365 Ways to Raise Funds for Your Nonprofit

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Practical Ideas for Every Not-for-Profit Organization

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Universal-Publishers
Boca Raton

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Universal-Publishers
Boca Raton, Florida • USA
2011

ISBN-10: 1-61233-030-4
ISBN-13: 978-1-61233-030-3

www.universal-publishers.com

Cover photo @Cutcaster.com/Cienpies Design

Author cover photo by Ben Van Sickle

Cover design by Shereen Siddiqui

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jervis, April R., 1981-
365 ways to raise funds for your nonprofit : practical ideas for every not-for-profit organization / April R. Jervis.
p. cm.
ISBN-13: 978-1-61233-030-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-61233-030-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Fund raising. 2. Nonprofit organizations. I. Title.
HV41.2.J47 2011
658.15'224--dc23

2011028257

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to my husband, Marc Mar-Yohana, a real renaissance man, for his sense of humor and friendship. Marc, I hope our children get your intelligence and my punctuality. I would like to thank my daughter Constance for filling my life with joy and love. Constance, without you, I would not need to write a book to save for your college fund.

I would like to thank my mother, Cindy Wolavka, for spending hours helping me to learn to read, amongst countless other things. Thank you to my stepfather, Robert Wolavka, for encouraging my graduate school education and for patiently listening during the innumerable calls when I complained about it.

I would like to thank my father, Richard Jervis, for helping make my charitable endeavors international in scope and for loaning me his car for years at time despite my driving record. Thank you to my stepmother, Juliet Jervis, for teaching me that adding water is not really cooking.

Special thanks to my grandma, Harriet Vollmer. Her beliefs in God, hard work, and boundless generosity have guided my life. A debt of gratitude is owed to my late grandfather, William Vollmer, who never mentioned that when I was a child he rescued me from a boating accident.

Thanks to my siblings Nicholas Jervis, William Jervis, and Robin Wolavka. Only Nicholas could make a reading of a car's owner manual a laugh out loud theatrical event. Without William's fearlessness we wouldn't have spent an incredibly exhilarating afternoon in an abandoned London carnival. Thanks to Robin for the two-person dance parties and for letting me play with your hair.

I could fill volumes with thanks to friends, so I will limit myself to the help I received with this book. I want to express my gratitude to my friend Carla Kilgore, who helped edit this book. I want to be Carla when I grow up.

I am grateful to those who reviewed this book. They are listed at www.apriljervis.com. Thanks to Jeff Young at Universal Publishers for his help cultivating and publishing this text. I would like to thank you, the reader, for buying a copy of this book and for participating in the world of fundraising. Our communities would be lost without the nonprofit industry's professionals, volunteers, donors, and institutions. You make everything from research to hot lunches possible. Thank you.

About the Author

April R. Jervis is a nonprofit professional with over ten years of experience. She has served as a volunteer, coordinator, trainer, executive director, spokesperson, founder, administrator, and board member for a cornucopia of organizations. April earned a Bachelor of Science from Indiana State University and a Masters of Business Administration from Loyola University of Chicago. She also received a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the United Nation's Mandated Universidad para la Paz (University of Peace). April credits much of her success to the leaders in the nonprofit, social entrepreneurship, and governmental sectors who have mentored and guided her through her career.

April has helped a wide variety of nonprofit organizations improve their operations, manage their resources, create and execute strategic plans, and of course, fundraise. Her causes have ranged from refugee service providers to organizations providing direct care to the disabled.

April is a firm believer in volunteerism. She has donated her time to numerous organizations, beginning with the American Red Cross at age 14. She hopes to live a long life of assistance, and has gratitude to those whose service has made her professional accomplishments possible.

April currently lives with her family in the central United States. She enjoys international travel, following current events, playing games, and trying new restaurants with her husband Marc. She relaxes by cultivating her vegetable garden, watching movies, reading, and listening to podcasts. She cherishes celebrating special occasions with family and friends. She is an avid crafter. April loves reading and playing with her daughter Constance. April and Marc get great pleasure from watching as Constance learns and grows.

