

*Section***Six**

**Popular
Fundraising
Techniques**

*To Get You
Started*

VI Popular Fundraising

Techniques To Get You Started

Activities, Events

One of the most popular fundraising techniques used by libraries is the special event or activity. Special events not only raise money, they also allow you to identify potential new funders for various other fundraising programs (see the glossary for a description of various fundraising programs). In addition, special events create participation, promote visibility, attract media attention and generate excitement.

Types of Special Events

- Book Sales
- Auctions
- Recognition Functions
- Sporting Events
- Author Dinners
- Home Garden Tours

Events or activities are fundraisers at which libraries excel. Many libraries hold dinner dances, raffles, book sales, etc. The Collingwood Public Library developed an unusual fundraiser, called "Forging Ahead", from which they cleared \$4,000 (after expenses). A group of local artists were asked to paint replicas of famous paintings. The 67 paintings were displayed in the library's gallery for a month and then auctioned off at a party held at the library. Tickets to the auction cost \$5, including refreshments. The artists, who normally receive 80% of the profits from any sale from the library gallery, agreed to a 50/50 split once the listed price of what they wanted for the painting had been reached. The Collingwood Public Library sold \$5,500 worth of paintings and approximately \$400 worth of tickets.

The type of special event is only limited by the imagination of the library's Board and staff. It should be mentioned, however, that special events are very labour intensive. They require a lot of work to organize and the return in actual dollars is not as great as with some other fundraising techniques. Although cost figures can be cut down by donations of facilities, food, or entertainment, such donations should not be allowed to obscure the real costs.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the less tangible benefits of such events or activities, such as generating visibility and excitement, help to support future fundraising efforts.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is a very popular fundraising technique. All of us have received a request for donations by mail. However, a distinction should be drawn between mass direct mail and more targeted direct mail.

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Mass direct mail programs require sophisticated mailing lists and can be used up to four times per year. From the fundraiser's point of view, mass direct mail is the most expensive way to raise money and shows the least immediate return on monies invested. If you choose to lease a mailing list from another charitable organization, the first mailing can cost as much as \$1.50 per dollar raised from an estimated 1% response. The cost of the second and third mailing to those who responded to the first mailing is sharply reduced to perhaps 22 cents, or even less, for each dollar raised.⁴⁵ Since 40% of the people who respond will continue to send donations, a solid donor base is created.⁴⁶ However, it takes three to five years of aggressive mailing before a significant revenue is seen. Consequently, it is important to decide whether the high costs and the length of time before a return is seen warrants the use of this fundraising technique.

More targeted direct mail, to a specific group of people, should be considered when a list of prospects (see below) has been developed.

The Windsor Public Library Board has established a Judith McLean Memorial Fund, named in memory of the previous Manager of the Riverside Branch. This fund was set up to receive donations towards a new Riverside Library. Letters describing the purpose of the fund and signed by the Manager of the Riverside Branch were sent to all Windsor Public Library staff both present and past, present and past Board members, Judith's friends and family, and all institutions and organizations in the community with which Judith worked during her lifetime. In addition, one member of the Friends of the Riverside Library group, who is also on City Council, wrote to various significant people within the community, asking them to contribute to the fund. Because the mail campaign was so targeted, the Riverside Branch has had a 20% response rate.

Four points to look at in direct mail are:

- percent return (how many responses do you receive?)
- dollar average (how large are the gifts that you receive?)
- dollar returned for dollar spent (is it profitable?)
- the quality of the donor you bring in (is this person capable of giving more and frequently?).⁴⁷

When a donor receives a letter, his/her first reaction to your copy is “What’s the pitch?” It’s important to answer this basic question early. Then the heart of your message should be what the gift will do.⁴⁸ Don’t try to explain everything about your organization. Pick your strongest program or need and write about it.⁴⁹ A specific statement on what you’ll do with the donation gives legitimacy to the appeal. Keep in mind that your donor will want to accomplish a specific goal by making the gift.⁵⁰ Don’t be afraid to get emotional about the cause, but keep your language simple.⁵¹ Finally, adjust the letter to ensure that it reads smoothly.⁵²

In addition to content, certain techniques can be used to make the letter more effective:

- writing a P.S. that summarizes the pitch;
- including pictures (with captions) which attract attention;
- underlining or indenting important passages;
- ensuring that a key person in the organization signs the letter;
- listing the Board of Directors;⁵³
- personalizing the letter by writing the first draft as if you were writing to a specific person--preferably a specific typical donor whom you know personally--then altering the letter where necessary for a more mass readership;⁵⁴
- making the letter more you-centred (the reader) than I-centred (your organization).⁵⁵

The letter needs to be supported by all the other parts of your package--from the outer envelope to the response form. If you don’t work equally hard at writing closely-related copy for the other pieces, the effort you’ve just put into your letter may be for nothing.⁵⁶

Telemarketing

Telemarketing (contacting prospective donors by phone) is another favoured method among fundraisers. With this personal approach, you reach out to potential new donors and retain contact with past donors. There is immediate feedback. Your telemarketers can answer specific questions and conduct donor research. When done consistently, telemarketing can be very effective.

Telemarketing can also be combined with other fundraising techniques. It is most successful when it is combined with direct-mail efforts. Telemarketing is also effective when coupled with a membership program, since it allows you to reach out to new membership candidates, service and listen to current members, sell benefits of association membership, upgrade members to new levels of membership, and most important of all, let members and prospective members know your library cares.⁵⁷

Fundraising *Kit*

When planning a telemarketing campaign, it is important to think about who will actually be calling on behalf of your organization. If you choose to have volunteers make the calls, you should probably consider providing them with a standard approach to the solicitation as well as training them in telephone etiquette. Your library could gain a poor reputation if your telemarketers are inarticulate, wooden, rude or discourteous. Volunteers, however, are valuable telemarketers because they are not perceived as having anything to gain personally from the solicitation.