

Grassroots Fundraising Journal

VOLUME 24 ■ NUMBER 1 ■ JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2005

FEATURING:

Going Once, Going Twice, Sold!

AUCTIONS FOR FUNDRAISING

By Stephanie Roth



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Getting it Right from the Start:
Building a Grassroots Fundraising Program

Grow Your Own
Development Director

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

KIM KLEIN

The first election I remember was between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960. I was seven years old, already opinionated, but not terribly sophisticated. In my house, no one political opinion prevailed. My father was a Democrat; my mother and grandmother were Republicans. I told my grandmother that if I could, I would vote for Kennedy because he was handsomer than Nixon. My grandmother said that was as good a reason as she'd heard for voting for Kennedy.

I learned, in my mixed-party household, that deciding who will run the government is a complicated task requiring thought and debate. I also learned that I could hold different opinions from my parents, and they from each other, and we would still be a family. "Think for yourself" was the drumbeat of my childhood. My parents often did not vote a straight party ticket. Sometimes, comparing notes after an election, they found they had voted for the same people, each of them sometimes crossing party lines.

We are told repeatedly that we are a polarized country — red and blue. The 2004 election seems to bear this out. But as I talk to people in airports or in line at the bank, I find that many don't know what to think about the major issues of the day, such as estate tax or abortion or terrorism. Many people find that there is little opportunity to explore an issue in depth, or to reveal that you would like to learn more. Instead, we are told that if we are moral, we are against this, and if we are liberal, we are for that, and if we are patriotic, we will never have certain thoughts. Put on your label, and your opinions will be given to you. In fact, few of the changes that we need to make in the world lend themselves to a simple "I'm for it, or I'm against it" analysis.

So, in addition to all our other work, the nonprofit sector needs to offer a safe place for people to find their voice, not just the most powerful. We must encourage people to think for themselves and express their thoughts. We must model that disagreement does not equal disrespect, and that changing one's mind is not a sign of weakness. We have to come out from behind our labels and sound bytes into the complicated world where there are many paths, few of which are all wrong or all right.

One commonality that does not require great debate is our ongoing need for resources. This issue has three new articles to help you. Stephanie Roth shows how small organizations can use an auction to raise money—a live auction, silent auction, or even the very modern, technological, virtual auction. Dean Spade shares how his organization started building a base of individual donors early on to save itself from the vagaries of foundation funding, and Linda Miles discusses an important approach to the difficult problem of finding a development director: create one from a bright and committed activist in your midst.

May 2005 be the year in which we sow compassion, harvest peace.

Going Once, Going Twice, Sold!



AUCTIONS FOR FUNDRAISING

BY STEPHANIE ROTH

Adapted from *The Accidental Fundraiser: A Step by Step Guide to Raising Money for Your Cause* by Stephanie Roth and Mimi Ho, forthcoming (Fall 2005) from Jossey-Bass.

Auctions, whether of the live, silent, or more recently, online variety, are a popular and versatile method of fundraising. They can be the entire focus of a fundraising event, or an add-on to a dinner, cultural event, or other gathering of your supporters.

There are two major kinds of auctions: live auctions with a skilled auctioneer, and silent auctions where people write their bids next to displayed items.

Depending on the goods or services being auctioned, auctions can raise anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars. This article describes how to do a relatively simple live or silent auction that should raise between \$500 and \$5,000.



BEST USES OF AUCTIONS

Auctions can be a lot of fun — both to organize and for the people attending.

Silent auctions are great add-ons to a special event, and it's possible to do a silent auction on a small enough scale to keep it manageable and still raise money. At a community potluck, for example, auctioning off 10 to 20 low-budget items could add \$250 to \$1,000 to your event's income.

The key to a successful auction is the combination of donations of high-quality goods and services that people want and a large enough group of people interested in bidding on them.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Like all special events, auctions are very labor-intensive to organize and therefore require a core of dedicated volunteers. Without a team of volunteers, too much work will fall on the shoulders of too few people — usually your paid staff — and will result in too little money raised for the amount of time and effort spent.

Organizing an auction involves a high level of attention to detail, along with making sure there are enough people willing to attend and participate in bidding. According to auctioneer Sandy Bradley, author of *Benefit Auctions: A Fresh Formula for Grassroots Fundraising*, you need critical mass for a “real-time”

auction to be financially successful. She suggests there be a minimum of 25 people in the bidding audience, and at least two people for every item you're auctioning. In other words, an auction with 15 items to be bid on needs a bidding audience of at least 30 people.

A live auction will rise and fall on the personality of the auctioneer. While it would be ideal to have a professional auctioneer rattling off numbers and encouraging the crowd, a volunteer who is fast talking and able to hold the attention of the audience might do just as well. The energy of a live auction is created in large part by a number of people bidding against each other. If a lot of

your audience doesn't bid on the items, your auction can seem flat. Therefore, if your group is new to putting on an auction, we recommend starting with a silent auction your first time out. You could also do a combination of a silent and live auction, in one of two ways: 1) have most of the items bid on silently, but have a few choice ones auctioned off live; or, 2) have all the items bid on silently, then have an auctioneer visit each item and solicit bids to exceed those on the bid sheet (this way you're starting from a higher base bid than having live bidding from scratch).

Costs

The following items should be considered as potential costs when producing an auction. You should, of course, try to get as many of these donated as possible.

- Space
- Equipment
- Tables and chairs
- Insurance
- Auctioneer's fee
- Invitation design, printing, postage
- Publicity (flyers, ads)
- Catalog design and printing
- Materials for displaying silent auction items
- Decorations
- Food and drink
- Paper goods
- Postage for thank-you letters

STEPS TO SUCCESS

As with most events, following a series of well-thought-out steps will help make your auction most profitable. Here are the details of eleven steps to holding a winning auction.

