

## Making "the Ask:" Reaching Potential Donors in Your Community

**T**he typical mission of a library Foundation is to raise significant money for the library. This money is often used to build an endowment, support a capital campaign for a building, or perhaps to fund special programs or services for the library. While a Foundation's fundraising may be ongoing, there will no doubt be times when the Foundation engages in an organized campaign with a monetary goal in mind.

Before the campaign can begin, there will be much background work to be done. A case statement must be developed outlining the reason for the campaign and what will result from its success. Based on the need, a goal for fundraising must be set, and finally, potential donors will have to be identified.

Potential donors could be those who have shown generosity previously - either because they've given to the Foundation in the past or because they have donated to similar community services in the past. They might be persons who are personally known to Board members and have the ability to donate a significant gift. They may be library volunteers or regular patrons who, again, have the means to make a large gift.

Once you've identified prospects, you will need to assign an amount of money you'll be asking of them. This can be based on past donation history, knowledge of their financial ability to give, or the significant interest the potential donor has exhibited in the library along with what knowledge you have of their means.

Once this background work has been completed, it's time to make the "ask." Some people are quite comfortable in asking for money but for many, this is a daunting task. For those who are comfortable and those who are rookies (and feel a little trepidation), it's important that this step is done correctly. Other than asking someone well known to the solicitor, a three step process is usually best.

### First: The Letter

All potential donors who are not good per-

sonal friends or relatives, should receive a letter explaining that a capital campaign is being undertaken for the library and why. Let this prospect know why you are writing - both because you believe they will support your cause and because they have shown support for the library in the past (as donor, patron, or volunteer if this is the case). If they were recommended by another as a potential donor, let them know that you are writing because Jane Doe thought they would be interested in this campaign.

Once you've outlined why you are writing to them (and to them specifically), you should let them know that you will be following up this letter with a phone call to set up an appointment to speak to them about this important initiative.

### Next: The Phone Call

For many this is the hardest part. If that's true for you, you might want to write up a little script and practice beforehand. Refer back to the letter you sent and anticipate and be prepared for some immediate reactions that aren't positive. If a prospect says that he or she is too busy to meet right now, suggest that you can meet with them in a couple of weeks. If the prospect says he or she can't make any commitments without speaking with their spouse, let them know you understand and promise to call them later in the week to determine a time when they can both meet with you. If the prospect says they believe public libraries should be supported with public tax dollars let them know you agree but there are important services, programs, collections, building concerns that are not being addressed by tax dollars and their support will ensure the library can be achieve excellence.

The important thing to remember is that you are doing this because you believe in the importance of the library - let the prospect know you are volunteering your time because of this. Most people are flattered to be asked to be part of a capital campaign and your persistence will show them the level of your commitment.

### Finally: The Meeting

This should be a little easier than the call because if the potential donor has agreed to meet with you they obviously have some level of interest. Be sure to bring the case statement with you along with a library staff member if you anticipate questions you can't answer. Again, let the prospect know that you are volunteering and that you have already committed to the campaign financially (because, of course, you have!). Once you've gone over the case for the campaign and answered questions it's time to look the potential donor straight in the eyes and say, "I am asking that you consider a gift of \$xx,xxx." Your background work has determined an amount to suggest. If you don't suggest a specific amount, you are likely to be given less - perhaps far less - than you had planned and it's hard to move up significantly from there. Be prepared to discuss pledges, payment plans, or to accept a check on the spot.

This is a very broad overview of the process and more information is available at the following websites:

[www.grassrootsfundraising.org](http://www.grassrootsfundraising.org)

[http://www.aspc.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ih\\_lib\\_makingtheask](http://www.aspc.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ih_lib_makingtheask)

[http://www.unitedwayelpaso.org/Making\\_the\\_Ask.pdf](http://www.unitedwayelpaso.org/Making_the_Ask.pdf)

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I'm sure you can think of others that will apply to your individual FOL and situation. Taking time to analyze your efforts is important to making critical decisions about your online book selling operations and will shape the course of your future actions. I think you will find it to be a lucrative venture, well worth your time and efforts, and you'll be able to adapt and enhance your online book-selling as Information Technologies continue to advance.

Carrie Jenott, Director of Development at Once Sold Tales, can be contacted by email at [carriej@oncesoldtales.com](mailto:carriej@oncesoldtales.com). Read the full article online at [www.folusa.org](http://www.folusa.org) in the Friends Zone.