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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

STEPHANIE ROTH



On a recent trip to New York, I heard a friend describe how her teenager does his homework: at his computer while listening to his iPod, watching TV, and instant messaging his friends. How, I wondered, could he possibly take in any information fully with that much going on at once?

In a similar vein, a colleague who teaches a university class realized halfway through the semester that her students were not avidly taking notes on their laptops, as she had thought — they were actually on the Internet and checking and sending e-mail throughout class.

On a recent conference call, I noticed that many of the other people on the call seemed more distracted than usual and weren't as responsive to the discussion. When someone mentioned a website they were looking at, I realized that everyone seemed to be multitasking on their computers throughout the call.

In contrast to these experiences, I recently spent an hour as a board member with a donor whom no one in the organization had yet met in person. We sat in a café, distracted from our conversation only by our server asking if we wanted more coffee. In that hour, I felt, I strengthened the organization's relationship with this donor more than any number of e-alerts or direct mail appeals could ever have done.

Of course, people have always tried to multitask, from passing notes in class to signing thank you notes while talking on the phone. But today's technology has expanded the range and number of things people can try to do at once. As a result, the level of distraction for many of the people we are trying to engage in our work has greatly expanded. For those of us doing fundraising, the challenges of getting a donor or prospect's attention have never been greater. My recent donor meeting reminded me that the best way to get someone's undivided attention is through personal contact, especially meeting face-to-face.

This issue of the *Journal* focuses on making contact with donors (or prospects) in several ways. Gil Gerald describes a successful all-volunteer event put on by a group of primarily African American gay men in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s to raise money for AIDS. He shows how — through personal solicitation and creating a fun event — a group of volunteers can raise significant amounts of money, especially with an annual activity that builds a following over time. Suzie McGuire details how to reach more prospects with direct mail efforts by working with list brokers. And Mary Ann McGivern describes developing relationships with her organization's constituents online, providing useful tips on how to make this mass contact more personal, even with limited resources.

If you are looking for opportunities to build your fundraising skills, and send new staff members and board members to trainings, check out GIFT's upcoming Fundraising Action Trainings around the country as well as our online webinars with Kim Klein this summer and fall (see page 19 and back cover).

This summer, take some time to rejuvenate for the Fall fundraising season — research that new database, put your files in order, and most important, experiment with doing only one thing at a time, or even doing nothing.

Gentlemen Concerned

A FUN EVENT RAISING SERIOUS FUNDS

BY GIL GERALD

In March 1986, seven Los Angeles men — six Black and one White — within the same predominately Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) social networks held a house party that raised \$15,975. They gave the money to the Minority AIDS Project (MAP), one of the oldest AIDS services organizations based in the Black community in the United States. The gift enabled MAP to put a down payment on a small residence, Dignity House, which would serve as a home with supportive services for homeless or severely disabled individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

This group of seven became known as Gentlemen Concerned. By 1995, the group had raised and given away more than \$263,000 through an annual all-volunteer fundraising effort that continuously refined and improved on the first year's performance. Each year's effort raised at least \$3,000 more than the previous one, so that by 1994 the group took in \$45,300.

Gentlemen Concerned was most proud of the fact that it could assure each donor that 100 percent of her or his gift would go to benefit people living with HIV in L.A.'s racial and ethnic minority communities.

The year 1986 stands out for AIDS activists in the Black community as the time when attention was first paid to AIDS in racial and ethnic minority communities, with several important conferences that year and the start-up of Black AIDS services organizations in cities around the



Event hosts Kevin Lyons and Lamond Ayers
PHOTO BY DOUG HILEMAN

country. African-Americans, who make up only 12 percent of the US population, were already disproportionately affected by the disease, with 25 percent of reported cases in 1986; that proportion has grown to 51 percent of new cases between 2001 and 2004.

The contributions and efforts of Black Americans at the grassroots to respond to the crisis of HIV/AIDS have been underreported and to a great extent unacknowledged and undervalued. What follows is one model among many of how small groups have

and can make a difference in confronting a crisis, whether it is health-related or another social ill.

THE FOUNDING OF GENTLEMEN CONCERNED

Gentlemen Concerned became organized when Michael Mahern, then a MAP volunteer, sought help from his friend Don Trimble, who had a professional background in fundraising. Don was also connected with the mostly hidden social networks of Black gay men who lived in L.A. at the time. Michael, like all the original Gentlemen Concerned members, was alarmed and concerned about the mounting number of deaths in the Black community, as well as the evident homophobia and institutionalized racism that characterized the early response to the epidemic in L.A. and elsewhere. These issues stood in the way of caring for many in need. Others joined the group because they either had lost close friends to AIDS or were themselves living with the disease.

