

# STRONG PARKS, STRONG COMMUNITIES

## Tool 16: Point of Entry Events

Fundraising consultant Terry Axelrod has developed a successful fundraising program – the Benevon Model – which is *a mission-centered, four-step, circular process for raising sustainable funding and major gifts from individual donors*. The model is described fully on Axelrod’s website, [www.benevon.com](http://www.benevon.com). This summary focuses on the first two elements.

### Step 1: The Point of Entry Event

A private Point of Entry Event introduces prospective donors to your organization. Guests participate at the invitation of a friend or colleague who serves as an “Ambassador” for your group. This succinct, one-hour introductory event educates and inspires guests with the facts and stories about your work. It is most effective when it focuses on three overarching areas of impact. It is not a solicitation event, but future fundraising success hinges on capturing guests’ names with permission.

A Point of Entry should be designed to be easily repeatable. Here is a sample one-hour program that could be hosted in someone’s home, with access to a screen and projector:

- **Welcome guests and thank them for coming**
- **Introduce them to their national park:** *Show a 15-minute video about the park*
- **Introduce them to you:** *Present 15 minutes about VNPA’s programs and strategic vision with the park; highlight three areas (e.g., Dark Skies, the threat from mining, and Teen Ambassadors).*
- **Share the difference you make:** *Show 10-minute video testimonial from program participants*
- **Teaser:** *Present a 10 min. condensed educational program to give guests a flavor for the work*
- **Engage their curiosity:** *Allow 10 min. for questions and discussion.*

The event has four key ingredients that make it work:

- People must be invited personally by someone they know,
- Guests must attend knowing they are coming just to learn about your work,
- You must have time to do the full Point of Entry program, and
- You must have permission to follow up with all the guests afterwards.

### Step 2: Follow-up and Involve

Every guest at your Point of Entry Event will receive a follow-up call within two to three days. Do not wait longer than three days – people forget their experience and it is not as valuable. Plan on 15 minutes for the phone conversation. This is not a quick thank-you call: it is an interactive research call in which you gather critical data on each potential lifelong donor and friend.

The purpose of this call is to gauge the guest’s level of interest in becoming more involved with your organization. If the guest is not interested in becoming more involved, thank them and let them off the

hook immediately. (“It was great to meet you, thanks for coming. I understand this is not your area of interest. Is there someone else you think we should invite to our next event?”) If they are interested in becoming more involved, this follow-up call is the start of an authentic dialog, which is the basis of any lasting relationship. However – this is **not** a solicitation call: do **not** ask for money.

Keep these guidelines in mind when choosing who from your group makes the follow-up calls.

- The person who makes the follow-up calls must have a speaking role at the Point of Entry Event (tour guide, storyteller). When they make that follow-up call, your guests must already be familiar with this person.
- The person who makes the follow-up calls must like talking with people on the phone and enjoy developing relationships.
- It cannot be someone who will just be doing the calls to check them off a list. This person must be passionate about this important step in the Benevon Model—the beginning of a lifelong relationship with potential donors!
- This person must know how to use your database or work closely with someone on staff who does. After each call, every bit of data gathered must be recorded in your database. Be sure your donor tracking system has a section for you to record and track notes about each donor contact and about your next steps.

### Steps 3 and 4: Cultivation, Solicitation, Introducing Others

In the Benevon Model, Step 3 is the solicitation. It takes place after multiple cultivation contacts with donor prospects. Benevon describes it this way: “Guests are invited by their Ambassador to attend an inspiring, mission-focused, one-hour free breakfast or lunch fundraising event. At the end of this event, guests are invited to join your organization's **Multiple-Year Giving Society** by making a gift of at least \$1,000 per year for the next five years. The Free One-Hour Ask Event differs from other, more traditional, fundraising events in that all Table Captains have been Ambassadors in the prior year and their guests will have attended a Point of Entry. Also, the Ask Event is free to attend, and there is no obligation for guests to give.”

In Step 4, the final element in the cycle, donors are asked to introduce others to your group. They may become Ambassadors and host their own Point of Entry events the following year.