

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement

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IMPROVE YOUR DIRECT MAIL PROGRAM

Spring is a time to look back over your shoulder at the past year's fund raising activities. It helps to consider what you might have done differently—like getting your mailing out earlier or planning a special event for friends and alums. It is also a time to look forward to the fall and begin to make preparations over the summer that will help you hit the ground running come September. Do you need a new brochure? Is there work to do on the database? Do you need to recruit more volunteers?

Among the many things to evaluate is your direct mail program. Are you able to chart or graph any trends that will be helpful? Can you do a gift list that will tell you who your consistent larger donors are (a tip for special treatment)? If you are receiving mostly small gifts, is there a way you could challenge your donors to increase those gifts?

Here are some ideas that come to mind for improving your next direct mail program¹:

1. Prepare a new donor package to send to each new donor 2-4 weeks after receiving the gift. Include items that will help them know your ministry better.
2. Spend a bit of time and money locating and involving lapsed donors. Add them to your "donor acquisition file."
3. Plan to acknowledge each gift promptly, ideally within 24 hours. A thank you phone call is even better than a note.
4. Remember to enclose a reply envelope with thank you letters. It will invite donors think about the next gift.
5. Send different thank you notes to different donors. The larger and more consistent the gift, the better quality the note—or phone call.
6. Promote planned giving opportunities regularly. Since donors have to "stop and think" about these gifts, they will need to be reminded often that you invite planned gifts. Frequent givers are the best prospects.
7. Build an entire mailing around a supportive news article. For example, if you have just returned from a successful mission trip and the local/campus newspaper carries an article, make copies and invite support for the next trip.
8. Reprint news articles or an occasional letter of affirmation (with permission) in your next regular mailing.
9. Enclose a photograph of a successful activity in your thank you letters.

¹ Some ideas were presented by Dennis Meyer and Bonnie O'Neill of Meyer Partners at the Seattle ALDE Conference.

10. Offer donors an opportunity to weigh in on a hot issue, either by vote or by using a questionnaire. Be sure to send them the results.
11. Tell your story with stories.
12. Do an objective survey of people who have been on your mailing list for sometime, but who haven't given, to see why not.
13. Think about the quality of your mailing—things like the kind of paper, color of ink, style of font, etc. Take a couple of mailings to other non-profits and ask them for feedback.
14. Use a “handwritten” PS on your next letter. Handwriting on a printed letter is generally better read than anything else.
15. Use a handwriting font or script font to address your letters. Better yet, ask volunteers to do the addressing if you are sending out a manageable number.
16. Keep your message simple and direct. Focus on one or two particular programs or ideas, rather than trying to be all encompassing with every mailing.
17. Avoid packing too much in each envelope. You want people to read your letter and return the gift envelope. Inserts, brochures, etc. are generally more confusing than helpful.
18. Tell donors that you will mention them in your next newsletter. Then do, of course. Gift levels are not as popular as they once were. A simple alphabetical listing of supporters is just as effective.
19. Repackage your appeals from time to time, but keep the “brand recognition” of a logo or theme. Don't make it so different that your readers will think they are on a totally new mailing list.
20. Study mailings of other successful non-profits to learn their “best practices.”
21. If your need is urgent, ask donors to match their “largest gift ever.” Sometimes deadlines help to lift up the urgency.
22. Think about the mail you receive yourself. What intrigues you? What offends you? What did you throw away and why?
23. Direct your readers to your Web site, where you will hopefully have much more information and some recent pictures. Younger donors, especially, will go online to find out more about your ministry. These days, a good Web site serves the purpose a sign in front of the building used to serve. It's the face of your ministry. Keep it fresh and inviting.
24. Write your letter with a person in mind. Use first and second person pronouns; be friendly and informal. Avoid long sentences and big words. Don't write an essay; write a personal letter.
25. Remember that in a solicitation letter the signature is read first, then the PS, followed by the first paragraph, then special paragraphs with underlining or boxed words. It's OK to be repetitive.

Finally, let me encourage you to involve as many people in your next mailing as possible. Invite several people to write the draft of a letter. Then compare them and use the best one, or blend them together. When the letter is in its final draft stage, have other people read it and offer their comments for improvement. Find someone who knows graphic design and ask for her/his ideas. See what your local print shop might offer before you're ready to go to press. Consider cranking up the volume of your mailings if you can afford to. Contact once a year with your donors is not enough. If you enjoy what you do and are committed to its importance, your readers will join you in celebrating and supporting your ministry.