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# HOW TO RAISE **\$50,000** IN SIX WEEKS

BY KIM KLEIN

## A STORY OF TWO RELIABLE VOLUNTEERS

### Mary Ellen

Mary Ellen has agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to contact 20 donors who have not given in the past two years to the art museum where she volunteers; she will be asking them to renew their gift. She is given training, a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs), and the names and phone numbers of the donors. Every week she gets an e-mail from the development director reminding her to contact her list. Every so often she takes out the folder and looks at the list of names, then, feeling overwhelmed, puts it away, promising herself she will do it later.

Six weeks into the campaign, the development director calls to see how Mary Ellen is progressing. As she listens to the cheerful and encouraging message, Mary Ellen feels fortunate she was not at home for this call. She gets out the list. She reviews the FAQs, but she has forgotten some of the training and feels nervous and ill prepared. "I should have done this sooner," she thinks, and puts the list away again.

After several weeks, the Chair of the committee calls and asks, "How are you coming with your calls?"

"Oh, I am going to finish this week" Mary Ellen says, hoping he will not ask too much more.

"That's good. How much have you raised so far?" he asks.

"I'm not sure — I don't have the list right here."

"That's OK — just let the office know when you are finished," he concludes and hangs up.

Feeling she has practically dodged a bullet, Mary Ellen begins her calls. Ten people aren't home. Two people don't remember the letter that had been sent out two months ago. One person says he hates phone solicitors. Another agrees to renew. After an hour, Mary Ellen stops, planning to finish the following day. But the next two days are full of unexpected guests and she never finishes her calls.

When the chair of the campaign reviews the results with the development director, they agree that Mary Ellen is not as reliable as she seems.

### José

José is on the board of the local Friends of the Library. Somewhat reluctantly, he agrees to phone three donors each week for the next six weeks. He is given three names on Monday that he is to have called by Friday and is instructed to ask each of them to increase their gift by 50 percent. He stares at the three names on Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday he gets a call from the development director. "This has to be done by Friday to stay on track," she reminds him. Thursday morning he gets a text message from the chair of the campaign: "Don't 4get 2 make yr calls." He gets out the list, starts at the top and is done in fifteen minutes. One gift, one not home, one disconnected number. "That wasn't so hard," he thinks, and calls the office to get three more names.

## USING URGENCY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

I believe that all of us are like both Mary Ellen and José. The longer we have to do something, the longer we will take to do it. The bigger the task, the more overwhelmed we will feel, and many of us will then put it off. In fundraising, we take this aspect of human nature into account by creating goals and timelines and challenge grants and year-end appeals.

One strategy that many organizations can experiment with is the one that worked with José in our story: raising a large amount of money in a very short time frame. This kind of intensive short-term campaign allows an organization to bring people in who are not going to volunteer year round or who may not be appropriate as board members, but who will participate in a time-limited effort.

Competitive people love these campaigns — they are like a game in which a number of things have to be done in order to win. People compete with each other to bring in the most money, and they compete to complete the goal. People who hate fundraising (can you think of anyone like that?) love a campaign like this because they know it is going to be over soon. All they have to do is work hard for six weeks and then they are done, and they do not have to agree to do any other fundraising for the rest of the year.

## WHY SIX WEEKS?

There is no absolute magic about six weeks. However, having experimented with campaigns of many different lengths, I have found six weeks to be about as long as a group of volunteers can sustain an intensive fundraising push. Eight weeks is psychologically a lot longer (two months sounds a lot longer than six weeks). Four weeks is a little too short to get the job done, and it does not allow any leeway for when something may go wrong. Even in two- and three-year campaigns, we notice that, with many exceptions, volunteers tend to work hard for short spurts, then drop back, then come back and work hard again for a time.

## WHY \$50,000?

It's good to choose a nice, round number that sets a reachable goal. In fact, you can use this campaign format to raise any amount of money, so it's important not to get stuck on \$50,000. If you have never done this kind of thing before, consider setting a lower goal. If you have some really major donors, consider setting a higher goal.

People often ask me, "Can you really raise \$50,000 in six weeks?" Of course. In fact, you can raise \$50,000 in ten minutes if you know the right person! But most organizations that have an established donor base from whom they raise \$50,000 or more every year, and who have some experience with personal solicitation, find that they can ramp up their fundraising to take on this kind of campaign.

## HOW IT WORKS

There are ten steps to this campaign.

