

Increasing giving while growing contributor numbers

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Nearly every non-profit is experiencing declining amounts and numbers of gifts during these times, and this is often working against an increasing need for your services. [What can you do?](#)

First, celebrate that you have survived. Seriously. Hundreds of non-profits closed their doors in 2009, thousands are concerned about joining those ranks in the near future and an innumerable number are in conversations with other potential partners to consolidate.



Secondly, if you have found ways to meet your mission within a balanced budget in our new economic and social environment, you now need to focus on increasing the number of gifts and total giving. There are specific actions you can consider. Gather your staff, board, key volunteers, outside consultants – whomever you need - to address some important questions about key subjects. Set aside time to brainstorm, evaluate and develop measurable action steps designed around maintaining and growing your current contributor numbers.

- **Seek ways to better connect with you current contributors** – the trend is for current contributors to give less and to be more selective in giving with those they historically have supported. In other words, they are no longer contributing to non-profits they have previously supported. This decision is based on their perceptions of your effectiveness in accomplishing your mission coupled with how important that mission is to them in these times. If they are current contributors you have the opportunity to impact these perceptions. This is much less expensive and time-consuming than seeking new contributors.
 - An engaged contributor stays engaged – How can you better connect with more of your current givers? What do the facts tell you about the number of contributors and their giving records? If you have volunteers, are you continually assessing their performance and providing “growing” experiences through assignment changes tailored to their gifts & interests and your needs & opportunities?
 - An informed contributor helps spread the word - How can you better share critical information about your mission and its impact in 2010? Seek to have meaningful contact with an increasing number of contributors on a regular basis. Large non-profits generally provide twelve “touches” annually. These include a mixture of newsletters, emails, phone calls, visits, birthday and special holiday cards, tours, volunteer opportunities, recognition, etc. Use your imagination and your resources to increase contact while staying within your budget. Be sure these knowledge-sharing opportunities include ideas and an

invitation to be an advocate within their sphere of influence. Give them practical tools they need to make it easy for them to speak and share with others from their heart.

- An effective contributor seeks to continually increase their giving – This always involves a mix of their time, talent and treasures. If your mission is meaningful to contributors they will find ways to give. Help them with innovative means that are inexpensive, relatively easy to do and combine elements of fun with mission accomplishment. An evening or half day weekend project that involves spouses, families and friends often fit contributors' time and interests.
- Keep contributors focused on your mission – This can mean you need to re-assess your vision, purpose and mission. What are we here to accomplish? Is this the best use of our resources in this new environment? When you are confident vision, purpose and mission are properly aligned, ask yourself, How are we doing in producing our desired results? When results aren't making the vision an ever-growing reality then either the relationships, the processes or your vision are flawed – in that order. Review them with a critical eye starting with who's on board and how well do we work together. Remember: your mission IS your message. Always talk about how your mission and actions are meeting needs, not what your needs are to carry out your mission. The former is seen as selfless; the latter as self-serving.

- **Consider Host Events to Grow Contributors and Contributions**

One means to increase your informed, engaged and effective contributors has been around for years. Successful non-profits use them in a variety of unique and tailored ways. They are called a number of things like An Evening with Friends, Sponsor Event, Dessert and Discussion, Gathering of Hope. All involve a personal invitation by a host for a 1 to 1 ½ hour combination social and informational event. The non-profit facilitates these by securing volunteer hosts and providing the message. Hosts can be board members, volunteers, staff or influential and supportive community members. The event is held in a home or suitable intimate location for six to fifteen attendees. Plan to invite at least twice the number of people you want to attend. Ideally, your host has names to suggest which are combined with your proposed guest list. The host initiates the invitation (although you may do a mailing to make it easier for them). Most importantly, your host follows –up personally with each invitee to obtain their response.

The schedule generally involves an informal 'meet and greet' period where the host individually welcomes everyone and introduces them to the non-profit representative(s) and other guests. Light snacks or desserts add to the comfort and social aspects of the event. This is followed by the formal program, which can be very informal and range from live music to slick audio and video productions. Whatever means you choose should reflect your host and invited guests and focus on your message and an invitation to take some kind of action. That action can vary from thoughtful counsel to an invitation to contribute time, talents and/or treasures. The larger the proposed contribution the more time you need to plan to invest in personal follow-up visits and subsequent conversations.

Where possible, it is highly desirable if your host welcomes everyone when you begin your program, explains their commitment to the organization and extends their personal invitation for their guests to take the actions you are proposing. Either staff or board members can make the presentation, which may be as straight-forward as showing a self-explanatory DVD and following up with your carefully scripted action invitation. Keep it simple and clear. Make your points for the head while painting a compelling picture for the heart.

The key to success is relationship-building coupled with a meaningful message that includes an invitation to take one or more suggested actions. One of those actions can almost always be to host a future similar event with a new guest list.

For more information visit the MCN [Non-Profit Resource page](#) and contact Chris for a free consultation at 517-260-7483 or eder@mastermindconsult.net.