

Association of Fundraising Professionals, New Mexico Chapter

February 12, 2009 Funders Forum: TIPS FOR TOUGH TIMES

Q1: How can fundraisers build better relationships with funders?

WHAT:

- **Keep it simple and straightforward.** We want to understand your organization and seek to help you, but tend to get more details than we need.
- **Know who your funder is and what they want to support.** Read our guidelines, websites and information we provide to get an idea what we are interested and able to fund. Understand our interests and only make funding requests for those programs that realistic and honestly meet our funding mission
- **Look at your request holistically.** See if there is an opportunity for volunteerism, tabling at events, board positions? Will the funding meet your mission and is it program specific—what else can we do to partner and leverage to build our relationship on both sides—what can we do for you too?
- **Respect funder's time limitations.** Realize it is difficult for funders to meet with every non-profit so take advantage of monthly/quarterly lunch and learns and meetings where we can meet before, after or during. If you want to discuss something specific with a funder, try a brief email or short phone call.
- **Detail outcomes.** Include both statistical metrics and personal stories.

WHO:

- **Know the appropriate contact person.** Find out the appropriate contact at the institution and do not send multiple copies to upper management. It confuses everybody and generally doesn't help your case.
- **Provide connections between funders.** If a funder can't provide the entire amount you have requested, maybe they would serve as a "lead" or "challenge" gift to leverage other funders for you.
- **Let funders know they're not your sole supporter!** It's helpful for funders to know they are not the only contact being targeted to support your agency/project. Let funders know the total amount you are seeking, any support you already have, and what this funder's role is so they can see the big picture.
- **Be aware of what is happening in the funder's world.** If their stock has just taken a dive or there have been significant local changes, this might not be the best time to approach them, even if you are following all of their guidelines or they have "always given to you".
- **Involve employees from the organization you are requesting support from.** This gets employees from that funder personally involved and can be valuable in creating a broader relationship with the funder and perhaps, a share of wallet from those personally involved employees.
- **Connect with employees.** If you don't personally know the person responsible for corporate philanthropy, it is important to have some sort of connection with someone in the company you are soliciting. Invite that person to some event (or just a tour of the facility) and have them bring whoever in the company that authorizes the donations.
- **Your BOD: Access or Assets.** Members of your board of directors should be able to either give significantly financially or they should have access to those that do. It's very helpful to let a funder know that 100% of your board has given, when you are asking a funder to support your organization.

HOW:

- **Collaborate!** Fundraisers who are interested in receiving funding from an organization might look into working on collaborative projects with the company throughout the year.
- **Provide site visits.** Site visits can be very compelling. When asking for donations/sponsorships, consider bringing clients that benefit from your organization with them to the ask. Offer opportunities for funders to see and understand your mission and the end users you support.
- **Practice honest and open communication.** If there is an issue or potential problem, address it immediately.

- **Keep in communication with past and potential funders.** Keep it short, simple, succinct and specific. Write brief notes that say “Thank you for giving—this is what we have done with the money; we have been successful; we need more”. Just the facts, in a friendly fashion.
- **Be consistent in everything you do throughout the asking process.** Put as much effort or perhaps even more effort into your interim and final reports as you did into the proposals.
- **Be seen/heard at times other than when you are requesting funds!** It makes a difference to funders if you are seen supporting the efforts/events of other nonprofits, community events that celebrate philanthropy, and perhaps the event or charity project of the funder whose support you are seeking.
- **USE 2009 AS A CULTIVATING AND NURTURING YEAR.** This may be the year to celebrate your long time funders and back off a bit on your usual ask. Use the time wisely to nurture current funders and cultivate new ones...for an ask at a better time.
- Keep communication to past and potential funders **SHORT, SIMPLE, SUCCINT, and SPECIFIC.** Brief notes that say “Thank you for giving—this is what we have done with the money; we have been successful; we need more” is unbeatable. Just the facts, in a friendly fashion.

Q2: What are more effective ways fundraisers can prepare/submit proposals?

PREPARATION:

- **Help the funder help you.** In the challenging economy of 2009, funders may need to defend philanthropy budgets, explaining to stakeholders, shareholders and employees why money is being given at all. Provide as many concrete details about the benefits your program/service will provide in the community and how your agency is unique in delivering the service.
- **Clearly understand what the funder wants/supports, what their funding priorities/focus areas are, and adhere to them.** Either your request meets these priorities or it doesn't. The funder should support your organizational mission without mission drift. Understand the company's objectives - what do they need to accomplish? What are their business goals? Who is their audience?
- **Develop a clear and concise message for the ask.** Think through just how the outcomes of your request advances the impact sought by the funder.
- **Consider timing.** Plan ahead. Don't expect to have an immediate answer.
- **Follow guidelines and directions.** Less is sometimes more when it comes to proposal submissions.
- **Select your funder re: providing activities that will reach their audience.** One company might be looking for opportunities to network with other big donors, while another company may be looking for mass media brand awareness -logos on billboards or TV. Another organization might want volunteers opportunities while another might just want to provide cash or even in-kind donations.
- **Consider timing and be forward thinking.** Don't just ask for your next event, let them see what you have available throughout the year. Provide choices when possible...different things could appeal to different companies.
- **Know an organization's budget cycle (check the Funder's Guide).** Many larger companies start budgeting for the coming year as much as six months before hand. Get in early and don't just ask for the next big event. Consider what needs you have throughout the year and try to include a clear picture of what each involves. The funder may not be interested in your most immediate opportunity, but might be interested in supporting something else.
- **Find multiple funders for single event.** If you feel you must do an event, find multiple sponsors to underwrite - one for the food, the facility, the printing, etc.

THE PROPOSAL:

- **K.I.S.S.** Keep your request simple but focused and provide ALL requested information. Ask directly for what you need, be concise!
- **Stay within the funder's recommendations for average grant size** – it doesn't do you any good to ask for considerably more than the funder usually funds unless you have a close relationship or have asked in advance about the possibility of larger amounts.

- **Don't "default" to the usual requests of \$500, \$1000, \$2500, \$5000 and \$10,000.** (When EVERY nonprofit is asking for these amounts, it's hard not to think that they are made up numbers, with no relationship to your budget) Use real numbers FROM YOUR BUDGET that it costs to deliver service.
- **Don't try to fit your project to the funders funding amounts.** If the average grant is \$1000, but it costs you \$1,453 to serve a client, SAY THAT in your proposal, then discuss the variance.
- **Be precise, concise and measurable.** If you can't measure your success, you can't report on it and you then can't brag about it for future funding. Don't make it complicated. Tell what you're going to do and how you're going to know that what you've done has been successful.
- **Provide information re: acknowledgement and recognition.** It would be in the requesting organization's best interest to help provide details re: What is the company receiving in recognition of their sponsorships or donation? Does it meet their business objectives?
- **Be creative - don't just think cash but in-kind, discounted products or volunteer hours.** Cash is tight this year but there are in-kind or volunteer services the company could provide instead. Don't ask a printer for cash, ask them to print your event program. Ask smaller businesses for help. They might be able to donate services or give discounted prices on supplies you need throughout the year.
- **Proofread your materials!** Make sure they are up-to-date; deadlines for sponsor benefits are clearly stated and are consistent throughout your communication, and make sure you have the correct funders name and contact info in the letter.
- **Ask - in every communication.** In every letter state the problem, explain why you are the solution, and then ask even if its \$25 - then do the entire chain again - 2x in every communication.
- **Personalize everything - even if it takes longer.**
- **Be passively persistent.** Do not harass or be too aggressive, be friendly and grateful.

FOLLOW THROUGH:

- **Sometimes a NO is really a NO.** Funds will be tight this year, and budgets won't be able to accommodate the number and size of projects that have been funded in the past.
- **Never forget the thank you note.**
- **"Under Promise, Over Deliver":** If you are granted funding, send a follow up report showing that you delivered what you promised in terms of the services the funder's money allowed your agency to provide.
- **Provide demographics for the outcomes you report:** Clearly state who was served, how, when and if you surpassed the expected results. If you can link the outcomes to the funder's philanthropy mission, footprint, etc., EVEN BETTER!

Special tips for requesting *media* sponsorships/donations:

- Don't request media donations from one media if you are spending with another, ie., don't ask for "free" ad space, or airtime if you are "buying" space from someone else.
- Always send a request letter designating your 501C3 status when asking for media space. Also, designate if you are requesting space for either an event or just general awareness/image/volunteerism etc.,
- Most media like to "mix it up" a bit in terms of who they donate airtime/space too, so if you don't get it one year, don't assume that you won't get it the next.
- In most businesses, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" Follow up when needed.
- Your chances of getting better locations for outdoor advertising improve if you are doing something more generic than event specific.