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Ten Ways to Improve Your Fundraising by Next Week Use these tips to give your fundraising a shot in the arm.

By Gail Perry

ive donors what they want and they'll reward you with continued giving. Here are some simple things you can do right now to improve your fundraising. Don't wait!

1. Organize a thankathon for your donors. Your number-one effort needs to be focused on your current donors. Go all out to make them feel special and valued. For details on holding a thankathon, see "How Do I Thank Thee? Let Me Count the Ways" on page 9.

2. Plan visits with your top 20 current donors. Treat them like your organization's best friends. Ask them to tell you their story of how they came to choose your organization to support. You'll learn things that will surprise you.

3. Rewrite your thank-you acknowledgment letter to make it warm and personal. Begin with an innovative or creative sentence that will charm donors. Make them feel happy that they gave to you.

4. Create a campaign for lapsed donors. They're the hidden gold for your cause. It's much easier to bring a lapsed donor back into the fold than it is to convert a current prospect into a donor. Send a special appeal to lapsed donors titled: "We love you, we miss you, we want you back!"

5. Rewrite your solicitation letter so it's all about the donor. Make it friendly, casual, heart-felt, and even a bit intimate. Use short sentences, action verbs, lots of white space. Remember that it's not about your organization! It's all about the wants and needs of the potential donor.



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6. Meet with your top 20 major gift prospects just to bring them up to date. And be sure you use these two ridiculously simple strategies to develop your prospect's interest in your cause:

- Don't do all the talking. Listen instead.
- Ask your donor: "What are your impressions?"

7. Update your on-line donation form. Pretend you're a donor. Go to your Web site and try making a donation. Is it easy to do? If the process is too time-consuming, change it so it's fast and simple. You don't want people getting frustrated and abandoning your gift "shopping cart."

8. Add a chart called "Your Gifts at Work" to your Web site and newsletter. Forget the boring annual report. Instead, give donors exactly what they want — information on how their gifts are used. And tell them in no uncertain terms how they're making a difference in the world. What to put on "Your Gifts at Work" Web page:

- pie chart on where the money comes from
- pie chart on where the money is going
- photo of a cute kid (if possible) and a story about how your organization changed or saved their life.

For a real-world example, check out www.care.org, which provides not only the pie charts but a link to Charity Navigator, where you can find summary financials, the name of the board chair, the salary of the CEO, and third-party ratings on the organization's efficiency. Here's an organization that understands "transparency." And since transparency is one of the most important factors donors consider when deciding whether to renew a gift, it's something to put into action.

9. Block off two days a week for the next three months to make visits with donors. The biggest obstacle to a major gifts effort is simply getting out of the office. Set your goal. Draw a line in the sand. Make a commitment. Get your staff's support to aid and abet you. Then make it happen.

10. Plan a party to honor your founders, former board members, and former capital campaign donors. These folks are your major donor prospects for the future. They're likely feeling ignored and abandoned by your wonderful organization, just because they're no longer involved. But once, they gave you their heart and their money. They still have a deep connection. Bring them back into the fold by honoring them. And then the door is open for you to keep them involved.

Gail Perry, MBA, CFRE, is an international fundraising and governance consultant, popular public speaker, and author of Fired-Up Fundraising (from which this article is adapted). You can find her at the Fired-Up Fundraising blog (www.gailperry. com) when she's not traveling around the country inspiring and firing up nonprofit leaders.

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How Do I Thank Thee? Let Me Count the Ways

Now is the perfect time to call your donors just to say "thank you." Start planning a donor thankathon today. It's fun and it's easy.

Start by making a list of who you'll call. Consider how many donors you've had in the last year. Choose a dollar threshold over which you will call. For example, start with all donors who have given you over \$1,000, then move to all those who gave between \$500 and \$999.

Put together your core team of three to five callers, made up of people of some stature within your organization. Ideally, these will be board members and volunteers who enjoy talking with people and are well organized. If you put staff members on the team, there should be no more than one staff caller for every three volunteer callers. One of the staff callers should be the executive director. Don't "require" that anyone be a caller; rather, you want to have callers who choose to participate and will enjoy doing it.

Either bring them all together for an evening of coffee and cookies, or dole out the lists and have them call from home or office. Daytime calls and leaving messages are fine. The script goes something like this:

"Hello, may I please speak to _____? My name is _____. I'm on the board of _____. I'm just calling to say thank you for your support this year. It has allowed us to expand/maintain our _____ programs. We've been able to offer our services to _____ more families/children in our community. Thank you."

If the caller reaches a real person, they may chat a bit. The caller should be prepared with a few general facts, but needn't feel they need to take a cram course before they're qualified to get on the phone. They can always refer the question to a staff member for a call back.

What are you telling the donor with this call? We noticed you gave. Your gift to our organization mattered. We appreciate you. That's exactly what a donor needs to know to keep giving year after year.

-adapted from Benevon's online newsletter, www.benevon.com/newsletter

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