Step One: Make a Plan

Decide whether to do a live or silent auction, or a combination of the two. In either case, you'll need to decide what kind of event to hold — a simple gathering where the auction is the main feature, or a larger party, dinner, or cultural event in which the auction is a part. That decision will be based on how much money you want to raise and how many people you can count on to help carry out the event. You will also need to choose a date for the event and

create a timeline detailing what has to be done by when.

Once you know how much money you want to raise, plan to obtain donations of goods and services that are worth twice that amount. This way you will be able to meet your goal even if bids amount to only 50 percent of the value of each item. For example, if you want the auction to raise \$5,000, you will need items worth a total of \$10,000 to be auctioned. Moreover, because about half the people you ask to donate items will decline, you will actually need to plan to solicit \$20,000 worth of items.

Goods & Services to Solicit for Your Auction

When thinking about auction items to solicit, remember to ask your team of volunteers what they can offer, as well as who they know who might be able to contribute something. Think, too, about who your organization does business with and whether they might be a potential source of an auction item.

Gift certificates from local retailers, such as:

- Bookstores
- Sporting goods stores
- Clothing stores
- Restaurants
- Movie theaters

Services, such as:

- Massages
- Hair cuts
- Home-cooked dinner for four
- Babysitting

Vacations:

- Airline tickets
- Frequent-flyer miles
- Night at a bed and breakfast

Classes (or personalized instruction):

- Foreign language instruction
- Music lessons
- Knitting, sewing, gardening
- Self-defense
- Yoga, Tai Chi, or the like

Just Plain Stuff:

- DVD player
- Television
- Electronic organizer
- Basket of skin care products or small food items
- Home-baked cakes, cookies, pies

Step Two: Recruit Your Team of Volunteers

Identify people to help out with the auction. Here are some of the things you'll want to ask people to do:

- Solicit items to be auctioned
- Organize logistics of the event
- Help publicize the event
- Get lists of people and organizations to send — and email — publicity about the auction
- Help out at the event itself

Step Three: Prepare Volunteers to Solicit Items

Before sending volunteers out to solicit items for the auction, bring them together to brainstorm whom to ask and to conduct an orientation to the process of asking. You'll want to come up with a master list of who's being solicited in order to avoid having one person inadvertently asked by two different solicitors.

It is helpful if the auction has a theme, such as "vacations," "services," "electronics," "household goods," or "restaurants." Make a list of all the vendors who might donate something and what you want to ask them for, such as dinner for two, a weekend at a cabin, and so on.

Remember that people who own small businesses, particularly storefronts, get asked for donations frequently. They might turn you down for a number of reasons not having to do with your group: they may have policies against making donations, they may have donated to five other charities and are not giving to any more at the moment, or it may be a hard time for their

business. Therefore, it's good to have at least two and preferably three times as many potential sources of donations as you ultimately need. See the sidebar for some ideas of items to solicit.

Step Four: Solicit Items to Be Auctioned

In this step, volunteers solicit the items for the auction. This may take a couple of steps: a letter requesting an item with a promise to follow up in a few days, then a visit. In some cases, with people a volunteer knows, they can just make a phone call and follow up with a letter of confirmation if the prospect agrees to donate something. In other cases, they might want to send a short letter first, stating what they'd like the person to donate and what cause or organization the auction is supporting.

Merchants must think about how giving an item to your organization is good for their business; you can help them in that thinking. Selling points to the merchant include the number of people you expect will attend the auction, other publicity you are going to do, a promise not to ask for another item this year, or whatever is true for you. You will likely have greater success getting items donated by merchants you know personally, or whom your organization does business with, or who you know believe in the cause you're raising money for. So start with them.

Left is a sample letter asking for a donation.

Below is a sample form that should be included with the letter. Merchants should be asked to fill it out

Dear Friend, Merchant, etc.,

I'm writing to ask you to help support a newly formed artists cooperative, Art for All Abilities (AAA). This nonprofit group highlights the work of artists with disabilities in our community. We're now planning the first of what we hope will be an annual event: a community potluck and silent auction. I'm hoping you will donate a gift certificate of \$25 (or more) to your store to be auctioned off at this event.

The purpose of AAA is to break the isolation that many people with disabilities experience in our community by bringing disabled artists together in exhibition and in creating communal art projects. We are an all-volunteer project and need to raise money to pay for the expenses of producing exhibits and other programs. This year, we're trying to raise \$10,000. Your support of the upcoming silent auction will help us to reach that goal.

We're expecting at least 100 people to attend the auction and more than 1,000 will hear about the event and the generosity of donors like you through our website and upcoming newsletter.

Enclosed is a donation form you can fill out and return to us if you can contribute a gift certificate (or other item) to this fundraising effort. We greatly appreciate whatever you can give.

I will be calling to follow up on this letter within the next couple of weeks, and to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
(Name of Volunteer)

Art for All Abilities (AAA) Annual Auction — Donor Form

Thank you for your contribution to AAA's silent auction, taking place on June 25! Please complete this form and return it to our office no later than June 11.

Please describe each donation in detail for display and catalog purposes — for example: "two \$50 gift certificates," "one-hour Swedish massage," "Frequent Flyer miles for one

ticket anywhere in the United States," etc. If possible, please include a brochure, photograph, or informational sheet. Be sure to specify location, if applicable ("Condo in Lihue, Kauai," "Massage office in downtown St. Louis," etc.), and any limitations, such as availability or excluded items ("available between September and December only," "does not include transportation," etc.).

