

Rating And Evaluating Individual Prospects: Whom Do You Ask For How Much?

No one would argue the fact that every fund-raising campaign needs a goal and that everyone connected with the campaign, including prospective donors, needs to be aware of that goal. Then why do people so often fight the setting of a goal for each prospective donor and sharing *that* goal with the prospect? Trustees often blanch at the idea, and it is the rare solicitor who for the first time he or she is told that there will be a suggested giving amount for each of his prospects does not respond with, *"I can't tell people what to give!"*

They're right. Solicitors shouldn't try to tell prospects what to give, as this will engender a great deal of resistance. Yet setting a personal goal for all prospective individual donors, letting prospects know what *their* goal is, and helping them see where and how it fits under the umbrella of the campaign goal, is probably the most important element of a campaign. No matter what sources you are approaching, you need to be ready with a suggested giving amount in line with what each prospective donor is capable of giving. Dealing with foundations, corporations, and government funders in this manner is easy. In fact, it is usually required. Grant application forms have a blank space where you fill in the amount requested. But when it comes to individual donors, we seem to think it is a different kettle of fish. It isn't.

If a fund-raising campaign is to have a realistic chance at succeeding, we must in the case of every prospective donor:

1. Rate and evaluate the ability to give
2. Seek a realistically large---hopefully the maximum---potential gift
3. Provide the donor with a suggested gift amount

This rating and evaluating process applied to as many of our key potential donors as possible will allow us to suggest what we would like them to give. It does not *tell* them what to give. Most prospects will welcome a suggestion of what would be appropriate. People nearly always want to know what the "price" of something is. It is rare that anyone decides to purchase an item without first looking at its price tag. The same is true when it comes to making a philanthropic donation. People want to know how much the soliciting organization needs, and fund-raisers should always have a ready answer. That answer should be a specific dollar amount determined by a rating and evaluating process, but far too often it is:

1. Give what you can: Requesting that multimillionaires give what they can is silly. You seldom are likely to be asking any one person for resources of that magnitude.
2. Give what you are comfortable with: People can be comfortable with giving \$10 when you need \$100 and they could give that and more.
3. We would appreciate a gift in the range of \$ ____ to \$ ____: Asking for a gift, for example, in the range of \$100 to \$1,000 tells the prospect you haven't determined what your real needs are.

You should always suggest a specific number, and that number must be presented in a way that is neither annoying nor demanding. There is only one person who can and will decide the size of the gift---the individual making that gift. However, most prospects will welcome and consider a request made that way.