

ENGAGING A POTENTIAL MAJOR DONOR “WHAT DO I SAY?”

Fundraising volunteers, while earnest in their intentions, at times may be reticent to discuss consideration of a gift commitment with a prospective donor. For these good people, following are some suggestions for “*what do I say?*”

First and Foremost...

Each volunteer should develop his/her own personal style and comfort level in engaging potential major donors for consideration of an eventual gift commitment. There is not a right way... there is only the way that works for you!

In the Beginning...

Indicate that you want him/her to know about important programs/activities your organization is providing... to benefit people in the community... and be prepared to give some specific examples.

Let your prospect know your purpose in talking with him/her... most likely they already suspect!

- *“Eventually I will ask you to consider support of the organization, but only after I have provided sufficient information and responded to your questions... so that you and your family can make that important decision.”*

The Personal Touch...

Through personal contact, versus mail or phone, fundraising experience has demonstrated that when properly informed and thoughtfully “cultivated”, 50% to 65% of potential major donors will make a contribution. That’s compared to 15% to 35% when contacted by phone, and .5% to 10% when contacted by mail.

If at first you don’t succeed in arranging a personal meeting, try and then try again. In most worthwhile efforts patient persistence pays! Lack thereof may suggest it’s not important.

- *“As a volunteer for the organization, I’ve been asked to meet personally with several people who have been suggested based on their leadership in the community... or prior contribution support... or likely interest in the organization.”*
- *“Your candid comments and perspectives regarding what our organization is doing in the community will be very helpful to us.”*

During Personal Contact...

The three things you should attempt to discover about your prospect in order to judge the best approach at the appropriate time in securing a contribution commitment are:

- ***Indicated interest(s)*** in the organization... which will aid in encouraging interest in an area/program that will benefit from his/her support
- ***Best person(s)*** who at the appropriate time can help to encourage a contribution commitment... through a meeting, personal note, and/or telephone call
- ***Suggested dollar “target gift” level***... to provide a frame of reference for the prospect to consider based on comments made during your conversations

To gain such insights, volunteers can pose questions that give an opportunity for the prospect to express his/her views.

- *“From what you know about the organization, what impresses you the most... would be considered most valued?”*
- *“How would you suggest we increase awareness among other influential people about the value of the organization’s programs and services?”*
- *“Are you acquainted with some of our Board members (showing him/her a list)?”*
- *“In this phase of our fundraising, we are seeking contribution commitments in the \$5,000 to \$25,000 level. Does that seem reasonable based on what the funds will be used for?”*

And The Close...

There will come a point-in-time when the prospect should be asked to consider a gift commitment. That time will come when, in the volunteer’s judgment, he/she has responded to the prospect’s questions, and provided ample information for the prospect to make that decision.

- ***“Yes”***... following gracious thanks, sending a confirming note clarifying terms and conditions of gift commitment
- ***“No”***... questioning if there is anything the volunteer can provide that might encourage the prospect to reconsider

- **“Maybe”** determining and confirming next steps to encourage a gift commitment
And, if the prospect is not asked to consider a gift commitment, he/she may reasonably wonder why the volunteer spent time and resources in meeting and discussing the organization’s programs and value to the community!

Final Note...

- ***You can’t fail!...*** public relations studies show that the average person comes into personal contact --- through business, social or casual meetings --- with an average of 300 people a year. With that in mind, it is likely that information about your organization that an enthusiastic volunteer provides will be repeated. And the likelihood of a conversational “ripple effect” will be a distinctive benefit to the organization.