DONATION: _____

- Item(s)/Gift Certificate(s) included Please make up a gift certificate for me
 I will send/deliver my donation by June 11 Please send volunteer to pick up

Expiration Date: _____ Retail Value: \$ _____ Minimum Bid: \$ _____

IMPORTANT! The Donor Name shown below will be acknowledged in auction displays and the auction catalog. If you wish to remain ANONYMOUS, please check here:

- Business Donor Individual Donor

Donor Name _____ Contact Name (if Business Donor) _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone DAY _____ EVENING _____ Email _____

Donor Signature _____ Date _____

Please return completed form by June 11 to: AAA, PO Box 124, St. Louis, MO

(Adapted from Donor Form developed by NARAL ProChoice Oregon.)

and return it so you can keep track of what's being donated and get any instructions about how the gift should be handled.

Give volunteers two or three weeks to solicit donated items. It's good to check in a couple of times a week to see how they're doing and to find out what kind of support they need if they're having a hard time completing their solicitations. Be prepared to help people problem-solve and provide encouragement to keep the momentum going.

A form can help you track progress on getting auction items (see sample below).

Step Five: Plan Program and Logistics of the Event

Once the process of soliciting items for the auction is underway, you can start paying more attention to the details required to hold a successful event. First, decide whether you want to have speakers or entertainment in addition to the auction itself. If so, consider whether people will sit or stand during that part of the event and figure that into your site selection. Second, find a venue for the auction that is large enough to accommodate the number of people you expect for the program you envision, has enough well-lit space to display all of the silent auction items, or, for a live auction, has a stage or elevated platform. In addition, you'll need a place to store the donated items ahead of time.

Step Six: Publicize the Auction

This step has four parts.

Create an invitation and a reply card and envelope to make it easy for people to RSVP and to send in a contribution if they can't attend the event. In addition, you may want to create a flyer that you can mail to organizations for posting and that they can photocopy and distribute to other people. Send invitations and/or flyers to your mailing list and to people whom members of your auction team know but who may not know your organization yet.

Send an email message to anyone you have email addresses for announcing the event. Use or attach the flyer to give your announcement sparkle, and provide an easy way for them to email back their RSVP (or provide a link to your website — see next item).

If your organization has a website, post information and the flyer about the auction there. Include examples of items that are being auctioned and all the details visitors need in order to attend. Include an RSVP button.

Use whatever free publicity outlets you can think of: ads in community papers, PSAs on your local radio station, and announcements in your sister organizations' e-newsletters.

Step Seven: Make Follow-Up Calls to Invitees

One of the keys to any successful event is making sure you get enough people to attend. This is especially true for an auction, where the money you raise depends on how many people engage in the bidding. Ask your volunteers to follow up on the invitations they sent to people they know by calling these people about two weeks before the auction is scheduled to take place. A reminder call like this can make the difference between someone showing up to the event or completely forgetting about it. Consider getting your volunteers together for two evenings during which everyone will call their own lists and anyone else who received an invitation.

Step Eight: Make Final Preparations

For live and silent auctions, this step involves carrying out all the details of organizing the event itself — details that are the same for any entertainment or program, including setting up the space to allow for the best presentation of items and traffic flow so people can easily place bids, preparing or purchasing food and/or working with a caterer, and so on.

For a live auction, you will need to create a catalog that contains a description of each item and the minimum bid for that item. Start putting this together as soon as the auction items start coming in and at least a couple of weeks before the auction to give yourself plenty of time to get any missing information on the items and to design and print the catalog. If you have enough people involved, you can expand the catalog to include ads from some of the donating merchants or others, for additional income. Give everyone a copy of the catalog as they arrive so they can look through it during the social time before the auction begins. Decide in what order you will auction off (or display) the items. Usually you start with lower-priced

Auction Donation Progress Form					
NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION	TYPE OF ITEM	WHO WILL SOLICIT AND WHAT METHOD	DATE OF FOLLOW-UP (CALL OR IN-PERSON)	RESULT	NEXT STEPS/COMMENTS
Rosie's Restaurant	Dinner for Two	Miles Jackson knows Rosie and will call her	June 1 - left message June 5 - talked to Rosie	YES to gift certificate for \$50	Rosie will send in form with gift certificate

items that you think a number of people will want to bid on, then move to more expensive items as people get warmed up and more excited about the bidding.

For a silent auction, prepare a form to place in front of each item that has a description of the item, the name of the donor (if not anonymous), and indicates the minimum bid and in what increments additional bids can be placed. For example, a gift basket of skin care products that would sell at your local bath store for \$30 might have a minimum bid of \$20, with increments of \$5. And a trip to Hawai'i, flight and accommodations included, worth \$2,000, might have a minimum bid of \$1,000, with bidding increments of \$100.

Here's a sample:

Silent Auction Bid Sheet	
Item # <u>#15</u> (This corresponds to the number in the catalog.)	
Item: <u>One-hour Swedish massage by Sophia Walker</u>	
Value: \$ <u>\$75</u>	Minimum Bid: \$ <u>\$50</u>
Minimum additional bid: \$ <u>\$5</u>	
NAME OF BIDDER	AMOUNT OF BID
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____

Step Nine: Hold the Auction

For a live auction, it's important that the people attending are serious about bidding. Otherwise, you risk both not selling enough to raise the money you need to raise, as well as not having the excitement of bidding to make the event an enjoyable one for the guests. Assess the donated items to make sure they will be of interest to bidders. Also, if you feel something is worth much more than people attending the auction will be willing to spend on it, make arrangements to sell it outside of the auction. Here's an example: a neighborhood association held a live auction for which residents donated many wonderful items. One was an antique brooch valued at \$250 by an antique dealer. While certainly worth this much, the brooch was too old fashioned for the audience's taste. To save the donor of the brooch, an elderly resident of the

neighborhood, from feeling bad, the organization sold it to an antique jewelry dealer for more money than they thought they would get from the auction.

