

7 KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL FUND-A-NEED

A successful fund-a-need has the ability to bring a crowd of people together in support of your cause and create the emotional high-point of the evening. A successful fund-a-need can also be the financial highlight of the evening, raising more than any other lot – often raising more than the rest of the auction combined.

As such, it is crucial to give your fund-a-need the importance and planning it deserves. We have worked with numerous organizations that spend

exponentially more time and energy planning silent auctions – which raise less than ten percent of their fund-a-need – but give little attention to their fund-a-need.

Given that the fund-a-need is the most important element of your fundraising auction, treat it as such. Start focusing on these seven keys at least three months in advance of your event to achieve your best results.

KEY #1: HONEST NEED

This may seem obvious but whatever you are asking people to help you fund has to represent what your organization needs. It has to be an honest need that maps to what you do. The need itself, however, may not be obvious, and may require some digging.

The more specific the need you can target – such as funding the P.E. teacher for an elementary school or repairing the roof of a food kitchen – the better.

Operating costs are always a challenge because they are so broad. But if that is what your organization needs to fund, it is the honest need to target.

KEY #2: EMOTIONALLY ENGAGING

When your auctioneer takes the stage and asks your crowd to support your organization, how will your crowd react?

One school we worked with wanted to renovate the middle-school bathrooms on campus as their fund-a-need. We thought it was a questionable need to target, but their committee assured us that it had emotional resonance with their crowd. Sure enough, the night of their event, the crowd cheered when we

mentioned renovating the bathrooms. Those parents had been forced to deal with those bathrooms for years and were happy to pitch in to fix them.

If you are not sure your crowd will support a particular need, ask! Fundraising is meant to be a conversation, and your closest supporters will be thrilled to be part of the decision-making process. Engage your donor base more than to just ask them for money.

KEY #3: STRETCH GOAL

The amount of money you need to raise in your fund-a-need is as important as your reason for raising it. If you under-challenge your crowd, you'll leave money on the table. The goal needs to be attainable, but it should make your crowd stretch to reach it.

Set your goal utilizing data from your previous events. If you raised \$50,000 last year, it is reasonable to challenge your crowd to raise \$60,000 this year. Provided, of course, you have a lot of the same donors returning.

If you have never done an event before, however, you need to do groundwork in advance with your potential donors. Which is a good segue to...



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KEY #4: LEAD DONOR

We advocate starting your fund-a-need at the highest level for which you know you have a donation and working your way down from there. Therefore, the lead donor is the most important person in your fund-a-need because nothing sucks the air out of your event like starting the fund-a-need out on a limb and not getting a single pledge.

The lead donor makes sure your fund-a-need starts off quickly. They establish the momentum and get the proverbial snowball rolling. The lead donor also makes the lower levels seem more “reasonable” through their giving.

Getting a lead donor makes you do some meaningful and often hard work. But it also establishes an honest level of support. You can’t fundraise in a vacuum, and engaging your donors in cultivation conversations helps validate the emotional resonance of your ask.

It also helps you set the goal for your event, especially if you’ve never done an auction or fund-a-need before. For example: if you have a donor willing to be the lead in your fund-a-need at \$5,000 and you have 300 attendees, a goal of \$100,000 would be more realistic than if you had a \$2,000 lead and only 220 attendees.

KEY #5: QUANTIFICATION OF NEED

People need to know how their contribution will have an impact, at every level. The power of a fund-a-need lies in its ability to motivate donors of all capabilities to pitch in together and give each of them a sense of accomplishment.

You empower your crowd by showing them how their donation “moves the needle,” at every level. Take the overall goal for your fund-a-need and break it down into components that map to the increments you’ll be asking for. An excellent example of this comes from an organization that serves the homeless in San Francisco:

\$2,500 Move-In Fund: Provides funds for the security deposit, the first and last months’ rent, and personal items needed when a client moves from the streets into permanent housing.

\$300 Community Food Pantry: Provides funds for weekly nutritional support through the Community Food Pantry.

\$150 Family-Connect Fund: Provides funds for clients to travel home and reconnect with family.

These are meaningful, easy-to-digest numbers, and they empower donors at every level. It’s clear that \$2,500 has a major impact, but donors who give \$300 or \$150 have a true sense of accomplishment as well.

KEY #6: MESSAGING/CREATING A SENSE OF URGENCY

In conjunction with the quantification of need, you need to create a sense of urgency. What won’t happen if people don’t support you? This helps focus the crowd and create an atmosphere of giving.

Done right, a fund-a-need brings the crowd together and is the emotional highlight of your event! Make the case for your need so logical it makes complete sense. Strive to shut down people’s analytical brains so that when you back it up with an emotional ask, you engage their intuitive/emotional brain and help them get swept up in the passion of the moment.

Whether through your printed program, testimonial, or video, good messaging will empower your crowd to make a difference in the world by supporting your organization.

KEY #7: MARKETING

Fund-a-need success requires marketing in advance. You can’t expect the entire crowd to simply show up, have a few drinks, and then buy-in to what you’re selling. It often feels that way, but that is because enough of the crowd was primed in advance.

Print the fund-a-need in the catalog, and include the quantification of need. Structure the entirety of your program to be on-message, not just the part where you ask for money. Include the fund-a-need in your online auction catalog, in your newsletter, and in your invitations. Obviously you don’t want to continually use the same message, so find creative ways to get the message out.

And the best form of marketing of all is word of mouth. Nothing beats a phone call or a conversation.

FINAL KEY TO SUCCESS

Do what you say you will! If you ask for money to build a playground, you better build the playground. Then follow-up with your donors after it is built. Send them pictures of the playground. Invite them to see the playground at its grand opening. Occasionally include photos of kids enjoying the playground in newsletters or e-blasts.

And be sure to show the crowd next year what they’ve helped you accomplish. Last year’s fund-a-need can be your best source of marketing material for donor cultivation and for getting your next fund-a-need started. ★



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