



TOP TIPS for Tough Times



Here's how to use the winds of change to your advantage—and soar!

By Veronica Meury

Here are five ideas that can help you navigate today's unnerving economy and put you in a position to thrive in the coming years:

1. Keep a positive attitude. People don't open their pocket-books for organizations that aren't outwardly optimistic about their cause. Those who remain confident when reaching out to donors, volunteers, boards, and staff are better positioned to weather turbulent economic times.

Hope, however, isn't a fundraising strategy on its own. It needs to be incorporated into your mission, resources, and long-term commitment. Donors will listen to the message and contribute to ideas they believe in. By remaining upbeat yet honest about the difficulties of both your organization and the donor, you can strengthen stakeholder relationships for the long term.

Those who maintain high morale are better able to focus on creativity and thinking out of the box. Some of the best ideas come out of challenging situations.

2. Stay in touch. When times are bad, nonprofits often want to shy away from asking for cash gifts, but this is the time to reach out rather than withdraw. Staff, volunteers, boards, and donors need to hear from you more than ever.

A simple e-mail can reap big awards. It's all in the detail. Donors want to know how their dollars are

being used, who's being helped, and the impact their donation will have for the future.

And never underestimate the power of sharing a thank-you letter from someone you've helped. It's one of the most effective ways to show donors they're making a real difference.

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3. Don't arbitrarily cut costs. Before looking at across-the-board reductions, examine your expenses and identify strategic cuts. Ask:

- What's the return on investment? How can we measure results against costs?
- How can we reallocate our budget to better support our goals?
- Are there items we can postpone or scale back?
- Which costs can be cut altogether?

More than ever, expenses should be evaluated strategically, with fundraising deliverables and organizational goals driving the decisions.

• Reexamine techniques, and implement new e-mail and social-media campaigns versus telephone campaigns and direct mail. The Internet gives nonprofits greater reach at lower costs.

• Look at fundraising software that merges systems, generates useful reports, reduces entry time,

and gives everyone in the organization access to information without running the copy machine overtime producing wasted paper.

• Reach out to former contacts who may not have given in awhile. Keeping existing donors, even if there's been no contact in a few years, is almost always more efficient than finding new ones.

4. Analyze fundraising plans. Now isn't the time to put all your financial hopes into one plan or one fundraising event. Evaluate each program against the organization's mission to identify efforts with the highest fundraising capability and the strongest ties to overall goals.

This may be the time to postpone fundraisers, such as capital campaigns, that rely on major endowments to be successful. By putting large gift requests in context with current market conditions, your organization can respect donors by demonstrating your understanding of their economic challenges. Doing so will strengthen your relationship and maximize donation potential over the long run. The donor who can't give a six-figure gift for a new construction project at this time will likely give a smaller, but still significant donation to support other needs. This contact lets you maintain a healthy, active donor relationship that can be expanded when the time is right.

You may also want to tone down events that have a reputation for being opulent. Lavish spending isn't well received when so many people are struggling. Even conservative plans can be reviewed for

Creative Fundraising Ideas

Undo the Gala

Rather than ballgowns and dancing, the “Ungala,” the brainchild of Cradles to Crayons in Horsham, Pennsylvania (www.cradlestocrayons.org) put hands to work in service of the organization’s mission. The organization’s staffers sold tickets to the Ungala at \$150 each. The event included musical entertainment and food, but guests also spent the evening sorting and packing clothing, toys, and books for the homeless and low-income children the organization serves. The event raised more than \$100,000 and gave the organization’s supporters a meaningful and fun way to make a difference.

Piggyback Events

Consider combining several events throughout the year into one major occasion. You could coordinate several of your own programs or team up with one or more other nonprofits. Examples:

- Hold your volunteer recognition event and banquet for donors together.
- Celebrate your anniversary or other key event in your organization’s history at the same time as you host a concert or other performance.
- Coordinate a variety of nonprofits to hold a seminar on planned giving for donors.

Save Costs without Sacrificing Enjoyment

For your next special event, look for ways to keep guests engaged and entertained without being frivolous. Use local entertainment to save costs, have board members find corporations to donate food, and seek out a venue that’s interesting without being extravagant.

Lighting is the most cost-effective way to transform a space, says Sean Cannon, director of Event Creative (scannon@eventcreative.com). A good lighting designer can give a ho-hum space a feeling of texture, depth, and excitement. For more ideas, visit www.stevensoninc.com.

cost savings. Look for more affordable venues, or get creative with donated space. Consider lighter menus, cash bars, and simple centerpieces to keep costs down. With a little extra creativity and thought, low budget events can be some of the most successful.

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5. Look for opportunities to collaborate. Now’s the ideal time to form strategic partnerships with other charities to bring in new donors and support complementary program areas. Donors tend to re-

ward the efforts of those who work together for the benefit of all.

Partnerships make your organization more visible to foundations, corporations, service clubs, government organizations, and nonprofit boards. Collaboration increases your circle of influence and, ultimately, your success.

Out of adversity comes strength. Keep reaching out to donors and the community and reminding them that this is a time to pull together and share your strength. When you emanate hope, you’ll not only survive but prosper in the future. ■

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More Ways to Thrive in Trying Times

These and many more articles are available at www.snpo.org/ members to help you raise funds even when your budget is tight:

The Most Important Question for You to Ask (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Recession-Ready Fundraising (Vol. 26, No. 6)

Take the Collaboration Quiz (Vol. 24, No. 3)

Increase Donations in a Down Economy? With Social Media, Yes, You Can! (Vol. 27, No. 3)

Using E-Mail & the Web to Acquire & Cultivate Donors (Vol. 21, No. 1)

Raising Funds in an Uncertain Economy (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity: Exploring New Revenue Opportunities for Nonprofits (<http://www.snpo.org/lino>).