The disease took its toll on so many of the members that between 1996 and 2001 the group simply and sadly faded away.

THE ANNUAL EVENT

Gentleman Concerned's main fundraising strategy was to hold an annual party. What started as a house party developed into an annual summer garden party held at public venues such as the courtyard of the Wilshire Ebell Theater or the Gilmore Adobe.

Individual members of the group solicited donations from individuals in their personal social networks. A minimum donation, which increased slightly over the history of the organization, entitled the donor to be invited to the garden party as a thank you. In the early to mid-1990s the minimum was set at \$100 (donations of less than \$100 were welcome, but did not result in an invitation to the party).

Other sources of funds were a raffle drawing, advertising sales in a souvenir booklet, and corporate sponsorships.

As the event came to be considered something special in the community, many vendors, such as caterers, graphic artists, and printers, most based in or serving the Black community, provided in-kind donations and discounts.

Gentlemen Concerned stood steadfast on the principle that this was a fundraising effort, so the many requests for complimentary invitations, especially for people living with HIV, were only honored if a donor could be found to cover the \$100 minimum donation.

The event's agenda included welcoming remarks, cocktails and buffet, live entertainment, an invocation, award presentations, introduction of members, a raffle, and dancing. The menu featured ethnic food; the dress was summer casual, with guests often opting to wear traditional African garments.

Being Part of a "Special" Circle

While they created an aura of exclusivity — "You want to be at this event"—the all-volunteer group of 12-16 members of Gentlemen Concerned came from a spectrum of social and economic backgrounds. Individuals were invited to join the group based in great part on whether they had the time and a personal social network—including family and friends from back home — that was not already included among the growing list of contributors. By 1995, individual members were raising between \$860 and \$7,945 in gifts.



The final newsletter of Gentlemen Concerned.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The members of Gentlemen Concerned were methodical and strategic in how they planned and carried out their annual campaign. They had about nine monthly meetings each year to plan the event, including a day-long retreat. The monthly meetings were usually hosted by a member, who provided dinner, and meetings were conducted in a businesslike manner in which minutes were consistently maintained. At each meeting, members reviewed the progress they were making toward the goals established by their annual budget agreement (described below).

Committees

Members generally had one or more work group or committee assignments, including Newsletter, Compliance (legal), Food/Beverage, Mailing List, Souvenir Program/Advertising, Venue/Location, Publicity, Raffle, Funds Distribution, and Entertainment.

These committees or task groups came into play at various points during the planning process and were an effective means for distributing the workload. For example,

those working on Venue/Location would meet early in the process, investigate alternatives for the location of the event, and report back to the whole group, which then made the final decision. Having accomplished that, the Venue/Location task group's job was completed for the year.

The Newsletter committee had the task of writing and producing one annual newsletter, which went out early in the planning season to announce the results of the last campaign and plans for the coming event.

Budgeting

Through an annual budget process, each member made a commitment to raise a certain amount of funds reflecting their natural gifts and growing competencies in soliciting donations from individuals, ads for the souvenir booklet, ads for the annual newsletter, donations from businesses and corporations, or selling raffle tickets.

The group insisted on keeping the cost of fundraising below 25 percent of gross proceeds, so it structured the budget so that fundraising costs would be borne by gifts other than donations solicited from individuals (see sample budget below). In fact it was not unusual for the group to give away more income than it took in through donations from individuals.

Income line items included member contributions, individual donations, interest, raffle ticket sales, souvenir booklet advertising sales, and corporate gifts. Expense line items included advertising, bank fees, benevolence (retreat expenses and flowers in memoriam), event-appreciation party, grants to organizations, legal/filing fees, postal expenses, printing and duplication, and supplies.

Draft Budget Fiscal Year 1993–94 GENTLEMEN CONCERNED

INCOME

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Member Contributions | \$ 3,750 |
| Donations | 44,000 |
| Interest | 200 |
| Raffle/Ad Sales | 8,000 |
| Corporate Contributions | 4,000 |
| | \$59,950 |

EXPENSES

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Advertising | \$ 670 |
| Bank Fees | 65 |
| Benevolence | 505 |
| Event-Appreciation Party | 7,025 |
| Grants to Organizations | 46,800 |
| Legal/Filing Fees | 75 |
| Postal Expenses | 935 |
| Printing & Duplication | 3,100 |
| Supplies | 775 |
| | \$59,950 |

In-kind Community Support

In-kind contributions helped to keep the costs of fundraising within the budget's goals. These contributions often included entertainment. In 1995 the garden party featured Tony Award winner Nell Carter. That year Synthia Saint James, a recognized contemporary illustrator, donated reprints of a signed limited edition poster commemorating the 10th Annual Gentlemen Concerned Fundraiser.

