

## Making "the Ask" for Large Donations: The Visit - the (Almost) Last Step

In the previous two issues of *News Update* (May 2007 and July 2007) we presented articles on how to solicit large donations from potential donors for a capital campaign. The first article discussed determining who your potential large donors are, how much they might be able and willing to give, writing an initial contact letter (samples were provided in the July issue), and following up with a phone call to set up an appointment.

Now it's time to visit your potential donor. This really should be the most exciting part of making "the ask" because if you have been granted the opportunity to visit with this prospect, then you can rest assured that he or she is positively inclined to hear more about the library project and knows that you will be asking for a gift. There is no guarantee that you will get the donation you are hoping for or any donation at all, but at least the potential donor is receptive.

There are a few things you will want to have with you when making the visit. First, you will want to bring a case statement with you along with any other pertinent information that will help answer questions about the project and the campaign. Putting together a kit of materials is critical. The case statement kit should include (but not necessarily be limited to) the following:

- ♦ Executive summary of the project - what you are planning to do and why it is needed.
- ♦ Architectural renderings if the campaign is to support a building project.
- ♦ Budget for the project including how much will be derived by fundraising, how much by city or administrative support, how much by grants, etc.
- ♦ General information about the library.

Being armed with concrete information will help bolster your courage if you need it. So will bringing along a partner who knows the details of the project such as the library director or the president of the Trustees. Obviously, if you are asking

for a leadership gift, you will want your partner to be of high ranking status, bringing along someone from technical services, for example, (even if he or she is on the building committee) may send the message to your prospective donor that he or she isn't important enough for the "big guns."

As mentioned in the May issue, you will know in advance exactly how much you hope this person will give. Part of the capital fund raising background work includes determining who might give, how much each might give, and how many gifts at different levels will be needed in order to reach your fund raising goal. Those who you hope will give at the highest levels are the "leadership" givers and this is the person you are now visiting.

Once you and your partner have discussed the project with your prospect, answered any of his or her questions, and showed how much enthusiasm you have for the project (making sure you say that's why you're volunteering to raise money and why you have already made a gift yourself), it's time to actually make "the ask."

For many, this is the hard part but don't blink. Look the person straight in the eye and say, "Laura, this is so important for the library's future. I know you have a keen interest in this city and its future. To help us reach our fundraising goal, we'd like you to consider a gift or pledge of \$100,000." Then close your mouth and wait. It may be an uncomfortable moment if there is hesitation but that's ok, it won't last long.

There are likely to be a variety of responses and you should be prepared for all that you can think of. Hopefully, you'll get an immediate, "sure, let me get my checkbook!" But it's more likely you'll get one of the following:

- ♦ I need some time to think this over or discuss it with my partner.
- ♦ That's more than I'm able to contribute at this time.

- ♦ Thank you for thinking of me for this project and I was interested in hearing about your plans but my giving is focused on the new opera building at this time.

If you are told the donor needs more time, that's fine - it's a lot better than a no, but be sure to ask when you should check back. If the response is that you're asking for too much, don't back down right away, but remind him or her that you would be happy to accept a pledge paid out over the next three years. If that doesn't work, then you can ask for a lower amount that you've predetermined in anticipation of this possibility. It's always best to ask for a specific amount rather than leaving it up to the donor because if you do, you are very likely to get less (and sometimes far less) than you were hoping for.

If you get a polite "no," be respectful of the reason they give you. For example, "Yes, I've donated to the opera campaign as well. I understand that timing isn't the best for two important facilities but in this city, it's hard to find the right time - we're really growing, it's wonderful for Smithville." Understanding that you give priority to the opera, do you think it would be possible for you to consider, instead, a gift of \$50,000. We can accept a pledge over three years if that would help. The library really needs your help at this time, we'd like to count on you."

In the end, you may get what you asked for, something less or nothing at all. Nevertheless, once you leave you still have at least one more contact to make with the person you visited. Be sure, no matter the size of the gift (if any) or the reception you get, you must immediately send a thank you letter. Cultivating potential donors will serve you now and in the future. Good luck!

**All-in-One Members:** Log into the Friends Zone to read "Framework for Foundation" articles in past issues of *News Update*. Once you log-in, simply click on "News Update" in the Friends Zone menu on the left. Then select "Current Issues" and/or "Archived Issues."