



Recession-Ready FUNDRAISING

Follow these strategies to survive hard times.



By Anisha Robinson Keays

Sales guru Zig Ziglar said, “If you have enough push, you don’t have to worry about the pull.” No matter what you believe about the current economic outlook, cutbacks on the part of grantmakers and donors will likely affect your ability to raise funds, requiring you to push that much harder to maintain financial stability. Here are ways to do so:

Diversify income streams

Many nonprofit organizations weather tough times by adding more sources of income. Given today’s environment, all nonprofits, even those that have historically raised money from just one source, should consider expanding the ways they generate revenue.

Create a fundraising plan with a broad reach. Such a plan should target income from a variety of places, including individual donors, corporations, and foundations, as well as earned income from special events and the sale of products and services.

Honor your volunteers

Tough times require subtle changes in the tone of the “ask” and the relationship between donor and recipient. An often-overlooked source of support for nonprofits, the volunteer, can be a key barometer for how successful a fundraising plan might be.

During an economic downturn, volunteers may be scarce, choosing to give their time and effort to

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personal or professional commitments. In response, consider demonstrating to volunteers just how and why their altruism is worth it.

Think of ways to make volunteering pleasurable and beneficial. For instance, use and promote the organization’s events, fundraisers, or fundraising initiatives as opportunities for volunteers to network with potential business contacts.

Also, minimize obstacles associated with serving. Respect volunteers by starting and ending meetings and events on time. Demonstrating appreciation goes a long way in fostering loyalty.

Keep in touch

Another important, no-cost strategy is to retain funder interest. Now is a great time to keep in touch with your supporters. Their investment shows that they care about the work your organization does; show that you care by keeping them informed of your initiatives.

During your calls, share success stories that can re-energize their commitment. Use anecdotes and case studies to reveal how their time, money, and talent are making a transformative difference in your organization.

Collect statistical data, but don’t overwhelm your supporters with the stats. Remember that donors are as emotion-driven as anyone else. The relationship between donor and recipient is based on people helping people.

Donors give more when they read the story of how their contributions affected a specific individual, as opposed to a report on many anonymous people. They also tend to donate more to an organization if they also volunteer for it, so encourage donors to become active volunteers.

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Be a part of your own solution

Openly confront the issue of how an uncertain economy could affect your organization’s stability and viability. Donors know that no matter where the economy is headed, raising money is never easy. So they’ll have concerns about how your organization will prevent, mitigate, or recover from loss of funding.

Many nonprofits operate under the constant threat of financial uncertainty. Therefore, they must be creative, proactive, and enterprising, constantly seeking opportunities,

CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Hold a Fashion Show with a Twist

In a variation on the classic fashion show fundraiser, students sauntered down the runway in new and vintage clothing that businesses had donated for sale. Dozens of outfits were sold at the event, and the class netted more than \$1,000 to cover prom expenses while outfitting many students for the dance at bargain prices. For more creative ideas, see *Fundraising: 50 Proven Strategies for Successful School Fundraisers*, Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com.

Tap the Potential of Postcards

Postcards can be a big help in your direct marketing. One of the key advantages, of course, is the less expensive cost of postage required by postcards versus regular mail. Postcards also stand out in the recipient's stack of daily mail in an eye-catching way. And you can fit a lot more on one postcard than you may think. Just ask Bob Westenberg, who publishes *IMP: The World's Smallest Newsletter* once a month on 4" x 6" postcards. That's right. A newsletter on postcards. He has thousands of subscribers too. For more information, see Modern Postcard at www.modernpostcard.com.

Play the Flamingo Game

Your only investment for this event is a flock of plastic flamingos – or perhaps more flocks if the demand is great enough. Volunteers secretly plant the flock in someone's yard along with the rules of the game: For \$5, the family can have the flock removed from their yard. For \$10, they can choose the next home to be invaded by the flock.

without forsaking their mission, to ensure sustainability.

There's an earned income option for just about every nonprofit seeking to supplement fluctuating donations. Coming up with the right fit may just be a matter of brainstorming.

A good example is the Girl Scouts. Noted for being enterprising, the Girl Scouts netted over 700 million dollars from cookie sales last year.

Baking cookies isn't the answer for most nonprofits, but it helps to have an earned income plan. For example: An organization that provides specialized training or has a talented management team may provide fee-based consulting services to emerging organizations in the same field.

Never stop asking

The best way to ensure that your organization loses revenue and goodwill is to stop asking for money and support. In good times and bad, stay positive and creative. Keep pushing hard to ensure survival and fulfill your promise to serve your community. ■

Resources

"25 Ways to Cut Costs," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 26, No. 2.

Boschee, Jerr, "Looking for Customers Rather than Handouts," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 22, No. 6.

Levinson, Nick, "Fundraising for 44 Cents," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 3.

Remley, Dirk, "Relationship Marketing: Guaranteeing the Future," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 5.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org. Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity: Exploring New Revenue Opportunities for Nonprofits (www.snpo.org/li).

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