All the committees made an effort within their assigned task to tap community good will, whether it was for the production of the newsletter, food and beverages, or music and entertainment for the event.

Direct Mail Solicitation

Care was taken to maintain an up-to-date mailing list. At the beginning of each season, each member was given a printout of his contacts and corrected his information from any returns from the previous mailing.

The letter of solicitation was carefully worded, reviewed, and then approved by the whole group before being produced through a word processing program that allowed each letter to be addressed personally and signed by an individual member of the group. That way, each letter came from someone the person being solicited knew.

The solicitation package included a response card showing the various giving categories, from Contributor at \$75 to Benefactor at \$1,000. Also included was the "Information Card" about Gentlemen Concerned required by the City of Los Angeles and issued by the Social Services Department.

Each year there was a letter-signing party, when members gathered to sign their letters of appeal to their list of donors and then seal and stamp the envelopes. Holding a letter-signing party assured that individual members would not put off sending the solicitations to their contacts.

Responses to the solicitation were tracked monthly, and the organization's leaders urged members to make follow-up calls as an effective way to drive up the response rate. A thank you note with invitations to the "thank you" garden party followed to those donors who had given at least the threshold amount set for that year.

All contributors of any amount were acknowledged in the souvenir program booklet for the event.

Publicity

At the beginning of each annual campaign, after the funds from the prior year had been distributed, all the donors received a newsletter informing them of the success of the prior year's campaign and the results of the funds distribution. The newsletter also highlighted some of the beneficiary organizations and the important work they were engaged in providing for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Publicity also included sending out press announcements and press releases as well as working with publishers, writers, and editors associated with small community press to develop news articles about the group and its activities. The press releases helped get the word out about the success of the group, highlight the work of the beneficiary organizations, and develop support for the annual fundraiser.

Souvenir Program Booklet

Sales of advertising space in the souvenir program booklet provided an opportunity for small businesses to support the effort. Inside front, inside back, center, and back cover pages were sold at a premium, while full-page, half-page, and quarter-page advertising space throughout the rest of the booklet was sold at more affordable prices.

Some of the larger AIDS services organizations placed advertising in the booklet. Gentlemen Concerned solicited ads from the bank where it did business, as well as private medical groups serving people living with HIV/AIDS.

The souvenir booklets also contained photographs in memoriam of the many Black men and women who had died in that year due to HIV/AIDS, including some whose passing had otherwise been kept quiet because of the stigma associated with the disease and the sexual orientation of the majority of individuals who were then becoming infected with HIV.

The souvenir booklets also gave testimony to the efforts of many both in and outside of the Black LGBT community who responded to HIV among racial and ethnic minority communities, including those carried out by many of the organizations who were recipients of funds from Gentlemen Concerned, such as Minority AIDS Project, Caring for Babies with AIDS, AID for AIDS, Project Angel Food, and Rue's House.

Raffle

Local businesses were also solicited for items that were raffled off at the event. The raffle was a featured part of the program. Along with the souvenir program booklet, the raffle raised an amount roughly equivalent to the costs of the party.

Art work, including photography, was very popular, and a local frame shop helped with mounting and framing donated items. One or more members developed this part of the program as their specialty and focused year after year on making it a success.

Evaluation and Mutual Support

Every year following the conclusion of the campaign, Gentlemen Concerned held a day-long retreat to evaluate their activities, refine their strategies, and begin planning the next annual campaign. The retreat also served as a time to welcome new members, inevitably replacing in many cases others who had recently died.

The presidents provided motivation for those who were challenged in raising funds. Rodney Carter, who served the longest in that role, was particularly known to consistently counsel members on making follow-up



Souvenir Event Booklets

phone calls to individuals on their lists in order to ensure a high response rate to the annual letter of solicitation. Problem solving involved members sharing lessons learned and experiences, sometimes mixed in with subtle competition in a way that helped improve results.

All were publicly acknowledged and extra recognition was given to the members who had raised the most.

LESSONS LEARNED

There is a strong tradition of philanthropy in the Black community, sometimes expressed through faith institutions and fraternal organizations, among others. There are also historical challenges that the Black community has faced and that continue. The legacies of the past history of discrimination include significantly higher rates of poverty and health disparities. HIV/AIDS is but one of these.

In the face of some of these problems, many communities may feel overwhelmed, yet small groups of people can get together and make a huge difference without necessarily working for a community-based organization or serving as a member of a nonprofit's board of directors. A volunteer fundraising group can focus on just the task of raising community funds for those who are doing the work, and the main resource they need to do this is their list of contacts — friends, acquaintances, family, and workplace associates.

