donations is to tie it into a campaign such as "Buy-A-Brick to Help Build a School in Bolivia" or "Buy-A-Seed to Help Plant Trees in Chicago." Make sure you have some literature to give people as well as a registration form that includes name, address, and how many bricks the person purchased. This is important to keep a record of who gave, because they might give again the following year. This is part of the institutionalizing the fundraising.

One key element to this type of fundraising is making your donation request appropriately affordable. By doing a Buy-A-Brick campaign, you should set the value of the unit, in this case a brick, low enough that your friends, relatives, classmates, or professional associates would be willing to buy one or two. People, especially students, will be more apt to buy a \$3 brick than a \$10 brick.

For your acquaintances who may have a little bit more disposable income, you want to make sure that they know whether or not their donation to your cause is tax deductible. This is a very important legal issue. You need to make sure you check with both your school and the collaborating organization(s).

University Funds

If you are a student, one major source of funding is your own college or university. Many school clubs are allocated a certain amount of funds through student activities. See if your club is eligible. Many departments also have discretionary funds for projects and programs. If your trip can be integrated into an academic or service learning course, there may also be some course funds that could be used for the trip.

One of the best resources on campus may be your University's development office. Their sole purpose is to raise money for the university and university programs. The alumni office may also be able to help especially in identifying potential alumni volunteers.

Grants

One of the most common ways to raise money is through grant proposals. Though a grant proposal is very simple to write, getting it accepted is extremely difficult. The Ford Foundation receives over 1,000 proposals a day requesting money. Also, grants are often time sensitive in that foundations have deadlines and funding cycles.

If you are going to go apply for grants, it is best to follow the "Who Do You Know" principle. One of the most comprehensive books on foundations is the Foundation Directory which is available at most libraries. In the Foundation Directory, it lists the board members of all of the foundations. See if someone you know is on the board of a foundation that might give to your cause. (The Foundation Directory also lists what types of projects foundations fund). Local businesses are far more likely to support you than large corporations. The key is to make a linkage between the owner of the business and you or someone close to you. You may want to approach the businesses with a letter first, enclosing all relevant material and a pledge form, the follow up with a phone call. Asking for \$100 or more is not unusual. If you are a student, make sure you have the approval of the university when writing grants on behalf of your university program. Contact your school's development office for policies and procedures.

Service Clubs/Places of Worship

Service clubs such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists, fraternal organizations such as Elk and Moose clubs, as well as churches and temples are excellent sources for fundraising. Most service clubs donate money. Follow the "Who Do You Know" principle. Is someone you know a member or know of a member?

The best course of action is to contact as many clubs in your area as possible and ask to give a presentation to their club. Many clubs have breakfast, lunch, or dinner meetings which may last anywhere from 1 - 2 hours. If you get accepted to speak at a club, be prepared to speak for 15 - 20 minutes. If you're fundraising with a group, we suggest sending two speakers (preferably 1 male and 1 female), but no more than three. This is your chance to sell your program. Visual aids such as slides and videos help tremendously. Remember, you are not asking for money for your vacation, you are asking for a donation to a charity and to make a difference in the world. Also, let them know that you would be willing to come back and show them slides or a video of the program.

How much should you ask for? Many of these organizations get inundated for requests for money. If you try to ask for \$2,000-\$4,000, the chances of them donating it to you are very slim. It is our suggestion to ask for \$200-\$400 which is much more reasonable. After the meeting, write a follow up letter thanking them for letting you speak and reiterating your request for money. Be specific on how much money you are requesting and how it will be used. Instead of directly asking for money, you may want to ask if they will help you in a joint fundraising event. 2-3 weeks after the meeting, if you have not heard from them, give them a call. Be persistent, but not pushy.

When you give a post-program presentation make sure that you explain how their money helped achieve something worthwhile. Also, if you are fundraising as a group, ask for them to consider making an annual gift to your club next year. This is part of the institutionalizing of your fundraising. Hopefully, every year your club can count on a donation from that organization - the only cost to your club will be sending speakers twice a year. (Plus, the speakers will get a free meal and meet some very nice people).

Events

When designing an event, make sure that the expected amount of income from an event is worth the amount of time and money put into the event. If you spend 80 hours and \$500 to raise \$1,000, is it worth it? Simplicity and efficiency should be your guiding rules.

Sales -- One of the traditional ways to raise money is through bake sales, candy sales, garage sales, etc. Some sales such as candy sales cost money (i.e. you buy the candy for \$.25 a bar and sell it for \$1.00). One warning with sales (especially candy) is to be careful not to eat your profits. Often sales can be associated with holidays - pumpkins for Halloween or flowers for Valentines Day. One of the easiest and most profitable sales is setting up a table outside a very busy intersection on campus and selling coffee and soda. Another easy sale which has little overhead is to have a rummage sale. As with any sale, make sure that you have the university's approval.

Raffles -- Often groups can get items donated to them from local stores and restaurants which they can use to raffle off - usually at a larger event such as a dance. Use the "Who Do You Know" principle. If there are no larger items to raffle, sometimes groups buy something like a television as a "grabber" to get people interested. This is fine as long as the raffle brings in well over the amount of the item(s) purchased.

Parties, Dances, Music -- These can range from gala black tie affairs to simple pizza parties. Again, I suggest simplicity. Use the "Who Do You Know" principle. Do you have a friend in a band? Do you know the owner of a bar or restaurant? Some simple events include having a band play at a club, and your group gets the cover charge or a percentage of the drink sales.

Chances are a restaurant or bar won't be willing to just give you food and drink, but if you can make it worth their while, they would be happy to accommodate you. For example, offering an all you can eat buffet at a restaurant for \$15 where you get \$7.50 and the restaurant gets \$7.50.

These types of events can be very labor intensive or not at all. Be careful on how you structure it, and be clear on your expectations.

Concessions -- This is in a different category than sales because it refers to your club to be an agent for another organization. There are many types of concessions that your club can participate in such as selling soda at a sporting or music event to cleaning up the stadium after the event. Instead of asking a company to pay you for your labor, they donate a portion of the profits (i.e. 10-15%) of that event to your cause.

Unusual Events -- There are some companies that rent out items such as rock-climbing walls, sumo-wrestler body suits, Velcro suits and walls, as well as a myriad of strange other items that can be used for special events and fund-raising.

Media -- Do not overlook media outlets as a potential fundraising source. A good article in a local paper or an appearance on a local radio show can go a long way in generating support. Just produce a simple press release and send it to every newspaper, magazine, radio and TV station in your local area. Be sure to follow up a few days later.

Conclusion

Though we've provided just a few suggestions, it is important to remember why you are raising the money. Remember to be persistent. You will probably get a lot of doors slammed in your face and pretty discouraged at times, but there will also be a lot of people who you will find that support you and will help you. Most of all remember to have fun.