### Step 1: Identify a reason to have the campaign and set a goal

These intensive campaigns are perfect for small capital needs: a van, a new heating or air-conditioning system, a renovation to make a bathroom wheelchair-accessible, and so on. Many people have used this strategy to send staff and board to conferences (such as last summer's US Social Forum) or to demonstrations, or they have used it to raise money to redesign a website or launch an organizing campaign.

You can use this strategy as part of an annual fundraising drive with no specific need attached: this is our annual major gifts drive and it lasts for six weeks. However, it often works better to have a specific reason that you need the money in this time frame.

### Step 2: Choose a 10-week time period to conduct the campaign

In all, development staff will need a ten-week period of time; the volunteers will work for six weeks during that time. Staff will need two to three weeks to get everything in place, find and train volunteers, and create materials. After that, the campaign itself is six weeks long, with another week at the end for final follow-up, thank you notes, and evaluation by staff.

### Step 3: Develop materials

You do not need any fancy materials for this kind of campaign. However, you will need the following:

- A one- or two-page description of the campaign need and goal: what it's for, why it's exciting (see sample, next page)
- A template of a letter to be sent to donors (see sample, next page)
- Return envelopes and reply devices (you can create a reply device for this campaign, but you should use your regular return envelopes)
- FAQs for volunteers and any other brief supporting materials that may be helpful to them (newsletters, photos, and so on)

### Step 4: Create a simple gift range chart

Your gift range chart will help you figure out how many prospects you will need and what size gifts you are looking for. Here is an example:

**Goal: \$50,000**

NUMBER OF GIFTS	SIZE	TOTAL
2	\$5,000	\$10,000
4	2,500	10,000
10	1,000	10,000
20	500	10,000
40	250	10,000
<b>76 gifts</b>		<b>\$50,000</b>

You will need about twice as many prospects as the number of gifts you want. To be safe, you will want to identify three or four prospects for each gift of \$1,000 and up because many people will say, "I can't give that much" and will give less. Remember that about half of prospects, when asked personally, will say yes, and half of those agreeing to give something will give you less than what you ask for.

You can create gift range charts for whatever amount you are trying to raise. Here is a gift range chart for an organization wanting to continue providing health insurance to their employees. Their insurance provider has just raised their rates by \$10,000 per year and the organization cannot afford that sudden increase.

**Goal: \$10,000**

NUMBER OF GIFTS	SIZE	TOTAL
1	\$2,000	\$2,000
2	1,000	2,000
4	500	2,000
10	250	2,500
15	100	1,500
<b>32 gifts</b>		<b>\$10,000</b>

This group will need about 65 prospects to complete their goal. Of course, you can also lower the gift amounts (which will mean increasing the number of gifts you need), but in general if you go through the trouble of sending a personalized letter and following up with a phone call, you want to ask for at least \$100.

### **Step 5: Determine the number of volunteers you need and invite them to join this effort**

In these intensive campaigns we usually find that one person can ask three people a week for the six-week period, so each volunteer will ask a total of 18 people.

To figure out how many volunteers you need, take the number of prospects you need (in the first example above, 160 prospects) and divide that by six weeks to get the number of prospects who must be asked each week to keep the campaign on track:

$$\begin{aligned} &160 \text{ prospects} \\ &\text{divided by 6 weeks} = \\ &27 \text{ prospects per week} \end{aligned}$$

If one person were to do this alone, he or she would need to contact 27 people a week — a fairly overwhelming task. Using volunteers, and assuming each volunteer can reasonably contact three people per week, divide the number of prospects who must be contacted each week by three to get the number of volunteers you need. In this example, you need nine good, reliable volunteers to form your committee.

Who are these volunteers? Some of these people are the usual suspects: a few board members, former staff, people who always help you. But this is also a chance to bring in other people, such as vendors, neighbors, long-time donors, former clients, people who have said to you, “If you ever need help, let me know.” This is a brief and relatively easy way for people like that to help out your organization.

The volunteers must make their own gift first, both to demonstrate their commitment and to make it easier for them to ask others to do what they have done. An added bonus is that when you start your six weeks, you already have some gifts — often some of the bigger ones. The solicitors must care about your cause, be friendly and warm, comfortable asking for

## Sample Campaign

### THE NEED AND THE GOAL

Since 1980, Greenforks Respite Center’s mission has been two-fold: it provides a crucial break, support, and education for people caring for a loved one who is impaired due to Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s disease, stroke, and related disorders; and it creates opportunities for those challenged by living with disease to enjoy a higher quality of life.