People will save funds to attend a community event that is special, particularly if they are confident that their contribution will directly address the need. In the case of Gentlemen Concerned, the group's grants usually went to organizations providing services that the community recognized as important but for which public funding was

limited. Bishop Carl Bean, founder of Minority AIDS Project, had mentioned to the early members of Gentlemen Concerned that the greatest need of all for Black and Latino alike who were living with HIV/AIDS was "a roof over their heads."

Individuals especially affected by the need are particularly good candidates as solicitors and donors.

Those who wish to do work similar to Gentleman Concerned need to realize that it requires a significant commitment of time. In addition, for causes where members of the group are dealing with life-threatening or chronic health conditions, there may have to be a reworking of the model to ensure its continuity.

With these things in mind, however, a small group of devoted members can make a huge difference to the cause they decide to sponsor through fun but serious efforts at organizing an annual fundraiser that generates money from multiple sources. **GFJ**

GIL GERALD WAS A MEMBER OF GENTLEMAN CONCERNED BETWEEN 1991 AND 1996. HE IS A CONSULTANT ASSISTING COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS WITH FUNDRAISING, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, AND CAPACITY-BUILDING CHALLENGES. HE CAN BE REACHED AT (415) 627-9139, OR GILGERALD@GILGERALD.ORG.

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Direct Mail Lists:

Going Beyond Your Inner Circle

BY SUZIE MCGUIRE

EDITORS NOTE: This article follows up on the article by Ellis Robinson in the last issue of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* (May/June, 2007), “Direct Mail on a Shoestring: Finding the Lists You Need for Affordable Prospecting.” Going to the next step with direct mail, as described in this article, assumes both that you have some familiarity with direct mail and that it makes sense for your organization to invest significant resources in building a large donor base by mail. Though not all groups will be able to pursue direct mail on this scale, the information here is useful even if you’re doing much smaller mailings, and it’s essential if you’re considering mailing large quantities.

In my previous career as a list broker, one of the most frequently posed questions was whether an organization should delve into direct mail fundraising as a way to expand their individual donor base. This article is for organizations that have some experience soliciting individuals for support but have run out of people to ask because they’ve already gone to board members, friends, people who have attended their programs and events, and so on. If you’re ready and able to invest more resources in building a base of individual donors, you might want to consider working with a list broker, someone who helps organizations find the best lists of people to solicit. This article also describes what criteria to consider in selecting lists to send your fundraising appeal to.

Considering the cost of direct mail — including writing the letter, design, printing, postage, and mailing list rental — and a typical rate of response of less than 1 percent, you will inevitably lose money in any initial acquisition mailing. The measurement of a successful effort is if your organization can acquire donors at an acceptable investment who then give additional funds when resolicited. Success depends greatly on your ability to foster a long-term relationship with the donors you acquire. Typically, it will take 18 to 36 months to recoup your initial investment through subsequent mail appeals to these newly acquired donors.

The next question is what types of mailing lists to use. As Ellis Robinson described in the last issue of the *Journal*, first-time mailers often cannot afford to rent outside

mailing lists and must look internally to see if there are prospects in their own data base. Your least expensive and most promising option is to review your own list of event attendees, activists, or people who wrote in seeking information about your organization. Individuals who have shown interest in your organization (but are not yet donors) are the best source for your first direct mail acquisition appeal.

If individuals on your in-house lists are responsive to your offer (meaning that at least 1 percent sent in a donation), you may then want to consider mailing to lists of

The measurement of a successful effort is if your organization can acquire donors at an acceptable investment who then give additional funds when resolicited.

donors to other, similar organizations. Most direct mail professionals will tell you that a pilot mail campaign should consist of at least 50,000 names drawn from several lists of at least 5,000 names each. There may be a few smaller lists that get pulled into the mix and are a part of your core audience, but by and large you will want lists that are big enough that the response rate you get from each list is an accurate predictor of future response rates from more names on that list. The goal is to have a good mix of lists

so that you have enough numbers to test various elements of your mailing — such as teaser copy on the outer envelope, size of envelope, premiums such as return address labels, and so on — with different segments of the entire list to see which package gets the best response.

Lists from a number of different organizations are merged together to remove duplicate names. That way you aren't mailing multiple pieces to the same individual at the same time. Your house list (your own donor list) will also be eliminated from these "outside" lists so that you are not soliciting your own donors.

CHOOSING A LIST PROFESSIONAL

There are two types of professionals you might want to engage in your move into the wider world of direct mail: a direct mail consultant and a list broker.

You look to a direct mail consultant to see if direct mail is a natural fit for your organization. A direct mail consultant collaborates with you on general fundraising objectives. He or she can provide strategy, copy, creative input, and analysis for your direct mail efforts.

