

An Effective Approach to Major Gift Solicitation - Getting Started

By TPG Philanthropy Group

Do Your Homework

1. Make sure you are familiar with organization you represent and its current program and priorities. Review the organization's points of pride (major accomplishments) and, if possible, be prepared to share a personal experience that impressed you about the quality, results, and impact the organization provides.
2. Gather important information about your prospect. Together with other leadership and staff, develop a profile of the prospect:
 - What are his/her interests?
 - What have they contributed too previously?
 - What is the largest gift they have ever given?
 - Do they give individually or through their company or family foundation?
 - Do they have a philanthropic fund with a local foundation? If so, how large is their fund?
 - Are they candidates for estate planning and/or deferred gift discussion?
 - Who are their key financial advisors?
 - Have they recently sold a business or inherited significant resources? How is business?
 - Do they have a loved one who may be appropriate for memorializing or honoring with a gift?
 - Are there other people who can be supportive with the solicitation who have special relationships with the prospect? Would it be helpful to have staff, or others participate in the solicitation?
 - What would be the best setting to conduct the initial meeting?
 - What are the likely concerns the prospects might raise in the solicitation?
 - What materials, handouts, or visuals would be helpful to have for the solicitation?
3. Finally, establish an "ask ratings" regarding the prospect – sequence of asks rating and how much you should ask the prospect to consider.



TPG COMPANIES

Leaders' Gifts: Setting the Pace

As a leader of the campaign, it is important that you make your own gift before soliciting others. It will be easier to obtain a quality gift from your prospects if you are comfortable that your gift is also credible and a quality one, based on your own personal circumstances. The ability to share that you made a generous "equal commitment" gift (not necessarily equal amount) when you are soliciting will give the prospect more confidence in your plan and leadership. Prospects will take into consideration what leadership has given, in determining their own gifts. Initial gifts will be "yardsticks for giving by those who follow."

Personalize the Solicitation

Major gift solicitations should be conducted in person, not over the telephone. Large gifts are often not closed with one visit. Family members, financial advisors, and/or business partners (even if they are not the primary prospect) should generally be included in the solicitation meeting(s). A major part of the success of a solicitation is the chemistry of the relationship between solicitor(s) and prospect, as well as how one is asked.

If possible, two solicitors should participate in the prospect cultivation and solicitation. It demonstrates to the prospect the importance you have put on their gift. It shows that there are others equally committed to the success of the campaign, and it provides for different perspectives to be heard. The old saying that two heads are better than one also applies to solicitation. While one person is answering questions or explaining the need, the other person can better observe responses, body language, etc. Evaluating the solicitation and together determining the best approaches for follow-up are enhanced with multiple solicitors.

Set the Appointment

The most critical aspect of major gift solicitations is getting the appointment. Be enthusiastic and let the prospect know that you want to share with them some exciting information about the organization, which is a project near and dear to you and that you would like to solicit their advice and support. Make sure that you make the appointment at a time and place that is convenient to both the prospect and solicitors. Also, try to schedule at least 20-45 minutes for the initial meeting. Try to avoid an environment where others may overhear conversation or where there will be distractions. If the prospect asks if you are looking for money from them, be candid and enthusiastic. "Absolutely ...I would like to tell you about the organization, and have you join me as a major supporter this year ...but just as important, we would like to get your input on additional ways we can achieve success on behalf of (Name of Organization) which is doing such amazing things." Make it clear that you will be asking for their support.

Engage the Prospect

Do not try to close too quickly. Share the vision, services, benefits, points of pride, and needs of the organization. While informing the prospect of the needs, you are also demonstrating the commitment of leadership. Donors want to be confident that they are giving to organizations with knowledgeable and committed leadership. Enthusiasm is contagious. So is apathy. It's your choice.



TPG COMPANIES

Conduct the Meeting

Take a few minutes to break the ice and to establish a comfortable environment. Introduce yourself and those with you, talk about your involvement and commitment to the organization and the services it provides. In a concise manner, share with the prospect the value of the organization and what it has accomplished. Mention some points of pride...emphasize the opportunities for the future based on the new vision and strategic plan. Discuss the importance of their participation in addition to their financial support. Your organization needs their advice, expertise, identification of additional leadership, and introduction to other prospective donors. Once you have shared your enthusiasm about the organization / project and demonstrated the needs / opportunities to make a difference, it is time to request the gift.

The Ask

Using the numbers agreed upon during the rating session, (see item 1 above “Do Your Homework”) the request can be introduced as follows:

“We would appreciate it and hope you can consider a gift of \$_____ to the campaign.” (NOTE: If there are significant projects/or programs, which need to be funded at the level of the request, mention the one or two that you think would appeal to the prospective donor.)

PAUSE: Once you have asked for the gift, it is time to be silent and let the prospect fully respond with questions or other comments. LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN – this is key to success. There is no need to ever apologize for asking for a gift. The individuals you are approaching expect you to ask, have likely been asked before by many organizations, and have, at times, been solicitors themselves.

Questions, Objections, and Dialogue

Answer the question as best you can but do not get into a debate. If you are unsure as to proper answers to specific questions, tell the prospect you will find out the answer and get back to them or have the staff provide them with the details. (Make sure you or staff follow up promptly.) If the donor offers a gift significantly lower than what was requested, you can supportively ask if, by spreading the gift over time could it be more significant; or if it is structured as a deferred gift with certain tax benefits, would they consider a larger amount? Do not press if they indicate that what they have offered is the limit to what they want to do. Thank them as enthusiastically as possible and complete the pledge card with them. If they indicate that they want some time to think about it and discuss it with others, thank them for their consideration and request a specific time when you can get back to them for a response.

Think of yourself as an enthusiastic salesperson...you are not “begging” Make sure that you are a good listener as well as good presenter. Once the gift is closed, stress the importance of your organization’s need for cash by the goal date. If possible, discuss how and when they will be able to make payment(s). Thank them and help them complete the pledge card.



TPG COMPANIES

Follow-up

Make sure that appropriate staff and/or leadership are briefed on your solicitation and that there are follow-up communications thanking the prospect ...even if a gift was not made. A hand written thank you from the individual who initially set up the appointment and/or was the solicitor, in addition to whatever is sent officially by the organization, is always appreciated.

Solicitations should be a positive experience for the prospect. A successful (positive) solicitation can set the stage for future involvement. An unsuccessful (non-positive) solicitation can turn off a donor to the campaign as well as to giving future support.

Summary

Keep in mind that people are more likely to contribute to make dreams happen than to solve problems. Success happens when a donor feels connected to the organization through his or her heart and head first, and only then ...through their checkbook.

TPG Companies

Copyright 2011