As part of the preparations for the auction, think through how people will pay for, and collect, the items they've acquired. You want to avoid having a pile-up of people coming to pay for their items at the end of the evening, which makes an otherwise enjoyable experience irritating. Make sure you have several volunteers ready to collect money and distribute the items, as well as enough space set aside for that task. You also need to make arrangements for winners who have to leave early to be able to claim their items (and pay for them) later.

Let people know that payment for items they have purchased at the auction is not tax-deductible.

If at all possible, you want to be able to accept credit card payments for the items people have bid on. This is especially important if you have any high-ticket items, such as expensive art work or vacations.

Step Ten: Send Thank Yous

Send thank-you notes to everyone who attended the auction as well as to each person who sold tickets and to each merchant and others who donated items.

Step Eleven: Evaluate the Auction

If you think you might want to conduct another auction in the future, this step is crucial to making improvements and potentially raising more money the next time. Your evaluation can be a simple set of notes jotted down (legibly) soon after the auction is over, perhaps at a final wrap-up meeting of the auction team. Note how many items were sold, which were the most popular, any problems with the volunteers, the merchants, the logistics, and so on. Make a file with all the information about the auction, including lists of who donated items, who purchased items, who volunteered, and notes about timing and other issues. The following year, it will be much simpler to do the auction if a committee can pull out the file and benefit from the previous year's experience.

VARIATION ON A THEME: THE ONLINE AUCTION

If you don't have the resources to organize an in-person event as described, an online auction may be a great alternative.

Online auctions take place "virtually." People go to a website, view the items to bid on, and submit their bid. Anyone familiar with sites like e-Bay will understand the process of placing bids online. Online auctions work well with a community of people who are comfortable with (and have easy access to) the Internet. They also lend themselves to a geographically dispersed community

because they don't require people to go anywhere in order to participate. One thing to keep in mind is to make sure the items that are donated can be easily sent to the winners; moreover, some items won't work for people outside of your community — for example, a dinner for two in Chicago won't get many bids from your supporters in Houston. Online auctions don't require a high level of commitment to the cause, as long as the items you are auctioning off are appealing to the people you're approaching to bid on them and you have a way of reaching a lot of people to let them know about the site.

Online auctions are not the best strategy if you're trying to build a sense of community or if you want to celebrate something with a group of people, or even if you want to increase people's understanding of the issue you're raising money for. However, they are a way to get people who are more peripheral to your organization excited to be spending their money on something they want that also supports a good cause.

Online auctions do have some costs; you may be able to get some of them donated:

- Web designer to create the site
- Fees for the domain to host the site
- Printing and postage to send letters to people soliciting items to auction
- Postage to ship items to winners (depends on the items; if most of them are gift certificates, cost will be minimal)
- Printing and mailing flyers to advertise the auction

You will need plenty of lead time to create the website and post the items to be auctioned off. Using a volunteer means you have to build in extra time. Take digital

photographs of any physical items that will be auctioned so that the image can be posted. For tickets, gift certificates, and so on, create a generic image that you can use. Decide on a minimum bid for each item as well as the increments for increasing a bid. For example, a dinner for two at a local restaurant that might be worth \$50 could start with a minimum bid of \$25, with increments of at least \$2 for each successive bid.

Of course, being sure the technology is working is the most important issue. Make sure you have all items posted on the website and that the mechanism for submitting bids is working smoothly before the official launch of the auction. One thing to check is that when someone posts a bid, it shows up immediately. Otherwise, you might get more than one bid at the same level for the same item and it won't be possible to determine whose bid was entered first.

As the auction gets underway, monitor the level of bidding activity to see how it's going and to determine if you need to increase publicity to get more people involved. Once the auction is closed, make sure winners have paid for their items before they receive them. The easiest system is to have them mail in a check, at which point their item is mailed. If you have the capability of accepting credit card payments, or using an online payment service such as PayPal, then purchasers can pay online.

If you've organized smaller-scale auctions and want to move to a level that will raise substantially more money, check out Sandy Bradley's book, *Benefit Auctions: A Fresh Formula for Grassroots Fundraising*. You can read a review of her book in the next issue of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*. **GFJ**

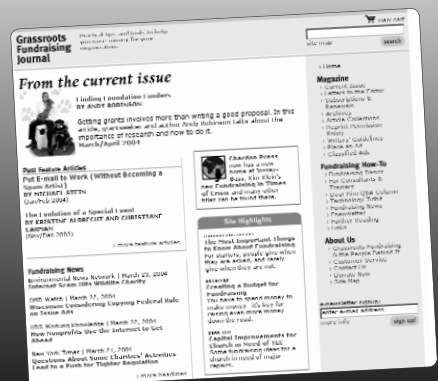
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GETTING IT RIGHT FROM THE START:

Building a Grassroots Fundraising Program

BY DEAN SPADE

EDITORS NOTE: Many of the articles we publish in the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* are instructional in approach, explaining how to carry out different fundraising strategies to help you build a broad base of individual donors. We are often asked by readers if we know people who have been successful using these strategies and have actually been able to decrease their dependence on foundation funding. This article tells one organization's story of their doing just that — applying the principles of grassroots fundraising and finding out how well they really work.

