

Your Board Can Help You Gain Major Gifts

Your board holds the key to major gifts. Here's how to enlist their help.



When you ask board members to identify major gift prospects, they can be reluctant. Here's why: They don't want to share names of people they know because they're afraid they'll be asked to "hit up" their friends. That's perfectly natural. Who wants to offer up their friends for a solicitation?

So, how do you break through this resistance? You do it with a game.

Play the Prospect Game

When you make fundraising discussions fun and interesting, everyone will be more likely to participate. This game is an easy way for board members to help identify major-gift

By Gail Perry

prospects. It will also introduce your board members to the major-gift process at the highest level. To put this secret tool to use, follow these prompts with your board members:

1. Please take out a small scrap of paper. You won't have to turn this in to anyone! (This last statement is a key part of the exercise. It lowers the pressure. Knowing no one will see their lists, they're free to think broadly and not be self-conscious.)

2. See if you can identify 10 people (or sources of revenue) who could *catapult* our organization's financial future to a whole new level. (Using the word "catapult" moves board members into strategic thinking – particularly thinking about strategic alliances that could change everything.)

3. The people you name could be current or former donors. Or they could be prospective donors.

4. They have to be people we could reasonably approach. Not someone pie in the sky like Oprah or Bill Gates.

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“How do you break through this resistance? You do it with a game.”

Then sit down quietly and let them work. You'll see thoughtful looks on faces around the room. Give them plenty of time. Then say, "Now please turn to the person next to you and discuss one of the names on your lists."

Process the Exercise

After the game is over, ask participants, "What was it like to do this exercise?"

They'll probably have a lot of comments. Someone may say, "It was different and interesting to focus at such a high level." Or, "It puts everything on a completely different level. It's challenging. And it's where we *should* be focusing."

On the other hand, someone might say, "I don't know anybody who can make this list."

You'll likely get both extremes and anything in between. The point is to get them thinking about how they can get involved in identifying major-gift prospects.

You may hear a board member say, "What about Mr. Jones? Has he ever given? I play golf with him. I think I might be able to get the door open to him." Now you have a viable prospect – and a board member who's interested in helping you with the cultivation process. That's exactly what you want.

Follow Up with a Task Force

After playing the game and processing the results, board members will be focused and interested in discussing prospects. Don't leave all this good thinking to waste. Ask for volunteers for a temporary "VIP Prospect Task Force." Their job is to meet *only* twice with the staff and help create or add to your organization's own Major Gift Prospect List.

“Get them thinking about strategic alliances that could change everything.”

Here's What You've Gained

Here's what this game does for board members:

It introduces them to a new way of thinking about identifying prospects.

It involves them in the whole idea of cultivation strategy – how to get the door open at the highest possible level.

It provides their buy-in and participation.

It makes fundraising discussions conversational and easy.

It starts them thinking big. You're not asking them to focus on \$100 or even \$1,000 prospects but on VIPs who not only give but are also important opinion leaders who influence many other donors. These VIP prospects are the civic, philanthropic, political, religious, corporate, or social leaders in your community. These major donors and key leaders should of course be your top priority.

It doesn't put anyone on the spot. It keeps the confidentiality that board members want. It eases them into the major gifts process – without pressure.

It's an enjoyable activity that bonds board members, creates an opening where they'll feel comfortable helping you, lightens the mood, and adds a bit of fun to the serious business of planning your financial future. 

Gail Perry Group inspires nonprofits around the world with cutting-edge fundraising strategies and new tools to make fundraising more successful and more fun. Find smart strategies to help you raise tons of money at gailperrygroup.com.



Get Your Board on Board with Fundraising

You'll find more board-fundraising tools in these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

How Your Board Members Can Raise Funds without Asking for a Dime (Vol. 19, No. 6)

The Five Most Dangerous Fundraising Fallacies (Vol. 32, No. 2)

Is There a Role for Your Board in Raising Funds? (Vol. 23, No. 3)

Getting Comfortable with the F Word: Fundraising & the Nonprofit Board Member (Vol. 20, No. 4)

The Word You Hear Most Often in Fundraising (Vol. 28, No. 4)

Fundraising with Your Board (Vol. 13, No. 5)