A good list broker — the subject of the rest of this article — can tell you how your offer may resonate with

The broker is able to give you an educated recommendation as to how the lists should perform for your acquisition mailing.

particular lists and list markets. List brokers work as the conduit between your organization and various list management companies or list owners. They send a copy of your mailing (your fundraising letter and any additional pieces you'll be sending) to the list owners, secure permission to use the list, and order the lists. The Direct Marketing Association and the Standard Rate and Data Services (SRDS) catalog are both good industry resources to find professional list brokers. Perhaps the best method is to get consultant and broker referrals from organizations you know who have large direct mail programs.

All list brokers can secure any mailing list on the open market for your organization. And they all receive similar compensation in the form of a standard commission. So, if any broker can secure any list, what criteria do you use when choosing this important partner? Here are some questions to consider:

Does the list broker have extensive experience working with organizations similar to yours? Ask for a client list along with years of service with those organizations. Brokers have access to their client's statistics and mailing patterns, and although the specifics of that information

are strictly confidential, brokers certainly keep in mind what they know about lists clients have used in recommending lists that might work well for your organization. Many brokers have sophisticated systems that allow them to cross reference usage and determine which lists are working for which kinds of mail appeals. The broker is then able to give you an educated recommendation as to how the lists should perform for your acquisition mailing.

Does your broker provide a thoughtful plan and strategy or are you simply seeing "cut and paste" planning? At the very least, the plan a broker presents to you should include for each list recommended the following information: the name of the organization's list, recency (how recently the list was updated), dollar selections that are recommended (the range of gifts to ask for based on what donors on a given list have contributed through direct mail), pre- and post-merge quantities, the price of the list, exchange transaction balance (based on how many names were traded and when they were used). An overall strategy document should accompany the plan describing why particular lists or markets are being selected.

For example, if you were a local children's health organization, you would hope to see national lists of a similar nature that have enough names in your region. Examples might be as specific as lists surrounding children's health issues or more general lists like Special Olympics or Smile Train. Or your broker might suggest expanding your potential list universe by using lists of nonprofits that do some charitable work regarding children — groups such as the U.S. Committee for UNICEF, CARE International, and Children's Defense Fund would fall into that category.

Is your broker a good negotiator? You need a broker who can negotiate nonprofit rental rates, appropriate exchanges, and discounts for large-volume rental arrangements. They need systems to easily track, reference, and negotiate exchanges. Some list owners offer discounts on rental orders where there is a high duplication rate. These are called "net name arrangements," and a good broker will be able to refer to previous data to use as a bargaining point. A good negotiator will also have good relationships with other list managers who will let them know about special discounted rates or new list availability.

How much experience does the broker have working with organizations similar to yours? There are brokers who specialize in working with specific types of organizations, such as environmental, health, or civil rights list markets. And many of these brokers have extensive experience working with multiple mailers within these categories.

How involved do you want to be in the process of selecting lists? Some clients like to roll up their sleeves and help choose lists and others want a refined plan of the best lists.

My belief is that if you are spending an unusual amount of time reinventing the mail plan your broker provided, you either need to communicate your needs better or re-evaluate whether you are working with the right broker. You need to inform your broker of your goals and needs so that they can produce the best strategy possible.

Can your broker deliver the recommended mail plan?

A good broker follows through on the process of getting the list to the mail house and lets you know at the critical points of the process if the plan needs to be adjusted. When trying to secure multiple lists from various resources, there will often be a case where quantities may fluctuate or approval cannot be obtained. An adept broker will be able to come up with contingencies to help you through this process.

Is the broker knowledgeable about your organization and your acquisition goals? To secure the best mail plan you need to collaborate with your broker and educate her or him about your current donors and what motivates them to give to you. You should give them current samples of your mailing piece, let them know about new packages that you may be developing, and supply them with current performance statistics. You also need to give them enough time to provide you with the best mail plan and to secure mailing lists on your behalf. Typically, a mail plan should be in conception about two months prior to the date the mail is delivered. This allows for pre-clearance (approval of your mail appeal or direct mail package by the organizations whose lists you're renting), count requests, and a few drafts of the plan prior to placing list orders. If your deadlines are too tight, you may not be able to secure your best lists or the best work from your broker partner.

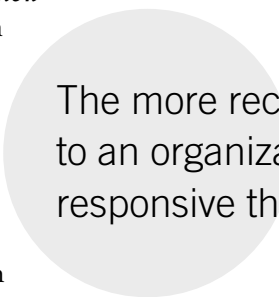
Is your broker connected within the direct response community? A good broker will have industry contacts with other list management firms and can help you network with other direct marketing professionals. They should be up to date on new trends and technology. And in order to be effective, your broker should be well regarded within the industry in terms of professionalism and know-how. So be sure to check references before hiring a list broker!