In August 2002, I founded the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), whose mission is to provide direct legal services to trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming low-income people and people of color. A year out of law school, I wanted to engage legal strategies to address the severe and persistent discrimination and violence I saw in my community. I saw trans people experiencing disproportionate poverty, homelessness, and incarceration, being turned away from employment, education, and social services. I saw both police and street violence against trans people continuing at phenomenal rates. In starting SRLP, I imagined an organization that would provide services by and for trans and gender-non-conforming people in a supportive, politicized setting. In the two years since, I have learned not only about providing the services I had imagined, but also about finding the funding to keep the organization going.

To get started, I applied for fellowships, some available only to lawyers and some for broader categories of activists. As soon as we began, the project was flooded with calls from people in need as well as requests for public education and media work. It was immediately clear that I needed to develop long-term plans for the sustainability and growth of the project.

A few months later, one of my fellowship funders offered me an opportunity to attend a workshop on grassroots fundraising. The workshop was taught by the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal's* Kim Klein and Stephanie

Roth. By this time, we'd been applying for foundation grants and beginning to understand some of the obstacles we might face trying to raise money from foundations to do work that was still unheard of to many. It could be a long process of educating funders about the struggles of intersex, trans, and gender-non-conforming people in the context of incarceration, immigration, and poverty. Moreover, changes in the economy made it a particularly hard time to get foundation grants for new initiatives.

What we learned about grassroots fundraising radically changed our approach to fundraising and has produced amazing results for us. Perhaps most important, it was deeply empowering to think about aiming to fund our work from our community and its allies. Coming from a background of poverty and welfare, I had been uncomfortable with trends I saw or heard about in nonprofit fundraising. The idea that foundation funders would get interested in certain issues, and then the trend would shift, concerned me when thinking about the long-term sustainability of movements. Hearing about groups changing their principles or mission to meet funding demands also worried me.

Given all of these concerns, I was delighted to have the chance to learn about other methods of fundraising that would diversify our tactics. Learning strategies to build a base of sustainability from the community affected by the issues and its allies was very appealing.

RADICAL INSIGHTS

When we heard that only about 11 percent of the money the private sector gives to nonprofits comes from foundations, while close to 80 percent comes from individuals, and specifically from families with incomes of only \$60,000 or less, it made perfect sense to me. I had come from communities of people barely scraping by who were always helping each other out and never afraid to talk about money, which is apparently taboo among upper-class people. Now I could also see that seeking our support from our community matched our “by and for” approach to the work and would make us more accountable to the communities we serve.

We learned about using newsletters for fundraising, creating direct mail appeals, giving house parties, developing major donors and using the Internet to bring in individual donors. Our organization dug into all five of these strategies right away.

PUTTING THE STRATEGIES TO WORK

First Things First: Data Control

We started by agreeing that we’d better get a database and learn how to use it before doing any big fundraising pushes. We had lots of names to put in, as SRLP had already trained thousands of social service providers, lawyers, activists, medical providers and students about transgender awareness. We realized that these folks, who had given us their contact information after being energized about our work, would be a great place to start reaching out for support.

Next, a Newsletter

We published our first newsletter in August 2003. It was wonderful to have a chance to write articles about the court victories we had won, to make people aware of new services and materials we were providing, to profile activists in our community who were making a difference, and to let people know how they could support us. We included a quarter-page appeal that could be cut out and returned with a donation. We were surprised by the result — many people let us know that they had read the newsletter cover-to-cover and were excited to send in \$5 to \$500 (yes, we even got a \$500 donation from the newsletter!). The newsletter is a simple affair of three folded legal sheets, printed in black and white, and copied at the local copy shop. It has become our central way of communicating

Many people let us know that they had read the newsletter cover-to-cover and were excited to send in \$5 to \$500.

with activists and allies all over the country. We put it out twice a year, and we always have a great time deciding what to put in, coming up with graphics, and coordinating folding and mailing parties.

We Tackle Direct Mail

In November 2003, we sent out our first direct mail appeal, a letter outlining a case we were working on of a young trans woman being held in the juvenile justice system. This case was an example of the horrific conditions our clients face and the vital need for our work. The woman quoted in the letter was eager to share her story, knowing that so many other youth faced the same conditions. We saw the direct mail appeal as not just a fundraising opportunity but, like the newsletter, a chance to educate about the dangers that trans people face when we are incarcerated in sex-segregated facilities according to birth gender, and denied medical care.

We have continued sending direct mail letters twice a year, using them to get the word out about significant cases and emerging needs in the community. Our next letter will focus on recent changes to the Medicaid system that are causing sudden denials of care to thousands of trans people. We’re hoping to generate support for a lawsuit we’re developing against the State of New York for its illegal policies that deny care to trans recipients.

Jumping Into the Internet

Our use of the Internet so far has been limited to having a “donate now” button on our web page, but our volunteer web designers are adding a page about our Medicaid Equality Initiative. Our lead donor, Nick Gorton, a trans doctor helping to raise money for the campaign, has agreed to send an e-mail to his extensive contacts (medical professionals who are trans or who treat trans people) about the Initiative that will include a link to that page.

House Parties Rock

Our house parties have been the most fun and most surprising part of our individual donor work. Many people who are attracted to SRLP’s work are pleased to serve on host committees, inviting their friends and colleagues to find out more about our work. Great apartments have been donated to host the parties in, and creative volunteers have found food donations through culinary schools, stores, and talented cooks in the trans community. Recently, interns and volunteers coordinated a silent auction at a party, charming donations of art supplies, electronics, meals, and more out of businesses all over

New York. The house parties have generally raised \$3,000 to \$5,000 each and have generated lists of donors and potential donors who continue to give and support the organization in many ways.

