

Individual Giving and Membership Building

Fundraising 101 Workshop New York City, October 16, 2003

Presented by the New York Technical Assistance Program (NYTAP) of the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP) and the Literary Presenters Technical Assistance Program (LitTAP). Made possible with generous funding from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)

From notes taken during a Roundtable Discussion with:

- Benjamin Brust, Development Director, Poets & Writers
 - Quang Bao, Executive Director, The Asian American Writers Workshop
 - Lisa London, Associate Publisher, The Feminist Press
 - Jeffrey Lependorf, Executive Director, Council of Literary Magazines and Presses
-
- You are never “asking for money” but, rather, “giving people the opportunity to give, to become involved and to support something they believe and participate in.”
 - Speak of your donor base as a community; establishing feelings of connection and participation are key. Be vigilant about making donors feel involved and appreciated.
 - Never underestimate small donations; a base of individuals with smaller donations is very stable and strong. It is consistent and renewable, and individual gifts provide over 50% of all funding.
 - Establish a direct mail campaign. If you are just beginning, target an organization similar to yours and research their donor base. Perhaps arrange a list rental to acquire initial contact names.
 - Keep a meticulous database of donors, potential donors, audience members—everyone who comes in contact with your organization. (EBase is a free database program created especially for nonprofits that is available to download from the Internet; it is a great place to start). Specify in the database what sort of interaction you have had with them and keep good notes for posterity, as staff turns over, the knowledge will be retained.

- Write a letter of acknowledgement and thanks after each and every donation, no matter how small. If you have other correspondence with donors, acknowledge this as well, providing information about upcoming programs, events, etc. A newsletter (print or virtual) is an essential tool for keeping in touch with donors and members, and keeping them apprised of all your organization is accomplishing.
- Look closely at all your points of interaction with the public: each exchange is an opportunity to “brand” your organization -- what sort of an organization you are, what you do, how you are unique, why you are needed and of service, what you value, how you make people feel. These are considerations that are addressed directly and subtly in all aspects of relations between you and the public: how the staff answers the phone to the way your letterhead looks. Pay close attention to branding; your brand both arises from and reinforces your mission.
- Create “bonded donors”: send out hand-signed holiday cards. Board members should personalize letters with notes to colleagues and friends. It tells members that you know who they are, is a more personalized method of communication and a nice way to acknowledge their continued support. Convert donors into fundraisers. Donors can ask others to donate; their connections can bring others to you.
- Cultivation events: the purpose of these events is not to ask for money, but rather to maintain member relations. Do not spend money on the event, a board member can fund it, or you can have space and supplies donated as “in-kind” gifts. Cultivation events are also great opportunities to acquire new board members. In general, cultivation should always illustrate the principle: “because you are giving us more, we will give you more.”
- Appeal letters/direct mail: the longer your appeal letter the better your response. Two to three pages is customary. Language should be institution building, use visual language that complements the letter structure. Use bullets, underlining, italics and bold.
- About emergency appeal letters: express that your organization is making changes so that it can be more effective. Show the positive, creative aspects of the organization despite its financial struggle. Convey confidence even while communicating intense need. Give a deadline date specifying the total amount you need to raise, showing donors that their gift is part of a larger context and continuum, and reinforcing the urgency of your appeal.