



please don't think of direct mail as requiring hundreds of thousands of pieces of mail. You may direct your mail to a very specific group of people or to several targeted groups. Your success will depend in large part upon how effective your letter is.

The letter should build a compelling case for how well the gift from the donor will be used. Don't dwell on the needs of your organization. Talk about the wonderful things you will be able to do with the support you will gratefully accept from the donor—your organization's friend.

As with your membership materials, the quality of the letter and the entire package should be top notch. It does not have to be expensive but should be attractively typed (no misspellings or old typewriter ribbons or printer cartridges, please!) and on nice quality paper in a presentable envelope. Be sure to include an easy way for the recipients to send their gift to you; this is called a response device. Probably the most effective device is an envelope that includes a form on which they can fill in the information about how much they are giving, for what purpose (if you give that option), their name and address, and boxes to check for further information: "please send me information about membership, how to volunteer, etc."

If possible, the name and address should be typed on the envelope (rather than using a label or window envelope), and either send it first class—if you have less than 200—or use a bulk rate postage stamp if you are sending it by bulk rate. Do not use a printed bulk rate indicia or meter the mail.

Once you receive the gift, send a thank-you note as soon as possible. For a large gift, a phone call or a handwritten note from the board president—in addition to the thank-you note or letter—is a wonderful touch that donors remember. If your thank-you letters go out over the board president's signature, then a phone call or handwritten note from another board member, a revered volunteer, or your curator or director would also be appreciated.

The definition of a large—or major—gift, of course, depends upon the organization. For a museum with a budget of \$10,000 annually, a gift of \$100 may be highly valued. However, if the budget is \$1 million or more, \$1,000 gifts may be considered large.

A year-end appeal (calendar year, not your fiscal year) is effective. Try to target your mail date between late September and Thanksgiving. Donors are inundated with appeals between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Try to beat the rush! As your program expands, try an additional direct mail appeal when your museum is at its most active. If you have a popular summer program that receives a lot of publicity, try sending out an appeal about the time you begin to get your first publicity. It reinforces how wonderful your museum is!

Be sure to keep your database accurate and complete, noting not only correct names and addresses but also when the gift was received, how much it was, for what purpose it was designated if any, to which appeal the contributor responded, etc. Your database can be as simple as 3x5 cards if you do not have a computer yet, but do keep a database of some sort. Don't just take in the money without being able to track the information.

### Major Gifts

As mentioned earlier, each museum has to determine what a "major" gift is, but every organization should work at developing a core group of major donors. Generally, you can anticipate that about 10% of your donors will give 60% of your total gift income; 20% will give 20%; and 70% will give 20%. Once you have targeted who these givers of larger gifts are, obviously you should concentrate your efforts on this group. This group should receive individual, personalized attention. They should be asked in person for their gift. They should be given special opportunities: invited for special events,

given behind-the-scenes tours, be among the first to learn exciting or challenging information about your museum, called upon regularly, and treated as the good friends that they are.

You then will want to identify that other 20% who are giving you larger gifts than that large group of 70% who are giving you the smallest gifts. With this 20% group, you should work at ways to upgrade their level of commitment.

Finally, identify and eliminate the prospects or lapsed donors who are taking more of your resources than their level of commitment would warrant.

We often use the pyramid to describe types of donors, percentages of donors, etc. Another type of pyramid is the commitment pyramid where donors move from the lowest level to the highest. These levels, moving from bottom to top are:

- |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 6. Awareness of your museum        | 5. Interest in your museum   |
| 4. Support of your museum          | 3. Commitment to your museum |
| 2. Involvement with "their" museum | 1. Leaving a legacy          |

### Gift Clubs

One effective way to involve major donors and to move them up the commitment pyramid is what is known as gift clubs or donor clubs. The basic concept behind these is to encourage a sense of belonging with a group of people who share the same level of commitment to an organization that you do. These clubs recognize donors and give them a chance to mingle with each other and have special opportunities. It is a way of giving personalized attention to your best friends.

Often, gift clubs are an extension of your various membership levels; the significant difference is that a major portion of the amount given to your museum is tax deductible.

Smaller museums may wish to recognize donors based on cumulative giving, while larger museums may "require" a large annual gift to qualify for gift clubs levels.

Gift clubs are often named after important people in your community's or organization's past or, more typically, by logical levels of beneficence: Benefactor, Patron, Contributor, Friend. The more successful clubs, however, have unique names which help the donor to be reminded of the commitment to a specific museum. Often the founder of an organization is honored with the highest level of giving club. The William Henry Smith Society carries a lot of weight with those who know his role in establishing the museum, and this is a way to remind donors of the commitment of its founders.

Establish your gift clubs after careful planning and reaching consensus in decision making. If you must make changes in the levels required to reach various clubs, or in the names of the clubs, or the benefits, then your planning was not complete.

Often, gift clubs members have their names on a plaque in a public place or are mentioned in the annual report; have a special membership certificate or card; receive a memento—pin, paperweight, etc.; or are invited to a special dinner and other special events. Plan carefully, however, so that what the donor gets back is valued by the donor, for very often these benefits have monetary value (pins and dinners, for example) and thus are not tax deductible. The whole issue of tax deductibility is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that your museum's treasurer, accountant, or legal adviser should be consulted when deciding upon benefits and how to present them to donors.

In Part II, we will explore alternative sources and methods for successful fundraising.

*Editor's note: Carol Vincent retired in 1995 as director of development of the Indianapolis Zoo. She is the former part-time Coordinator for the Association of Indiana Museums. She has nearly twenty-five years of experience in the field of museum fundraising.*