As we've become more sophisticated, we've begun shaping the house parties around certain audiences, such as medical and mental health providers, or legal service providers, or artists. This has created parties that are not only fundraisers, but networking opportunities as well. They have also provided a chance to generate other kinds of support, such as pro bono medical experts for our cases or reliable referrals for certain legal matters. People are also attracted to these parties because they meet others who are approaching their work with a commitment to trans justice, and they get a chance to share strategies and resources.

Stepping Up to Major Gifts

What we learned in the grassroots fundraising course has also been central to developing our major donor work. Like many people who first learn about grassroots fundraising, I assumed we wouldn't have much luck with major donors because our community is so disproportionately poor and I personally couldn't think of folks I would ask. What I learned at the workshop, however, changed the way I thought about who could give and helped me become more willing to ask and be turned down. It made sense to me to see that giving away money is a radical political act in the capitalist context in which we live, where we're always encouraged to think of the world through a lens of scarcity. Becoming empowered to ask for money, and being comfortable hearing from people if they can't give, makes perfect sense to me if I see myself as an activist working for the redistribution of wealth and power, and if I believe that the work of SRLP is vitally important to the self-determination of my community.

I moved from feeling that asking for money was somewhat embarrassing to realizing that I am doing something that is good for the donor as well: giving them an opportunity to support great work. Of course, I still get nervous, and we are still refining our strategies for following up with donors and working to have them make a long-term commitment that will keep us stable and afloat for the

future, but the fact that we are working on these strategies is the first step to ensuring the sustainability of our work.

MEETING MISSION

I feel very lucky that SRLP had the opportunity to learn about developing a donor base in our first year of operation and to begin institutionalizing that work from the beginning. Of course there's no doubt about it: putting together mailings and events and maintaining relationships with individual donors is time-consuming work. At every stage, though, we have found that this work is directly in line with our mission and enhances our work beyond just fundraising. It keeps us in touch with our allies and supporters, it spreads the word of our innovative strategies so that they can be replicated, it brings together people in our community, which is still one defined by isolation.

We have used the help of dozens of committed volunteers, as well as a consistent stream of interns, to accomplish our individual donor work, and this has built new skills in our community and helped us create new strategies for effectively directing the enthusiasm our community expresses for our work. Being an organization committed to low-income people, to a grassroots approach to social change, to using a non-hierarchical, collective structure of governance that maximizes accountability to our community and that is fundamentally focused on the redistribution of wealth and power, these fundraising strategies make perfect sense for us. They promote communication, transparency, skill sharing, and the creation of community spaces and celebration.

I am proud that last year we raised 30 percent of our budget from individual donors and other non-foundation sources. I know that this percentage will continue to grow, will be essential for maintaining our work, and will contribute to the organization staying responsive and connected to the needs and values of those we serve. **GF**

DEAN SPADE IS A TRANS ATTORNEY AND ACTIVIST, FOUNDER OF THE SYLVIA RIVERA LAW PROJECT, AND THE CO-EDITOR OF THE ONLINE JOURNAL WWW.MAKEZINE.ORG. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SRLP, VISIT WWW.SRLP.ORG.

Grow YOUR OWN Development DIRECTOR

BY LINDA ANN MILES

Five years ago, development was not a part of my career ambitions or my training. I was just out of college, with two liberal arts degrees and a long-time interest in the politics of social change. My first job came in the form of a citywide electoral campaign. Armed with energy, I dutifully tackled whatever they put in front of me until election day. This turned out to be primarily managing contributions secured each day by the candidate and left with assistants, at front desks, and even underneath welcome mats across Portland, Oregon. My job was to pick up, record, and bank the money. Little did I know how this initial introduction into the world of fundraising would affect my future profession.

Seeking new work after the election, I stumbled on a small ad in a weekly paper asking for a “phone room manager.” The hiring organization, Oregon Right to Die (later to become the Death with Dignity National Center)

Though nonprofits generally want their development directors to be proven fundraisers, what if your small group is growing, as many are, and you don’t have the funds yet to hire someone with experience?

Why not try “growing your own?” With the right candidate, commitment, energy and a little ingenuity, you may find that you have a blossoming development director right under your fingertips.

PICK A GOOD SEED

Experienced development professionals don’t often come cheap, and experience certainly does not guarantee someone’s commitment to your issue. If you’re hiring for a position in fundraising, focus on passion and willingness as the foundation qualities for establishing experience and retaining staff.

***If you’re hiring for a position in fundraising,
focus on passion and willingness to learn.***

had a high profile from a heated public battle in 1997 when the Oregon Legislature referred the Oregon Death with Dignity law back to the voters for repeal. (The voters defeated the proposition by 60 percent.) The position offered me an opportunity to work for an issue I believed in, and I was interested in this chance to continue political work in a professionally sustainable position.

During the more than five years that I spent raising money to promote and defend the nation’s only law establishing death with dignity, the organization changed and grew. So did I. Supported by my supervisors and working within professional networks, I took on the development skills I needed to learn.

Learning on my feet gave me a particularly interesting lens through which to view the fundraising world. Growing into the position of the organization’s first development director gave me a perspective on what it means to fill those money-raising shoes.

My employers took a chance on me. When I was hired I was put on the phone with some of the smaller donors very quickly — cutting my teeth the old fashioned way by learning how to communicate the issue with urgency, how to make a second ask, what it took to engage a donor and, as all good fundraisers must, how to take rejections in stride. This hands-on experience became an important part of my training program (see Allow to Germinate, below). As I learned the specifics of the organization’s mission, I was also learning what was most important to the organization’s supporters and how to put what I was learning into a language that would inspire them to make a gift.

