

Fundraising

Best Practices in Individual Fundraising



Top 5 Tips for Successful Individual Fundraising

1. **People give to people.** People give when they are asked, and especially when they are asked by someone they know, so focus on building strong relationships. Cultivate a cadre of volunteer fundraisers who give themselves, care deeply about your cause, and are willing to reach out to their connections on your behalf. Grassroots community fundraising of this sort is especially effective for school garden projects. Focusing on the people will help clarify who are the best people to ask and who are not. (See Donor-Centric Pledge on reverse)
2. **Communicating your unique value is key.** Develop an “elevator pitch” that conveys your vision and impact—NOT your programs—in 30 seconds. When asked, “What does your organization do?” it’s tempting to talk about the details of your project, but people don’t often remember details. If you say, “We know this school garden will help every child in this community learn and become healthier,” the impression you leave is much more compelling.
3. **Share stories of success about real people.** Once you can communicate your “big picture” vision and value, find at least one anecdote that inspires you to share with prospective supporters. Transformation and impact on lives move people to action.
4. **Be transparent about your needs.** It’s helpful to have one page that shows your budget that you can share with donors who ask. You can develop a simplified version by using your grant project budget as a guideline. Beyond money, what else do you need? New supporters, happy supporters, advocates, volunteers, visibility, hay bales?
5. **Be social—go where your audience is.** These days, it’s essential to have an online presence: without one, you are not part of the conversation. One of the easiest, and most effective, ways of doing this is to share photos. Not only do photographs comprise the “most shared content” online, they also communicate the transformative power of school gardens particularly well. Who could argue that smiling kids holding fresh vegetables and getting their hands dirty isn’t a cause worth supporting?

The Donor-Centric Pledge

Fundraising Panel
Take Home 5 of 11
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Written by Simone Joyaux and Tom Ahern from *Keep Your Donors: The Guide to Better Communications and Stronger Relationships*.

The Donor-Centric Pledge

We, [fill in the name of your nonprofit organization here], believe that...

1. Donors are essential to the success of our mission.
2. Gifts are not “cash transactions.” Donors are not merely a bunch of interchangeable, easily replaceable credit cards, checkbooks and wallets.
3. No one “owes” us a gift just because our mission is worthy.
4. Any person who chooses to become our donor has enormous potential to assist the mission.
5. Having a program for developing a relationship with that donor is how organizations tap that enormous potential.
6. We waste that potential when donors are not promptly thanked.
7. “Lifetime value of a donor” is the best (though often overlooked) way to evaluate “return on investment” in fundraising.
8. Donors are more important than donations. Those who currently make small gifts are just as interesting to us as those who currently make large gifts.
9. Acquiring first-time donors is easy, but keeping those donors is hard.
10. Many first-time gifts are no more than “impulse purchases” or “first dates.”
11. We’ll have to work harder for the second gift than we did for the first.
12. A prerequisite for above-average donor retention is a well-planned donor-centric communications program that begins with a welcome.
13. Donors want to have faith in us, and it’s our fault if they don’t.
14. Donors want to make a difference in the world—and our mission is one of many means to that end.
15. Donors are investors. They invest in doing good. They expect their investment to prosper, or they’ll invest somewhere else.
16. We earn the donor’s trust by reporting on our accomplishments and efficiency.
17. Individual donors respond to our appeals for personal reasons we can only guess at.
18. Asking a donor why she or he gave a first gift to us will likely lead to an amazingly revealing conversation.
19. Fundraising serves the donors’ emotional needs as much as it serves the organization’s financial needs.
20. We are in the “feel good” business. Donors feel good when they help make the world a better place.
21. A prime goal of fundraising communications is to satisfy basic human needs, such as the donor’s need to feel important and worthwhile.
22. The donor’s perspective defines what is a “major gift.” (For example, a repeat donor of \$25 annual gifts who suddenly increases her gift ten-fold to \$250 is making a major commitment that deserves special acknowledgement.)
23. Every first gift can open a door to an entirely new world for the donor through participation in our cause.