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LISTS

There are thousands of lists available for acquisition mailings. When a list broker presents a plan, you may be faced with the quandary of choosing between two similar lists. What makes one list better than another? Typically, a list broker will send you written descriptions of each organization's list along with its pricing and available criteria you can choose from in selecting names from a given list. On this sheet, called a "data card," I look for several clues as to the condition of the list and if it's the right choice for my particular plan. Here are some things to consider:

List description. Is the mission of the organization and list market similar to the organization I am representing? The closer the affinity, the more likely those donors will be interested in hearing about your offer. For example, if you are a local environmental organization, you might look into other local or national organizations mailing on the same general topic, or expand your search to lists of donors concerned about wildlife that are affected by environmental destruction.

How donors were acquired. Usually I am looking for donors who received their offer via direct mail and responded via direct mail. Event attendees, prospects, and lapsed donors on lists that aren't your own do not tend to work as well as lists with active donors acquired through direct mail.



The more recently a donor has given to an organization, the more responsive they will be to your offer.

Recency. Typically, list owners offer donors who have given within the past 24 months. If the file is large enough the list manager may offer donors with gifts in the last 12 months, 6 months, or better. The more recently a donor has given to an organization, the more responsive they will be to your offer.

Donation levels. In most instances I'm hoping to find donors who are giving single donations of at least \$10. You are looking for donors similar to yours, so if you are an organization seeking a lower ask as an entry point, you might choose lists that have lower giving levels.

List universe. If I am going to invest in a list, I want to make sure there are enough names that if I get a good response from that list, there are more to rent for a future mailing. Assuming the list performs well, I also want to ensure that I have enough quantity to split the list across package variations within a mailing. Another factor is how the list duplicates against other lists in the merge-purge process. When calculating costs, you need to determine how much you are paying for unique names (or net names) after all the acquired lists have been merged. For example, you may be paying \$60 per thousand names for a list, but if it duplicates at 50 percent, you are really paying more than \$100 per thousand names for the list. The increased cost and limited universe need to be considered in conjunction with response performance.

Frequency of updates. How often is the mailing list updated and are newly acquired names added into the mix?

Often when working with regional mailers we are asked to find out if other regional lists offer their list on the open market. When asked this question, my first concern is that these organizations acquire their names through direct mail and that they are regularly mailing themselves. In this way they are adding new names to their file and improving the chances that the list will continue to work in the future. When organizations mail haphazardly, their acquisition lists atrophy and performance drops.

Cost. Is the list appropriately priced? Your list broker can advise you if a list is inappropriately positioned. (Non-profit lists range from \$65 to \$95 per thousand names.) Other considerations are if the list owner offers nonprofit discounts. A list that is available on exchange is particularly attractive because of the reduction in cost. Sometimes a list manager may be willing to negotiate special discounts for first-time tests. Eager list managers may also offer free tests or free selects on first-time users of their lists. For continuation usage some list managers will offer special net name arrangements if you can provide merge-purge documentation showing duplication information.

Usage. Many people like to look at usage listed on the data card — that is, who else has rented the list. In some

cases this information is instructive, but you need to remember that it is often used as a selling tool by the list manager. My preference is to rely on my list broker to counsel me on which lists are performing better for other users of the list.

Offer. Did the organization acquire their names with premiums or did the donors respond to a straightforward appeal? Again, choosing or not choosing these lists would depend on how you were attracting donors. If I were mailing a calendar or name-and-address labels, I would want lists of donors who were acquired similarly.

Fulfillment. How expeditiously can the list be approved and processed? There is nothing more frustrating than wanting a particular list only to find that you can't get it for your mailing.

These are just a few things to consider when approaching a list plan. When in doubt, consult with a fundraising consultant who can help you determine if your organization should be delving into acquisition and a list broker who can help you prioritize lists in conjunction with your specific fundraising goals. **GF**

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Building Online Community

A Key to Fundraising on the Internet

BY MARY ANN MCGIVERN

At a Carnegie Foundation workshop last year on raising money on the Internet, the presenter said that although research is limited, it seems that online givers — that is, people who give via a “donate now” button on a website — give once. They are impulse donors, not repeat donors. Listserv members, on the other hand, the same speaker said, perceive themselves to be part of a community, even if they give no money. That distinction struck me as interesting, and I asked if donors with a sense of community gave more and how to develop community feelings. Nobody knew.

I was particularly interested because I had just sent an appeal to a listserv of 200 antinuclear organizations and individuals in two dozen countries. I was working for Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). WILPF had facilitated a listserv conversation resulting in a statement to present to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review at the United Nations. I asked the listserv for donations to print the statement.