The qualities of passion and willingness to learn while taking risks are touchstone traits for a fundraiser, meaning they can be returned to throughout a development professional’s career as a source of inspiration and motivation.

Along with passion and willingness to learn, there are many skills that transfer easily into the role of fundraising

and can be markers of the potential for success. Your best candidate will likely have the following characteristics:

- Be at ease with personal and group interactions — a confident, outward personality is ideal
- Be able to listen and respond attentively in a one-on-one encounter as well as in a group setting
- Be articulate — any public speaking training is useful
- Be a strong and creative writer — journalism is great background for getting a message or mission statement across
- Be fearless in the face of rejection
- Be able to motivate others by setting a positive example

Focusing on the quality of the contact, rather than the total amount raised, will help your new hire learn how best to communicate with donors.

ALLOW TO GERMINATE

One of the most common problems in development work is that new staff is often expected to perform right off the bat — without a thorough training or orientation period — making for frustrated managers and early burnout of fundraising staff. Develop a training program specific to the needs of your organization and its issue. You may know the best ways to communicate your mission, but don't assume new hires will intuitively know your issue or the nuances of your most important strategies.

A new fundraiser's training program should include key organizational highlights, perhaps dividing an orientation work day into different areas of focus to encourage multi-tasking and cooperative work relationships with other staff. A first day would include an overview of organizational history — with reading material provided for more careful study at home or during the week; a short introduction to current fundraising strategies and their effectiveness; introductions to current program and administrative staff; and a general overview of how the office works.

Within the orientation week, if you are expecting your fundraiser to make direct asks to donors, take the time to role-play making an ask and dealing with common objections to giving. If you do not have a formal telephone fundraising program, create a short fundraising campaign for your new hire. Provide a list of donors giving a small average amount, say \$25 to \$50, a script to follow, consistent feedback after a call is completed, and goals for time on the phone, number of donors contacted, and percentage of positive responses.

Focusing on the quality of the contact, rather than the total amount raised, during this critical part of the training will help your new hire learn how best to communicate with donors and what motivates donors to give. Continue to use this tool throughout your training program, and pay attention to the strengths and weaknesses that emerge. If you find an individual who is excited to make these contacts with supporters, you will have come a long way toward "growing" your development director.

Leadership in the organization can provide essential background during this germination period. If the position of development director is new to your group, take the time to trace back where relationships with your most committed donors started and how those relationships

have been maintained. If possible, consider hosting a simple "meet and greet" with your strongest supporters, your new hire, key staff, and board members. This will give everyone the chance to begin to forge new lines of communication and to put names to faces.

Be sure to incorporate the fundamentals of fundraising into the training, whether your hire has experience with development or not. In an organization where the executive director has largely handled both fundraising and the organization's relationship to board members, some transfer of those relations and responsibilities needs to be done gracefully. Once your new hire has begun to build relationships, take the time to help her or him understand how fundraising decisions have been made in the past and how you would like them to be made in the future.

FERTILIZE AND WATER REGULARLY

Incorporate leadership skills into the training and expectations of your new hire. Becoming a stronger leader will make the staff person feel more invested in the organization. If you have allowed for the proper germination, this process has probably already started. A good way to build your new staff member's leadership skills is to begin to involve them in the larger fundraising picture for your organization. Once they are trained and feeling confident, begin to empower your new staff member to propose innovative ideas by asking them to make an informal presentation to the staff — perhaps over a brown-bag lunch — reviewing the current fundraising program and identifying areas where they have new ideas to build fundraising strength. Conclude the lunch hour with a brainstorming

session where other staff can build on these new ideas.

This type of a process can have multiple benefits. Your new fundraiser will be seen as a leader with new ideas among other staff members, they will be getting a review of fundraising in the organization, and you will be on your way to investing all of your staff in the process of fundraising.

A similar process can be followed in the work of the fundraiser fine-tuning the annual fundraising plan and presenting it to the board of directors, with the hope that it will interest and invest them in the fundraising process as well.

I spent many hours on the phone with our most committed supporters before I ever sat down face-to-face with a major donor, but each time I did find myself at a meeting or speaking to a group, the personal history of growing my skills as the organization grew drove my story. It gave me a reason to be there beyond my job as the fundraiser and reminded the prospective donor that I was committed to the organization because the organization had been committed to me.

NURTURE GROWTH

Another key element to developing strong leadership in your new fundraiser is inclusion. No one can raise money in a vacuum, and program work is often more tied to fundraising than some on staff are willing to readily accept.

Once the new development professional has gotten their feet wet with informal presentations to staff, let executive and program staff know that for some time fundraising will be a strategic focus for the organization. Host staff meetings in which everyone on staff (and board if you can bring them in) plays with the idea of fundraising. Allow your new hire to take a role in making these meetings fun and inspiring and you will have made great strides toward an inclusive fundraising program as well as confirming the new staff person as a fundraising leader in your office.

The degree of fundraising involvement that your

not have the leeway to tap into the talent that makes up your group's strongest leaders, they may succeed to the best of their ability but they will begin treading water — a fate that means stagnation for any development program.

SHOW OFF THE BLOOMS

Encourage your fundraiser to keep program staff aware of fundraising successes. Everyone loves to hear when a big check comes in the door, but don't stop there. In staff meetings, it's helpful for them to recount how a donor had come to the decision to make a large gift, particularly if this was an upgraded amount from gifts in the past. The fundraiser can share the interests and quirks of your most committed donors, working to give a picture of the individual donor and making them more of a person than a signature on a check. Program staff are often flattered by the knowledge that a donor was inspired by information the fundraiser shared about their specific program.

