

Dispelling the myths: the truth about what really works in major donor fundraising

This download is based on a 'big picture' session delivered at the Institute of Fundraising Convention 2008, by Angela Cluff of **=mc**.

The aims of the session were to:

- challenge conventional thinking
- explore why so few organisations achieve their potential from major donors
- provide tips on how to succeed

5 myths and 6 truths and buts...

Statement	Truth or myth?	Key point	Key action
It takes a long time to get a major gift	Truth and myth	You can get a gift in a very short space of time; you may get the gift in a long time	Don't overly focus on the 'perfect' process and ask
Successful capital campaigns are about securing the right lead gift early and working top down	Myth	The lead gift may not be a defined % of the appeal total, may not come early and may come from a surprising source	Focus on leadership or stretch gifts from those closest to create the cascade down and leverage up
All fundraising organisations can develop major donor fundraising	Truth	If the need is powerful and the Board and senior team passionate, they'll find the connections	Focus on your organisation's connections and use them relentlessly
Capital campaigns have a sequential private and public phase	Myth	Generic campaigns need the public phase to create engagement and demonstrate public interest for major donors	Adapt your strategy to fit your cause

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Major donor fundraising is only as good as your prospect research	Truth	Prospect research is vital when focused on the right things: capacity, propensity, connection	Don't let research get in the way of building real relationships
Asking is the job of the volunteer	Myth	The 'best' asking is usually done by a volunteer – but it's not the only route	Sometimes the right thing to do is for the staff to ask
Your supporter base is the right place to look for prospects	Truth	But it's not just your donor base – it's your broader supporter base of local volunteers and beneficiaries	Start with who you know and work rigorously and relentlessly out
A major donor led campaign is a way to transform income	Truth	Major donor campaigns build donors, networks and fundraising skills	Make your campaign a success! Failures are hard to recover from
The rich are different from you and me...yes they have more money	Truth and myth	The quote is true, but major donors aren't different – they want impact and demand more than lower level donors	Understand and respond to the needs of your major donors – however complex they are

In **=mc**'s experience there are 6 reasons why organisations find it so hard to make real progress in major donor fundraising:

1. they want money for existing work, major donors want to fund **more** work. They want to know your vision and your business plan to achieve it, and they want a genuine say in them
2. they don't really want the involvement donors want. Fundraisers know that an important and effective part of the solicitation process is involving donors – and that means asking their advice and views. But the reality is that too often organisations aren't prepared to hear let alone take on board the advice they seek

3. they don't want to ask their best prospects – those closest to the organisation – to make stretch gifts. And until they do, those key individuals don't become true advocates, willing and able, to ask for gifts
4. there are few really experienced major donor fundraisers and even fewer organisations. And those who are really succeeding have a critical mass and sustainability – of technical skills and internal support – from having both individual talent and organisational experience
5. major donor fundraisers move on too quickly – too often major donor fundraisers spend 12-18 months creating an effective case and researching the prospects... and then making their next career move. It's not good for organisations, donors and fundraisers themselves – because they don't build their own bank of experience in successfully securing major gifts
6. too often Boards and senior teams think major donors is a quick fix and then lose faith. In reality it's a 3-5 year income stream. And it is hard to make the right first steps.

There is only one answer! The theory is easy, the practice is extraordinarily hard. So stop reading the theory, go build your experience and that will show you how to apply the theory. Good luck – and call **=mc** if you need help.

Angela Cluff

Institute of Fundraising National Convention 2008

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.

We hope you found this download useful and enjoyable.

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