Only about 40 of the listserv members had participated in the online development of the statement, so I was surprised (and pleased) when at least 100 members responded to the appeal, sending back \$4,000 in gifts ranging from a high of \$700 down to our suggested donation of \$30. We had never sent an appeal to the listserv before, and this was a more generous response than we had expected. Clearly, the listserv members had followed the discussion, even when they did not participate. It seemed to me they saw themselves as a community, working together and willing to contribute to getting an important piece of work accomplished.

Following the Carnegie workshop, I paid closer attention to what constitutes an online community and how to use a listserv to develop it. I see an online community as one that enlarges the community that does the work.

Through a listserv, I want to invite people to share the responsibility. I also want donors to know the impact of their gifts and to give again because they see that their money supports the work they are discussing online and doing themselves at home. This is a particularly important listserv function when the listserv consists of other activists working on a common issue; however, many people join listservs as their way of becoming active on an issue, even if that is not part of the job they do.

The question is always, how to do it? I’ve been looking

at websites more critically since I’ve begun trying to build virtual community, and I’ve given some thought as to how I would like to be approached to give money via an online community. Here’s

the advice I would give anyone wanting to build an online community — both for advocacy and for fundraising.

Listserv members saw themselves as a community, working together and willing to contribute to getting an important piece of work accomplished.

FIRST, COLLECT MY NAME

At first, I just want you to ask for my name and my e-mail address. Later, you can ask me to make a gift. While we’re in the getting-to-know-each-other phase, just ask me to sign up. Give me a reason to give you my name: ask me to sign up for an e-newsletter or for action alerts. Ask me to sign up in order to move deeper into the website or before downloading free articles. Ask me to join a listserv.

JUST TAKE THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

When asking me to sign up, consider carefully what information you want. Don’t overwhelm me and scare me off.

You need my e-mail address so you can contact me in the future, and you want my name because calling me by name helps build community. I suggest that the only other thing you need is my zip code or country. This bit of data will give

you a sense of your geographic reach. Funders like to know what your reach is, and my hunch is that online community members like to know too. You can put this bit of online community data in the About Us page of your website.

You don't need my date of birth, gender, annual income, street address, telephone, or job title. I walk away from that level of initial information. But if I've been an online participant for a while and I'm ready to make a gift, pay membership dues, or buy your T-shirt, then I'll give you my address as part of my credit card data. At that point I may well be willing to answer a few more questions, such as giving my opinion of your newsletter, or telling you about my work and giving you tacit permission to call me when I give my phone number.

INVITATION

Now that you know how to reach me, invite me to participate in the work. Ask me for a report of local activities for a website blog. Ask me to travel to a conference, hold a house party to show a new DVD, or write to Congress. Ask me to give money. But always keep the work as the context of the invitation.

OFFER ME SOME BENEFITS

In return for my name and e-mail address, give me a newsletter or action alerts. Let me download articles. In return for a membership fee, you could give me access to members-only pages on your website. For example, I'm a member of a writers' group. For \$100 a year, I can join a chat room, share what I've written, and read and post on the bulletin board. This is useful access for me and I feel a part of the group. The *New York Times* online subscription fee gives access to columnists and archives. Perhaps you have the podcast of a keynote address to offer.

Strengthening Online Community

We don't know if community can thrive in cyberspace or if people will find satisfaction for the long haul in working with people whose hands they never shake. But it's time to find out. Here are some things to think about as you create and work to strengthen your online community:

1. Who do you serve now by web and e-mail? What do you know about them? How can you enlarge that list?
2. What do the people you contact virtually have in common? What benefits do they gain from your site?
3. What do they know about each other and about you?

Another type of benefit is the opportunity to participate in the work.

Another type of benefit is the opportunity to participate in the work. That's why I want your action alert and to be kept up to date through your newsletter. In a recent issue of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, Madeline Stanionis recommended running issue and advocacy campaigns online to keep members engaged and to turn listserv members into donors. That's one of the steps in building community and turning community members into donors.

THE ASK

Once you have my address and have invited me to become more deeply involved in the work, send me an appeal letter (online) three or four times a year. Write this appeal letter as carefully as you prepare direct mail. Tell me your need, your accomplishments, your funding sources, how many other online users give, how much you hope I will give.

Set a deadline by turning your fundraising appeal into a time-limited campaign.

Develop a case statement for the ask letter that fits what you know about this burgeoning online community (see "Strengthening Online Community" box below). I suspect they will be most likely to give to help you develop technical capacity, but this is new ground for all of us.

Recently, I unsubscribed from a news listserv that harangued us monthly: "Hey, everybody, we need your money so hit Donate Now right now." I didn't like the news coverage enough to be treated like a cash register every month.