Greenforks Respite Center strives to enable adult day program participants to lead full lives, allowing them to make their own choices while enjoying dignity and respect in their daily lives. Program participants are encouraged to reach their maximum level of individual potential, independence, and self-esteem. The program provides socialization and recreation in a safe and compassionate environment.

To enhance the lives of our program participants, we want to create an outdoor garden where they can wander safely on their own. We have a space about the size of half a football field that we wish to enclose with a ten-foot-high solid wooden fence, landscape simply with benches, a few picnic tables and chairs, and beautify with grass and flowers. We have people who will donate the labor to create this enclosed garden space, and materials are being sold to us at cost. We must raise \$50,000 to purchase the needed materials and complete the project. Our goal is to raise this money by the end of February so that we can finish all the work in March and open the space in late April.

### SAMPLE LETTER

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

*As a long-time donor/volunteer with Greenforks Respite Center, you know the quality of our work. I hope you also know that we couldn’t do any of it without you.*

*Greenforks grew out of the grassroots effort of a small group of people in need of day care for their spouses or parents who were suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or debilitated from the effects of Parkinson’s disease, a stroke, or other conditions. We started out as a program that met one day a week; now we are a full-service, state-licensed, adult day program that operates Monday through Friday in two four-hour shifts. We offer a dementia caregiver support group twice weekly (average weekly attendance: 23) and ongoing information, support, and referral services.*

*You may know that one element our program lacks is the chance for our participants to be out-of-doors on their own. A few years ago, we purchased the vacant lot behind our building and we now have permission to enclose it with a wooden fence and make it into a wonderful small, park-like space where participants can wander without any danger of getting lost or hurt.*

*Youth groups from three churches and a synagogue are donating labor under the skilled direction of a master carpenter and a landscape architect. Our local hardware store has arranged for us to buy everything we need at cost. So a project that could easily have cost \$120,000 can be done for less than half that — only \$50,000!*

*Our goal is to raise this money in the next six weeks so we can have the space ready to use by early spring. I am working with a small team of people to meet this goal. We have each made our own gift and pledged to raise another \$5,000. I am hoping you can help with a gift in the range of \$500 to \$1,000, and I’d like to talk with you more about this project. I know you have many requests and I want to answer any questions you have about ours. I’ll call you in the next few days to follow up.*

*Thanks in advance for every consideration.*

Best always,  
YOUR NAME

money on the phone, persistent in doing follow-up, and able to work on a team.

There are people who meet all these criteria except the last one — ability to work on a team. These people should be used in some aspect of fundraising, but not in this kind of campaign. You don't want someone running into a colleague and deciding then and there to ask them for money without regard to the fact that this colleague has already been asked by someone else.

### Step 6: Invite volunteers to a meeting to create the master prospect list

When doing this campaign — as with any campaign — it is important that you ask *prospects* and not just nice people or people with money or people you know. All of those qualities might be part of what makes a person a prospect, but your campaign will sputter to a quick stop if you are not careful about identifying your prospects.

A prospect is someone who meets three criteria:

A) They are *able* to make a gift of the size you are requesting.

B) They *believe* on your cause enough that you think they might consider the gift you are requesting, assuming they meet criteria A.

C) You or someone on your team is able to *contact* this person. Although they may be a stranger to you, they are a friend or colleague of someone on your team or they are a long-time donor to your organization. There is no “cold calling” involved here.

At your meeting, brainstorm names of prospects. You should bring in the names of anyone who has given for the past three years. That list will get volunteers started. Don't criticize any names at first. Just write them down on a flip chart or a blackboard. Let the volunteers say “Bono” and “Leonardo diCaprio” if they want. Some volunteers may have names of friends and relatives that they don't want to have recorded in this public way — that's fine. Just make sure you get *all* the names of people to be solicited before any solicitation takes place to ensure that no one is solicited twice and to make sure you have enough prospects.

After brainstorming, go through each name and confirm that person meets the criteria to be a prospect. Many names will be eliminated because no one knows them. Some eager volunteers will want to write to Paul Newman or Bill Gates anyway. “It can't hurt,” they argue. True, and they are welcome to do that. However, those names can't count toward their assignment of three names a week.

Be careful that when you discuss whether someone believes in your cause you don't fall back on the idea that “Everyone believes in our cause.” There are many causes that someone might feel fine about and might even hope succeed, but they don't care enough about that particular issue to make a gift. Most of your qualified prospects will

either be current donors to the organization who are going to be asked for an extra gift, or they will be friends of the volunteers on the committee.

