



Should a Famous Person Chair Your Fund Drive?

What are the pros and cons of using someone “famous” to chair your fundraising campaign?

Q:

What is the conventional wisdom on using somebody famous as an honorary chairperson for a fundraising campaign? In our particular case, the person we have in mind is famous because of politics and is clearly identified with one political party while we are not a political organization. Would using this person be risky? We don't know any other famous people. Finally, what should be expected of the honorary chairperson other than putting their name on letters, etc.?

*Stephen P. Hansler, Executive Director
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A:

Using someone who is “famous” to chair a fundraising campaign has both pros and cons. On the positive side, the person will bring name recognition to your campaign. On the other hand, well-known people may be so closely linked to another cause that they turn off those who disagree with their stands on certain issues. This is especially true of political candidates.

To determine if someone will really assist you in reaching your fundraising goals, ask these questions: What is this person's image in the community? Will this image help the campaign?

Ask these questions of people both internal to your organization (staff, board members, and other volunteers) and those who are not now connected to

your organization (potential donors and campaign leaders). If you are conducting a feasibility study as part of the campaign (always a good idea), ask these questions as part of your study. Be sure to ask without specifying the person's name except to those closest to the organization.

Make sure that the person you choose to be the chair will contribute financially to the campaign; the level of the gift is not as important as the fact that the person donates something. Also, before choosing a chair, discuss what that person is willing to do to help. Some suggestions include:

- signing letters
- making calls on key potential donors

- attending public relations functions
- “opening doors” to potential donors that are not among your current constituencies
- doing an article or segment on T.V. or radio on why your organization is good for the community.

In the end, you may find that a chairperson willing to do such things is more valuable to you than a famous name.

Good luck!

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