Listserve Fundraising Versus "Donate Now"

Invitations to give money as part of participating in the work are different from the ubiquitous "Donate Now" button on a website. I might use that button to give to my Public Radio station or to a group where I'm already an active member. I might use Donate Now when I check out your website after I've received your direct mail appeal (30 percent of direct mail recipients do check out the website). Or perhaps, I'll give on impulse. The Donate Now button is a useful tool to collect money. It's a convenient method of responding to an invitation. However, Donate Now is a point-of-purchase display (like candy at the checkout counter), not an ask or an invitation to participate in a community.

Set a deadline by turning your fundraising appeal into a time-limited campaign. The Public Radio method is a good model. Run a three-week campaign, with reports to the listserv and postings on the website. Send thank yous very promptly. Remind your list members that they are not alone. Consider posting their names.

Then, in return for my money, give me a membership, downloads, or access to a chat room, or offer an occasional online seminar on topics related to your issue. These are freebie premiums, cheap for you and valuable to me.

Brainstorm all the benefits you have to offer. The task may be fun to do, but it is not easy. It requires thinking about the work differently because you have invited or plan to invite a large list of people to help do the work. So when you post a report on your webpage blog of a new strategy developed by one part of your membership, you have to think too about whether you want to add that strategy to your work plan. Keep adding to the list of possible benefits. The benefits you choose will shape how you build your community — top down with a newsletter and action alerts or collegially.

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY BEYOND THE ASK

The interactive listserv has the most potential for building community because it takes little technical expertise and because the members bring a commitment to working on the issue. When I appealed to my WILPF listserv, I had a \$2,000 printing bill for a project many of them had worked on. As money came in, I e-mailed the

Communicating by listserv offers participants a very convenient way to feel connected to work that's important to them.

names of donors and the amounts of their gifts to the whole listserv. When the giving reached \$4,000, I presented another compelling need and asked if we could put the excess to use there. This communication gave mem-

bers another opportunity to interact with us and to be part of the work by directing how the additional funds would be spent.

Nobody said no and at least sixty respondents said yes — I felt a chorus of great good will. I'd given my members the benefit of strengthening their community.

Building online community gets both easier and more difficult as time goes on. Easier because more people are online and are used to participating that way — communicating by listserv offers participants a very convenient way to feel connected to work that's important to them and it capitalizes on a sense of urgency to drive a quick response.

At the same time, using online communities for fundraising gets more difficult because it's no longer a new strategy, and many online users are beginning to be burned out from — or just tune out — online fundraising asks. Nonetheless, as with any fundraising strategy, the key is building personal relationships with your donors and expanding those relationships into a community. Increasing that community online can only help. **GFJ**

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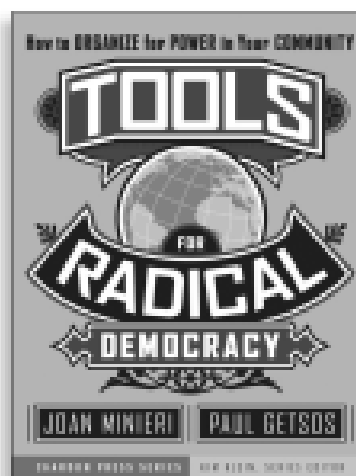
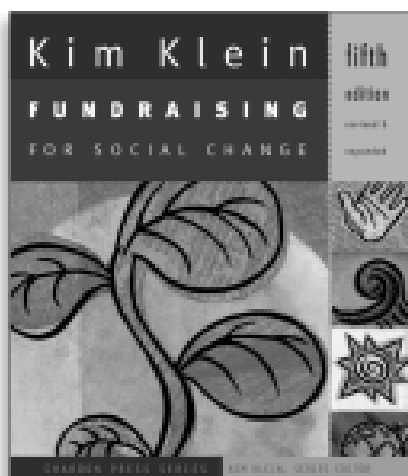
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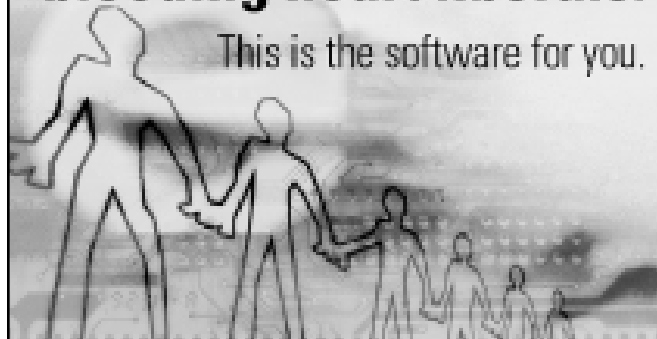
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