After this meeting is over, create a master prospect list against your gift range chart, as follows:

**Goal: \$50,000**

NUMBER OF GIFTS	SIZE	TOTAL	NAMES
2	\$5000	\$10,000	1) Bill 2) Mary 3) Arnoldo 4) Tiffany
4	2,500	10,000	1) Emiko 2) Hillary 3) Frances 4) Helen 5) Nancy 6) Raj 7) Sunny 8) Jaden
10	1,000	10,000	etc.
20	500	10,000	
40	250	10,000	
<b>76 gifts</b>		<b>\$50,000</b>	

You do not need all your prospects right now, but you will need prospects for the bigger gifts in order to give your campaign momentum and to ensure success. In this example, if all your prospects were at the \$250 level, it is unlikely that you would make your goal.

### Step 7: Invite the volunteers to a meeting where the campaign is launched

Technically, the launch meeting can occur at the same meeting at which the committee brainstorms prospect names. If your volunteers are coming from a distance you may want to do both the prospect identification and the launch at the same time.

When moving into the launch, go over the message and the materials for the campaign in detail. Have people practice follow-up phone calls and dealing with difficult or rude prospects. Remind volunteers that a lot of people are going to say no. Here are some things that volunteers should keep in mind about hearing no for an answer:

- **Some people may say, “I have to think about it”** or “I have to ask my husband,” and that may be what they have to do. Don't hear no when the person hasn't said no. However, sometimes people say things like that and they mean no.

- **When someone says no**, just remember that you are that much closer to a yes with the next person (because half overall will say yes).

- **Don't take it personally** when someone says no — it has nothing to do with you. Some people dislike being called; most people have a lot on their minds and sometimes can't pay attention to any other requests; some people have already given what they are going to give this year; some people may not be that thrilled with how you are going to use the money or may think some other cause is more pressing. Just thank them and move on.

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The idea of this kind of campaign is that it is fast: the request is “Can you help with this much at this time?” In this strategy there is not a lot of cultivation or giving the donor lots of time to think about their response.

Send out the first round of letters either right before or immediately after the launch meeting. Give people their first three names. Ideally, the meeting is held on a Friday or a Monday and each volunteer has one week to complete asking the people whose names they received.

It is tempting to give each person all of their names at once and to send out all the letters at once. It is more efficient and if they can't reach the first three, they can go on to the next three. The problem with this approach, as we saw in the opening story, is that people feel overwhelmed with more than three names and they also assume they have time to get their calling done “later”—after all, they have six weeks. We all know how we think that the week after next week is going to be better than this week.

So although it seems more efficient to give out the names all at once, it is more effective to give out three names at a time to follow up on three letters. This means some weeks will be easy (everyone is available when they are called and they all make a gift) and some weeks will be hard (it will take four tries to reach one person, another person will be rude and dismissive, and a volunteer will talk for 45 minutes to the third person only to have them tell you how sorry they are that they can't help you).

#### **Step 8: Keep in close touch with the volunteers**

Each week the people on the committee get three more names. Daily e-mails let the team know how well they are doing. Post something about the campaign on your website and have a visual there that shows how close you are to your goal. If anyone falls behind, they should be called by the chair of the committee and encouraged.

#### **Step 9: Around the fourth week, rally the team**

Often all goes well until about the fourth week of the campaign. Volunteers then begin to flag. The easiest prospects have been asked and the biggest gifts are usually in. Now it will take a lot of \$100 gifts to get to the goal.

Have a meeting in the fourth week and rally the team for the final push. Go over the prospect list again and make sure you have enough prospects to finish the campaign. Volunteers will have thought of new people as they go along and you can add in those names.

#### **Step 10: At the end of the sixth week, close the campaign**

Regardless of how much money you've raised, once volunteers have worked on the campaign for six weeks, consider it over. Have a party. It would be great if you have met your goal, but even if you haven't, celebrate what you have done and see what you have learned and what you would do differently the next time.

This kind of campaign appeals to a certain kind of person, both as a volunteer and a donor. It is not a substitute for cultivation and for building deeper relationships with donors, but it is a fun and lucrative way to get a good chunk of money in quickly.

A campaign such as this is a good way to bring back lapsed donors, sometimes to upgrade current major donors, to seek extra gifts for something not in the budget, and to expand your donor base to the friends and colleagues of the team that is working on the campaign. Many organizations have found that they develop a core group of people who volunteer every year for this short campaign, which over the long term can reliably boost your overall fundraising. **GFJ**

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