

The Charity First Series

MAJOR GIFT FUNDRAISING

Taking the Plunge

James K Myers

The Charity First series aims to provide practical and straightforward guidance on the challenges confronting charity operations today, with fundraising in the spotlight. Its individual subjects range from those concentrating on the UK and Ireland to non-profit issues in the EU and other jurisdictions, from traditional to digital fundraising and from basic help for those just entering the third sector to specialist areas for the more experienced.

For further information and orders see www.charityfirstseries.org

This sample consists of brief extracts from one title in the series.

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INTRODUCTION

Major gift fundraising can all too easily be seen as a field too mysterious to penetrate, but the essential elements of a successful major gift fundraising effort are reasonably accessible. So why not give it a go? For the effort expended on getting relatively small gifts you might equally well attract a much larger one. In today's world, with funding from statutory sources withdrawn or at risk, this would be no bad thing. Major gifts can be sought not only for specific projects but also for core funding. Whether it be for a particular purpose or overall expansion or simply survival, major gifts could be your answer.

What constitutes a major gift? There are no universal thresholds. For some charities, a £500 donation would be considered major, for others the figure might be £5,000 and for a lucky few, we might be talking millions. In every case, no matter what the amount, the effort requires the same careful preparation, discipline and diligence. Even so, the world of major gift fundraising can bring surprises, both good and bad.

Embarking on the adventure trail of major gifts is an exhilarating voyage of ups and downs through which the determination to see the success of your cause will sustain you. There should also be a bonus, besides the gifts, and that is the friendships that should result from your endeavours. Cherish them!

Are you ready to take the plunge?

For simplicity, donors will be referred to as 'he' throughout this text but do not infer that 'she' donors do not count in the fundraising equation – they count very much, indeed.

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IT STARTS WITH YOU

No one likes asking for money but it can and should become so much more than a simple request. Think in terms of bridge building, donor satisfaction, how we can all make a difference, and achieving a reason for celebration and total joy.

You, the fundraiser, whether a paid staff member or unpaid volunteer, obviously need to have real enthusiasm for your charity's cause. The type of cause will, of course, influence the direction of your general and major gift fundraising strategy. Consider your charity's mission against a backdrop of other similar charitable causes in your sector or community and look at how they operate their own major gift fundraising campaigns.

Then think about how to differentiate your charity's mission in your own approach to donors. Imagine the differences between appealing for an animal charity on the one hand and an art museum on the other. Or imagine fundraising for Tate Britain compared with your local art gallery. Both are deserving causes but the fundraising strategies will necessarily be quite different.

Next, consider your available resources in terms of time and staff. Think in terms of fundraising precepts such as the 80/20 truism – in this case that 80% of your funds may well come from 20% of your donor pool.

So how do you start your approach to potential major donors? Some of the steps suggested below may sound obvious, but they are included because they're fundamental to success.

The Cause

As I have already pointed out, if you're not enthusiastic, the potential donor won't be either. Define the cause as you see it so that it is crystal clear. If the desired gift is for a particular project, be ready to convince your listeners that the objective is essential for the charity's mission.

Jan Jennings Cailleux, of Viking Consulting Services, a Paris-based international fundraising consultancy, stresses the need to build a bridge between the charity's mission and the donor. 'Listening to why and how the donor has been touched by the cause and the charity and conveying how the donor's gift will make a difference are essential,' she says. 'Making the donors feel they will touch others and advance the mission is integral to securing a major gift.'

At all costs, avoid what is known as 'smash and grab' fundraising, i.e. coming across to donors as being unprepared and in a hurry – 'you've got money and we need it!' Go to meetings prepared to explain the need for the gift or the project and be able to answer questions put by the donor and his advisers (who may well be present, as may representatives of foundations).

Have with you all budgets, costings, plans and anything else you might need to make the best possible presentation of the project or cause. And don't forget to listen!

Involving the Trustees

The trustees of your charity must be closely and continuously involved in this process right from the beginning. There are two basic ways in which they can support you: by discussing and agreeing the fundraising plan; and by opening up their Rolodexes and helping you to solicit. Indeed this might call for the creation of a development committee, made up of one

Text of full version continues / ...

About the author James Myers is the founder of the European Association for Philanthropy and Giving (EAPG), a not-for-profit membership body that brings charities, legal advisers and financial intermediaries together for more effective and efficient philanthropy. He is also a partner of Social Partnership Marketing LLP. Jim is American by birth but has spent virtually all his adult life in Europe, mainly France and now the UK. Earlier in his career he co-founded the European-American Tax Institute in Paris.

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