

THE ART OF CULTIVATION

Inexperienced volunteers are often told to “cultivate” a potential donor before soliciting their gift support. Often it is not made clear what that means, or how to go about it.

The most effective cultivation of a potential donor has two principal objectives, achieved through personal individualized contact to:

- provide the potential donor with a better understanding of the organization’s mission, programs, and funding opportunities for serving people;
- provide you with a better understanding of the potential donor’s interests in, financial support capability, and links to others who might be helpful in encouraging his/her support.

How is Effective Personal Cultivation Conducted?

- Select a convenient time and place for a personal conversation. A pleasant and comfortable setting for an initial conversation. A casual meeting? Lunch? A personal invitation to a special event? An intimate dinner including other volunteers and potential donors? An appointment to call at his/her office or home?
- The initial conversation is most often general -- two or three people talking together about a deserving cause or opportunity to serve people which are associated with the mission and goals of your organization.
- Through your initial conversation and follow-up meetings, the prospect’s familiarity with your organization is increased, areas of his/her special interest explored, and awareness of needed support made clear.

When Should I Solicit a Gift Commitment?

At some point in the cultivation process you will be able to make that judgment. Most likely when you feel you have provided sufficient information about your organization and its related funding opportunities; and, have provided meaningful responses to questions and comments posed by the prospect. That would be the best time to indicate:

"I'm very pleased we have been able to explore ways you can provide significant support of our organization's goals and objectives in serving people. Can we discuss a leadership gift commitment in the \$10,000 to \$25,000 range?"

I hasten to add that the most effective fundraising volunteers I have known develop their own personalized approaches to cultivation and solicitation. In the final analysis, whatever works for you!