



Overcoming Obstacles to Raising Major Gifts



It is human nature to gravitate to those tasks where we feel skilled and confident and to avoid those which are more unfamiliar. So it is with many fundraisers and major gift fundraising. They can imagine raising many small gifts, but they have a harder time turning their attention to raising large gifts (defined by whatever dollar amount makes them gasp).

Based on research, we know that nearly four-fifths of all charitable gifts come from individuals, and about 90 percent of gifts come from approximately 10 percent of donors.

We also know that individuals are giving more than in years past, but they are giving to fewer organizations. What this means for nonprofits is that focusing on major gift donors is not only cost effective, but time efficient. Here are a few strategies for overcoming obstacles to major gift fundraising:

Start with who you know. Consider who cares most about the organization. Ask staff and board members who they know who might be interested in learning more about the mission. Ask if you can use their name to open doors of introduction. Since those who volunteer with a nonprofit are more likely to give when asked, review your list of volunteers to see if any may have influence, affluence or both. Don't ask them for money ... yet. Ask for their insights and expertise.

Listen to learn. As you begin to identify people who have the capacity to give a significant gift, consider ways to cultivate a relationship. Ask them questions and really listen to what they have to say. Use the 75/25 rule: Listen 75-percent of the time and only speak for the remaining 25 percent. If you're talking more than 25 percent of the time, you're doing it wrong.

Ask intentionally. Take the information you gleaned from listening, along with research-based intel, in order to formulate a specific ask. If you can, take someone along who they know and respect—someone who has given a gift of their own. Don't ask for a range. Ask for a specific dollar amount. "The right person asking the right person for the right amount."

Finally, don't forget to show appreciation for major gifts in a way that is honoring and tailored to the individual donor—one that increases the potential for even larger gifts in the future, including legacy giving.

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