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Foreword

Whereas in times of economic abundance, fundraising efforts can rely on the generosity of those with more privileges, times of economic scarcity bring forth another process: fundraising as a community-building event. The tradition of communities coming together to support causes that they believe in is a principle that America is built on. A fundraiser can make one's cause a community experience that brings people together not only to create a better future, but also to foster a more cohesive presence. The process of energizing a community for fundraising is itself a community-building experience that goes beyond simply donating money for a particular cause: the community is strengthened through the collaborative experience of fundraising.

April Jervis' book is based on this paradigm, and provides hundreds of practical examples for application by a diversity of groups to activate and initiate community-building experiences. As a side effect, these events create the funds needed to expand the projects further. The best fundraising efforts result in a mutual experience in which both the giver and the receiver feel equally enriched. We recommend April's book as a pathway towards this destination.

The Deep Democracy Institute is a leadership and consulting non-profit organization with US headquarters and sister organizations in the Ukraine, Russia, Kenya, Netherlands, and the Palestinian territories. We are faced everyday with funding issues, not only those of our own organization, but also of the many organizations that we assist in grant writing. Of the many books that we have encountered on this topic, April Jervis' *365 Ways…* is the most practical and creative text. Its strength lies especially in its solutions for a wide diversity of organizations. Every non-profit is different, and therefore has different funding needs. Jervis has solutions for all of them.

Dr. Max Schupbach & Dr. Ellen Schupbach

The Deep Democracy Institute

FUNDRAISING METHODS

1. Pot Luck to Give a Buck

A pot luck, or pitch-in, as it called in some regions, is an event where each attendee brings a dish and everyone eats together in a buffet format. This makes for an easy, low-overhead fundraiser. Common in religious organizations for years, this type of event can be expanded to nearly any organization. It works best in groups that have a membership base: organizers can ask each member to bring a dish and to contribute. Attendees can be encouraged to donate what they would spend for a lunch out. This creates an atmosphere where individuals can donate as they are able.

For example, I organized a pot luck event for a financial literacy organization that we titled, "Pot Luck to Give a Buck." The title made it clear to attendees that they were being asked to bring food and a few dollars to kick in to the organization, too. As the organizer, I contacted local grocery stores and found one that was willing to donate a $25 gift card to the event. This covered the costs of dishes, silverware, beverages, paper table clothes, and chips. Holding the event in the office served the dual purpose of keeping down costs and exposing members to the organization's location and marketing materials. Attendees used the event as an opportunity to network.

When approaching a grocery store for a donation, keep in mind that most stores:

- Require requests in writing at least a month before the event. Call the location to get the store manager's name. Envelopes addressed to a person are much more likely to get a personal response.

- Give a maximum of $25 in store credit at the store level. For larger donations, you must go through the corporate headquarters giving program. Information about this program is available on corporate websites, typically under the heading "community."

- Require you to come into the store to collect the gift card. Don't bother asking for support from a store that is so far away that you'll burn more than $25 in gas getting there to pick up the card. To save time, purchase the items you need while collecting the card.

• Must have a copy of the tax exempt certificate and federal tax identification number to give you the donation. It is easiest to send a copy of these items with the donation request letter.

• Often wait until the last minute to notify the applicant that they have been granted the donation. If they are not awarding the gift, they may not call at all. To prevent a last minute drive across town, call to follow up on your donation request two weeks before the event.

This event is informal and social in nature, so keep the invitations the same way. I have used personal emails, but you could also use a free online service like Evite.com. The benefit to using Evite over personal email is that they track RSVPs for you. Email, however, provides the benefit of personal contact to help encourage attendance.

Another element to be aware of is that attendees frequently bring dessert items because they are cheap and easy to prepare or purchase. As a result, you may need to supplement the menu by preparing a main dish or having a local restaurant donate one. Prepare labels in advance that show a dish's contents, for instance, "Spaghetti, vegan, and gluten free." Post-its can be colorful and easy, but card stock cards can be used for a more formal occasion. If you need to print labels in advance, ask attendees to RSVP with the type of dish they're bringing. Keep in mind that the more you ask people to bring, the less they're likely to donate in cash at the event. Make it easy to donate with donation tins and a mention of their location. Be sure to mention the importance of the cause in your welcoming speech.

2. LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGN

Letter-writing campaigns are an old standby of fundraising. They have been around since organized mail delivery and still exist today because they are effective. One major development is their increased cost. The cost of stamps, envelopes, ink, paper, and staff time continues to increase. To make this venture a good investment, you should only send letters to individuals with a demonstrated interest in your organization or cause. A great rule of thumb is: if someone has donated before, they are likely to do so again. Just don't ask too frequently or they'll take their money somewhere they feel it is more appreciated.

Some corporations sell lead lists to charities with the names and addresses of individuals they believe are likely donors. I have worked with organizations where this has been helpful and others where it has not. I recommend not taking the gamble if your resources are limited.

There are a couple of simple ways to construct your own mailing lists. Begin your list with past donors. I recommend using a simple data management tool to input the names and addresses that can easily be used in a mail merge. Then add recent event attendees and past supporters. Finally, look for individuals in the community who are in fields that make it probable that they will see the value of your work. For instance, if you are raising money for a blood bank, consider sending solicitations to healthcare professionals in the area. Many corporations list their key employees' names and titles on their websites.

Keep in mind the following additional tips when constructing a letter of solicitation:

• Begin with a call to action. Catch the recipient's attention and explain why they should act now. You will need to show the value of your cause and persuade the donor to act immediately. Statistics often work well.

• Make it personal. Address it to the person and don't misspell their name.

• Include sincere thanks for previous support. Discuss what the organization has done that has made a difference in the local community of the recipient.

• If you are hoping for a large amount of money, consider a hand written note and business card, too.

• Do everything you can to avoid looking like a mass mailing. If you can hand-sign each letter and/or hand-address each envelope (with the help of volunteers), then do so.

• Make it easy to give by including a donation slip (easily put on the bottom of the letter page) and a return envelope that is preaddressed to you. Include on the donation slip space for credit or debit card information, expiration date, code, signature, and billing zip code. Additionally, include spaces for the donor to check if they have enclosed a check or need to update their address.

3. Amazon Associates

Many corporations have profit sharing programs. Amazon.com's is unique because it is easy to set up online and completely website-based. This partnership provides additional benefits because of the enormous market share of Amazon.com in the retail space. Your supporters are going to shop Amazon.com with or without your participation in the Amazon Associate program; why not get a portion of the sales?

Set up is easy. You'll need your federal tax identification number, physical mailing address, and an Amazon.com account. Go to Amazon.com's site and click on "Amazon Associates." There you can set up an account. The site will take you step-by-step through the process of setting up a widget for your organization's site and/or social networking page. It will provide you the widget code in HTML. You'll simply have to copy it and paste it into your page. If you use an IT company, it's easy for them to insert the code for you if you email it to them. The widget can be anything from a simple link to a large banner advertisement. I prefer the search box because it is unlikely to offend any supporter who comes to your site, and is always in season so it won't have to be updated regularly.

As your supporters visit your site, they will see the Amazon widget advertisement. If they click on it and purchase any item through that link, your organization will receive a portion of the proceeds from the sale. The portion that your organization receives is determined in advance by Amazon and depends on your site's traffic and audience.

Some special tips to keep in mind while setting up your Amazon Associates account include:

- Amazon provides extra rewards for requesting checks less frequently and for transferring funds electronically. If you can wait to receive checks, then it is advantageous to do so.

- Amazon only provides the code for HTML. If you need XML or another type of code, try various free online conversion services to get the code to work. Amazon will not provide any technical support to Associates who need help getting their widgets to work in their sites.

• Use Amazon's link checker to ensure that the widget on your site works before your supporters try to use it. This will ensure that you will receive credit for those purchases.

• When setting up your account, make sure to enter every version of the site address so Amazon knows what traffic is yours.

