Preparing to Ask for Money

By Anita Nowery Durel, CFRE

Building Good-Will, Making Friends, and, Oh, Yes….Asking For Money

> *"Apply to all those whom you know will give something; next, to those whom you are uncertain whether they will give..., and show them the list of those who have given; and, lastly, do not neglect those whom you are sure will give nothing, for in some of them you may be mistaken."*
>
> Benjamin Franklin

Knowing who to ask may be one of the most difficult aspects of fundraising. This prospect identification phase is the first step in the development process. Although most people shy away from asking an individual for a gift, the solicitation or the "Ask" is just one small step in the larger development process. Before you ask for a contribution a significant amount of work is involved. Learning more about who might give and why takes time. This knowledge of the individual's level of commitment and interests makes solicitation easier and the request for support more precise in both dollars requested and the gift's intended use.

During the development process the cultivation phase helps to build trust and affirm the relationship. Prospects have the opportunity to more fully understand an institution, its worth, and the critical nature of services. Overtime, the hope is that they will become loyal supporters and advocates.

KNOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S BEST FRIENDS

Getting started, or prospect identification, is often difficult, but it doesn't have to be. The best prospects are those you already know. That's why development officers invest time in analyzing the database to find patterns of loyalty and higher end donors. Their gifts are an expression of interest in your work. Another source of names is the board. Boards of nonprofits are typically larger than required by law because we rely on our boards to bring their networks into the organization. Trustees are expected to introduce new friends to the organization. It's important to recognize the people who have always been there for you—those that care the most about your work and your role in the community.

In nonprofits in general there are too many distractions. The most important work can get lost as directors put out fires and manage staff and their departments. A primary role of the CEO is to not only watch the bottom line but also to increase the revenue. To do this, the CEO must focus on serving those who can do the most for the organization. Consistently those people have been individual donors –the group that contributes a full 83% of all the money given in the U.S.A.

To better focus on those in your institution most likely to give, set priorities and concentrate on top prospects. Typically the top ten is identified and the focus remains on the top three active prospects. Consider the likelihood of each prospect to give and rank prospects. When possible, knowing each prospect as an individual, their interests and values allows you to make a clearer determination of their potential capacity and giving level. Having taken these initial steps your organization can then engage in cultivation, expanded education about the value of your work, and ultimately in a solicitation.

PREPARATION

The process of getting to know your major prospects is a rewarding one. These are people who know the organization; they value the work; and are interested in your success. This is a relationship that has grown. When you plan to solicit a prospect, the "Ask" warrants a special visit and conversation.

What we know about asking for gifts is that people give to people. They give more to people who are enthusiastic, well informed, equal to them in stature (or a notch up), and those who have made a significant contribution to the cause. They give more to those who can make a *compelling* Case for Support and who take the time to get to know the prospective donor and to understand what they value. Those called on to engage in this work are the CEO, the development director, the trustees, and the senior staff.

WHY YOU MAKE PERSONAL VISITS

- To thank and educate established and prospective donors.
- To discover the prospect's interests and learn how they fit with your work.
- To gain insights on their personal and professional priorities.
- To seek support for your worthy organization.
- To determine specifically what they might fund.
- To gain permission to continue the relationship
- To gather information and prepare for the next encounter.

BEFORE YOU GO

Before engaging more deeply with prospects, research is conducted to learn as much as you can about an individual and that research is used to qualify the prospect based on their financial ability to make a gift, their interest in your organization, their priorities, and your overall relationship. This information includes their history with your institution and their interest in your vision.

The most important donor meetings are conducted in teams of two or more solicitors. They should be the right people—those who know the donor or have the stature the visit demands. Preferable you will have both and the team will be fully knowledgeable about the prospect.

Maintaining records and keeping up-to-date donor profiles, especially on your most important prospects, makes this job easier. Profiles contain personal and professional information, their background with your institution, different perspectives on their giving history including consistent gifts and the total number of gifts and amount as well as their largest gift and giving over the most recent three to five year period. To understand your prospect's capacity to give, look to their other philanthropic priorities and determine their largest gift to any institution. New board members can be asked to complete a board profile that may not address their giving but can asks many of the background questions about membership on other boards and involvement with other nonprofits.

Besides the research and learning about the prospect, prior to a visit, you will also want to discuss precisely what you want from a particular prospect. Materials that can be left with the prospect allow you to leave important information that can clarify what you present at the meeting. It's important to assemble the right information and avoid overwhelming the prospect with paper. The objective is to focus attention on the important opportunity you will present. Here are materials you will probably need:

- Case for Support
- If appropriate, a brief proposal outlining your request
- Recognition potential
- Pledge Card/Sponsorship Information
- A list of board members

Other materials:

- The full list of Opportunities for Support
- A summary of all recognition opportunities
- Brief overview of organization's history
- Upcoming Programs
- Recent newsletter, press releases
- Lists or documents that establish credibility; kudos; awards; confidence builders, quotes.
- Organizational chart, list of senior staff, list of all staff

WHAT DO YOU NEED?
Know *specifically* what you want and have at least five fall-back Asks. Regardless of what you think the prospect's giving range may be, they may have different ideas. Identify those other possibilities in advance and be ready to use them if required. At the least you can leave with the question, "May I come back to see you in a few months to keep you posted on our progress?" Ask for permission to move to the next level and give them a time frame when the next action will take place.

PLAN ALL ASPECTS OF THE VISIT
If you are strategic in planning each visit, you will give consideration to who must be at the table for the donor to make a decision. It may be a spouse, children, or a financial advisor. Take the time to prepare a very short script or at the least an outline that all participants will receive along with a donor profile. The script outline roles, the specific Ask including the amount, fall-back Asks, and outline talking points for each participant. At the least you

can read through the process and confirm that everyone recognizes their specific role. The amount of information required depends on the experience of the solicitors and their relationship with the individual. Here is a brief outline of what you might include.

- Introduction – who starts the conversation
- Lay the groundwork – background, history, accomplishments
- Discuss the vision - compelling reasons for the need
- Present the opportunity
- ASK
- Be silent Be silent Be silent
- As appropriate, introduce options, coming back
- Wind up conversation
- Close – offer another visit or contact
- Thank and Follow up

MINUTES BEFORE YOUR MEET

Keep your energy and enthusiasm high. Remind yourself that you are not asking for yourself but for an invaluable cause. Try to find ways to keep moving. Sitting in a waiting room can be deadly, so take a walk in the hall. Find a discrete place to rev up. There are lots of distractions that take your mind off the solicitation that can help. Chat with the receptionist, give them a free pass to the Museum, or go to the restroom. If you sit you'll get sluggish.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ***ATTITUDE!***

- Remember why the cause matters.
- Be enthusiastic in your approach.
- Emphasize broad benefits not the price tag
- Have you made your own thoughtful gift first?
- Do you understand the dynamics behind your own decision to give?
- Nothing's Perfect – go with what you have--listen and learn!

LISTEN

- Are you selling what the buyer wants?
- Sometimes you are just building the relationship and not Asking
- Everything you learn on behalf of your nonprofit should be reported and recorded in the prospect records of the organization

REPORT

- File a report in the database on outcomes, new information, next steps and dates
- Share information with those who must know

Above all, stop putting off these visits. They are the road to success, to major gifts and to organizational sustainability. Get out there!

"I'm a great believer in luck, and the harder I work, the more luck I have." Thomas Jefferson