

# Major donor fundraising: finding the right strategy

So you've read the books, been on a plethora of training sessions and heard the very best from the conference platforms. Now you just need to get on and do it – raise serious money from major donors. But how do you decide the best strategy for major donor fundraising in your organisation? =mc's expert on major donor fundraising Angela Cluff sets out to answer just that question...

In the last 5 years or so, I've worked with a very wide range of fundraising organisations: large to small, international to local, those with established fundraising and major donor programmes to those with start up operations. Most face at least one (and some all three!) of the following key challenges:

1. the major donor income stream isn't as big as everyone thinks it *should* be. And it's taking much longer to get to the result than anyone thought possible
2. you can't recruit enough (or any!) talented major donor fundraisers to take the programme to the next stage, or perhaps to take the first step
3. the organisation doesn't have the capacity or breadth of experience to really support major donor fundraising

In my experience all of these are very real challenges. But organisations can make very real progress even with these challenges by focusing their attention on the right major donor strategy. To think about this for your organisation, here are 3 questions to focus on:

## What does your organisation *need*?

The key question here is to understand and respond to the role that the major donor income stream needs to play in your fundraising mix. If the need is to achieve this year's budget move fast! Identify your 'best' current prospects, fast track meeting them and involving them closer in the work of your organisation and ASK them for a gift. You may not get **the** gift – the gift you might have got if you'd spent much longer involving the donor and setting up the perfect ask, but you will raise money – if you ask enough prospects.

If, on the other hand, you're building the foundations for a capital campaign that will transform the income of your organisation, then play the long game to secure the right fundraising leadership. Don't compromise in building the right ask to secure the commitment – money and time – that you really need to deliver.

## **What resources do you have?**

Here I don't mean staff, brochures or access to information. The key is finding your **best** prospects quickly. If you have an existing supporter base, look there first. If you are a volunteer based organisation work through the volunteer network. If you are lucky enough to have both, try both. You don't need to do a completely thorough job and identify and then research all possible prospects. Rather you need to be pragmatic – find a manageable number and get on with raising money. Put simply by the time you've finished the preparation you'll have missed opportunities to raise money.

## **What's your experience?**

I think one of the most challenging jobs in fundraising is as a lone major donor fundraiser in an organisation that doesn't have an established track record in nurturing high value individual relationships. And it's even harder if you yourself have limited first hand experience with major donors – you don't have access to guidance and advice. The easy thing to do is to focus exclusively on writing the case, researching prospects, and building organisation support for what you are doing. All very necessary, but they won't generate money. So don't let these activities stop you from approaching real donors and asking for money. You'll make some mistakes and you'll learn. You'll also have some – sometimes surprisingly big – successes. And nothing gets the organisation's attention like success. And then it becomes much easier to get the rest of the organisation to contribute to what you need to make major donor fundraising really fly.

## **Need more help?**

To find out how =mc can help with your major donor strategy, contact **Angela Cluff** on **+44 (0) 20 7978 1516** or email [a.cluff@managementcentre.co.uk](mailto:a.cluff@managementcentre.co.uk).

**We hope you found this download useful and enjoyable.**

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