The development staff can also make short presentations to let the group know where they are most successful in fundraising and offering an opportunity for staff to brainstorm new ideas. With this tactic, it is important to take new ideas seriously and provide updates to staff at a later date. Ideas that do prove successful end up energizing the rest of the staff to add their ideas in future brainstorming sessions. And, of course, it is always effective to provide small humorous gifts to everyone, recognizing their willingness to think creatively.

For myself, I learned how to build a sense of teamwork in fundraising. Though always remaining respectful of their time, I would often ask program staff to review writing that I was doing to communicate program needs to supporters and grant sources. By creating this inclusive environment, I was gratified to find that facing a critical proposal deadline I could count on my fellow staff members to support my work and often provide program descriptions for me that made my work much easier.

Your new hire should be encouraged to look into volunteer centers, nonprofit technical assistance groups, and community foundations that offer trainings on a variety of fundraising skills.

group will need from program staff can vary. At the least, a limited amount is needed to keep all staff keyed into the development process and maintaining a sense of fiscal stewardship as they develop program budgets. Involvement on the part of the executive director and board of directors is essential. If your group's new fundraiser does

KEEP FEEDING

Many cities have formal and informal professional organizations and networks that development staff can become part of. Encourage your new hire to explore these networks and allow for time to attend meetings and become involved. A simple search on the Internet may

turn up a local group of fundraisers that gets together for a monthly lunch to talk shop. This will likely become an outside network where your new hire can seek solutions and find new ideas.

Consider supporting continuing education for your newest development professional. Some cities have technical assistance groups, such as CompassPoint, that provide excellent daylong fundraising trainings. Your new hire should be encouraged to look into volunteer centers, nonprofit technical assistance groups, and community foundations that offer trainings on a variety of fundraising skills and provide another opportunity to meet other fundraising professionals.

The Fundraising School at the School of Philanthropy, Indiana University, is the oldest school in the country teaching the fundamentals of development. My experience there came after two years in the development field and just as I had exhausted many of the support ideas outlined above. The knowledge and facts that I gained at the Fundraising School gave me a much-needed boost in both my skill set and my confidence.

If your new hire is particularly green, you may consider fundamental support as well from a seasoned development consultant. Using this consultant's (often expensive) time wisely, a new development director will have a sounding board and a mentor.

IT BEGINS WITH THE ROOTS

In conclusion, the risk the directors took to hire an inexperienced but passionate fundraiser has paid off. My role as development director and the success that I achieved was fueled by talking one-on-one with the everyday people who made gifts to the cause and by the willingness of my directors to see my professional growth as an essential asset to the organization as a whole.

Humble roots, grass roots, whatever you choose to

call them, the most important gift you can give your organization if you are considering a new development professional is someone with "roots" and the proper support to grow them. **GF**

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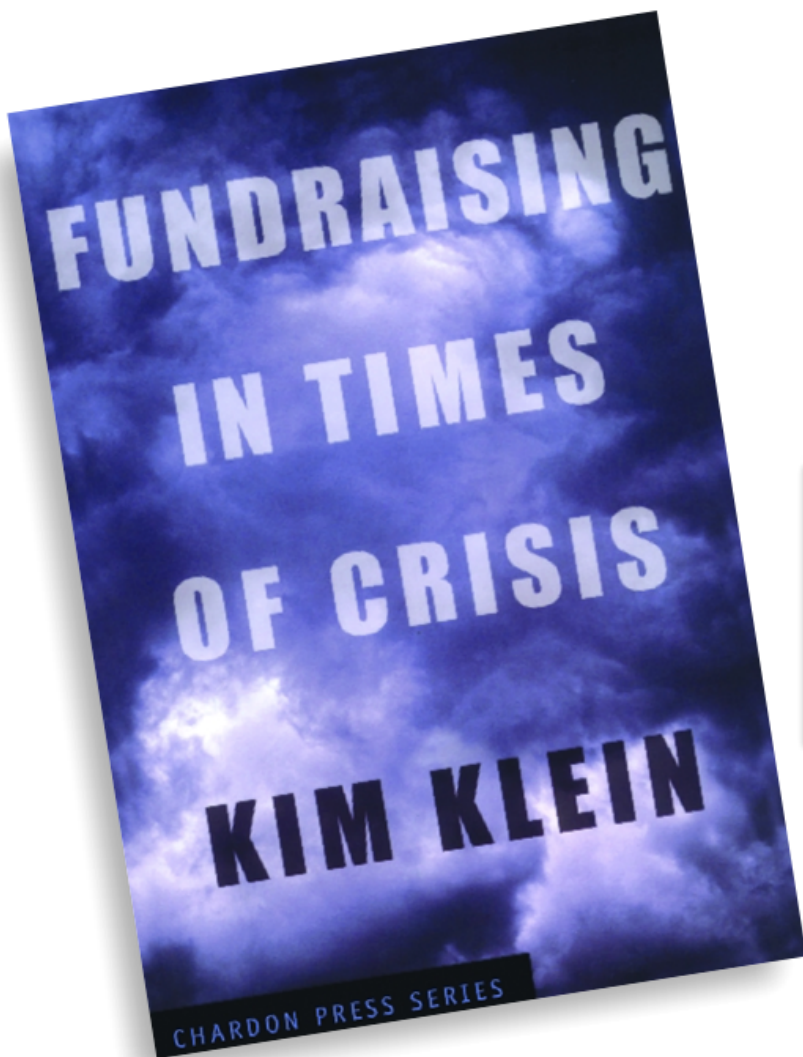
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