

STRONG PARKS, STRONG COMMUNITIES

Tool 4: Tips & Tools for Fundraising Success

Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start when it comes to fundraising. Here are five tips to help if you are new to fundraising and want to help bring resources to support your organization.

Tip #1. Attitude matters! Fundraising is rarely limited by the number of donors – it is usually limited by the number of “askers.” So getting in the right mindset is essential if you are going to be a good fundraiser. And fundraising is often not just about fundraising – it is also about building your board’s confidence to serve as ambassadors for your group, and about getting people onto your board who are fearless about asking others to join in your cause.

Tip #2. It is all about you. You have heard the phrase “elevator speech,” right? That is the two- to four-sentence pitch you might be able to give if you happened to be caught in an elevator with someone you knew worked at a local foundation, and they turned to you in the elevator and asked you about your group and why you are involved. Memorizing your four sentences is not mandatory; being clear about your own goals and motivations, why you do this work on behalf of your Friends organization and the park you support, is.

Tip #3. It is all about them. Your group is doing great work; there are donors in your community who believe strongly in your work, love your park, share your vision, and have ideas about the future conditions they would like to see. Maybe they want to see more interpretive programs, more opportunity for youth employment in the park, inclusive trails for people with physical disabilities, or new exhibits in the visitor center. There is a good chance that what is on donors’ minds is also on the park’s radar. You can help donors realize *their* goals while meeting real needs for the park. Learn what concerns and motivates these donors and invite them into your work as partners in a shared vision. It is not about begging; it is about asking people to invest in shared success.

Tip #4. Fundraising is friend-raising. A fundraiser’s job is to make friends for her organization – lots and lots of friends who will help the organization succeed financially. You want to make friends for your group, and carefully cultivate those relationships over time. Friends are interested in what you are doing, but they are really interested in why you bother – what are you accomplishing and how is that making the world a better place? It helps if you stop talking about what you do, and start talking about *what difference you make*.

Tip #5. If you want my money, ask my advice. When donors are asked for ideas and input, and later see their fingerprints on your guiding strategic plan document, it sets the stage for your later fundraising efforts. “You told us your ideas, we listened, we acted, will not you help us reach our common goals?” Donors who share your vision, because it is *their* vision and they have told you so, are more likely to invest in your success.

On the following page, we offer five practical tools for your fundraising toolbox.

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION: YOUR TOOL BOX

When you are getting ready to make your first contact with a donor – whether it is a phone call or a coffee meeting that you have requested, we recommend the following:

Tool #1. Information packet. This is for them (if it is a meeting) but it is also for you, so you can be knowledgeable about the park's needs and your group's programs and details if you are asked. If you are asked a question you cannot answer, it is perfectly fine to tell the donor you will get back them. Just make sure you do!

Tool #2. Script. Write it out, in your own words. There is nothing worse than making your first donor phone call and stammering your first sentence or forgetting to introduce yourself, how you are related to the organization, and why you are calling. "Hi, this is Allison, I am a board member for Friends of ABC National Park. I am calling to thank you for all of your past support over the last few years! It has been wonderful to have your support. I was hoping you might have two minutes to chat – I would love to learn a little about how you discovered Friends of ABC and what connects you to our mission."

Tool #3. Glass of water. A good fundraiser makes space for others to speak. So in your conversation with a donor, particularly if you soliciting a gift, have a glass of water. When you ask a question – particularly, "you gave \$500 last year, do you think you would be able to do that again this year?" – be in the habit of pausing to take a sip of water and listen. Get comfortable with silence.

Tool #4. Personal conviction. You know why you are doing this. Your park is operating under budget constraints that are more constrained year after year. It's a unique, wonderful park and you care deeply about its ability to protect and interpret the important resources within its boundaries. This work is very important to you. Wear that belief like a cape, like a fancy hat, like a comfortable jacket.

Tool #5. Smile. Even when you are on the phone, people can hear if you are smiling. Everything is better when you are smiling. We promise.