• You can put more than one widget on your site or widgets on more than one page. Using more than one will increase purchases.

When I set up an Amazon Associates account for a foundation, I made a special webpage for it. Then, I promoted that page through e-newsletters, on other pages of the site, and on our social networking pages. I asked our supporters to bookmark the page and go through it when making their holiday purchases. As a result, Amazon sent us checks for 4% of all sales. The percentage the organization receives from Amazon varies based on the kind and amount of traffic to your site, as well as the products purchased.

4. Dial for Dollars

Recent legislation and public sentiment are against cold calling as a form of fundraising. If you are going to "dial for dollars," call only individuals who have a previous relationship with the organization. Don't call during the work day, dinner time, or late in the evening. This leaves small pockets of time that must be adjusted for time zones.

Have staff and volunteers practice their pitches before they dial anyone. Keep statistics and water close by the phones. Also, keep credit card donation slips and lots of pens handy. You can process the donations after the calls have all been made. Use a voiceover IP service, such as Skype, to make calling cheap and convenient from any computer.

Read the name of the person you're calling before dialing, and be sure to determine correct pronunciation. If anyone in the organization (staff or volunteer) knows the potential donor personally or has spoken to them before, have this person make the call. Begin with a personal and friendly introduction and conclude with a thank you, even if the person does not donate. In my experience, mentioning recent progress on the cause and thanking donors for past support goes a long way to ensure that their donations continue. No matter what, do not hang up on the person or become angry.

5. SILENT AUCTION

A silent auction is an auction where attendees bid on items by writing their names and numbers on a bid sheet. This event is a great supplement to a party or other gathering. Display items you are auctioning behind bid sheets, and make sure there is at least one pen per sheet. Announce to everyone the end time for the auction; this is when the last bid will be accepted and the sheets will be collected. Make sure attendees know what forms of payment are accepted and when and how they will collect their winnings. It is simplest and saves on shipping to provide winners with the goods at the event of the event and to collect their check or credit/debit card information after the auction is completed.

A bid sheet should be one sheet of paper. If you feel there will be a lot of bids, go with the legal-sized sheet. In the past, I have been able to get carbon copy paper that transfers bid information onto a second record sheet from FedEx. Attach each sheet to a clip board if table space is limited. Each bid sheet should contain the following information:

- Name of good and corresponding number placed on good for identification

- Description of good

- Donor of item

- Starting price of auction and retail price of item

- Increments in which bidding can occur. I recommend making this the same for each item to prevent confusion.

• Lines going down sheet for bidders to insert their name, number, and bid

• Space at the bottom of the sheet to record payment information, including the credit/debit card information of the winner, their address, phone, email, and a box to check if they paid in cash or check at the event.

I have organized silent auctions for many different types of nonprofit organizations in many different events, and the secret to success is to not to pay for anything you are auctioning off. All of the auctioned items should be donated by area businesses. You will be surprised and delighted at how eager they are to contribute. Because the auction will have no overhead cost, bids are all profit. Incidentally, I have observed that wine always gets bids.

Attendees may ask you if their purchases are tax deductible. Currently, they can only deduct the amount they spend on the item past its retail value. Their accountant or other tax professional can provide more detailed information.

6. ONLINE AUCTION

An online auction can be a great fundraising tool for organizations with a large sprawling network of supporters. Collect donated items and upload photos of them and logos from their donors onto the site. Write compelling and interesting descriptions. Set a starting bid price well under the actual retail price. Clearly explain any costs and logistics associated with collection of the goods to all bidders. Have a well-advertised start and stop time to the auction. Then let the bidding begin!

Some companies, like 32auctions.com, specialize in online auctions for nonprofit organizations. They allow nonprofits to set different bid increments, buy-it-now prices, and reserve price amounts for each item. These cheap and easy online tools allow even the novice auctioneer to sell goods for their cause. I have used this service for online auctions, and also as a way to build up bids before moving to have the auction conclude in person. It was a great way to expand the audience of a silent auction to all stakeholders.

Some special tips for online auctions are: