

Arts Management Guidelines

Twenty Rules for Fund Raising Success

1. No one owes you a donation. Be humble and appreciative. Never appear angry if denied or if offered a smaller contribution than you had hoped for. Remember there is always tomorrow.
2. The key to good fund-raising is to listen. Listen to what the donor wants and learn what excites them. Then take time to respond with an appropriate proposal. Fund-raising is strategic – you are matching your needs and the donor's needs.
3. Always have a menu of projects to suggest to a donor. Do not come with a presentation geared to a specific project unless you know up front that this is the one project they may fund.
4. If you do not have a project that would interest a donor at this time, tell them. You will impress them and will be sure to be funded when you do have a project that meets their needs.
5. Donors respond to positive information, not to threats of bankruptcy.
6. Remember to separate your major gift campaign from your membership campaign and run them differently. Don't spend more money on solicitation and fulfillment than the donor is giving you.
7. Find the right solicitor for each donor. It might be a Board member or friend. The proper solicitor can frequently get an extra '0' added to a check. Use your Board members, or other friends, to open doors. Spend time getting to know who your Board members know and are willing to solicit.
8. If Board members are excited about your progress and not embarrassed by your organization they are more likely to be helpful. Implement your visibility campaign before you implement your fundraising efforts.
9. Events are an easy way to get to new donors since the quid pro quo is so simple to understand. Make your galas as special as possible to create a strong impression with new donors. A poorly planned gala can hurt you forever.
10. Each prospect is precious. Don't waste a prospect by being ill-prepared or sloppy. If the prospect feels comfortable with you, they are far more likely to give. You are competing with the largest and best staffed not for profits – don't appear to be 'small time' with your donors: never make a typo, never forget to return a call, never appear unfriendly.

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11. Cultivate a donor before making an 'ask.' Especially a big ask.
12. Don't ask any one donor for a gift that is out of proportion with the rest of your donations. You look naive.
13. Don't let a donor off easily. If a corporation says they are already sponsoring another organization, find a way to get a contribution that helps both. For example, in Kansas City I was told that a corporation funded the Girl Scouts. So I had them buy tickets for all the Girl Scouts to come to a performance. We both benefited.
14. Don't waste too much time writing a zillion cold call letters. Rather invest your time getting to know a few donors.
15. People value experiences more than tangible items. I would rather offer a benefit of coming to a rehearsal than of getting a mug or t-shirt. It is easier to deliver and costs far less and is much more memorable.
16. Don't use 'lingo' when speaking with donors. Remember they probably have no idea what your project names mean. Explain using simple language and avoid theatrical jargon.
17. Research your major donors. It is easy to do on-line and it impresses.
18. Be ready with a visibility plan for a corporate donor. Don't wait for them to ask. Be knowledgeable about their business: are they likely to want mass marketing (e.g. a consumer products firm) or are they likely to be trying to impress a few major clients (e.g. an investment bank)
19. Small donors can grow into big ones. Deliver on what you promise, and over-deliver if possible. And make sure you keep in contact throughout the year. Do not only contact your donors when you want more money.
20. We use the word development as a synonym for fundraising since what we are trying to do is develop relationships with our donors over time. If you are in it for the long term, and treat the donor accordingly, they will be in it for the long term.