

Nonprofit organizations should always place first priority on their service mission and second on money. Charitable organizations such as byway associations depend on donations from supporters and partners. Mainly they operate in the “Third Sector” – not government and not business. The fiduciary responsibility of a nonprofit board is to ensure the presence and management of resources to achieve its mission. Remaining sustainable is an obligation to the public.

The Context of Giving: Aligning with Donor Partners

People give emotionally with some rationale. People give to successful people where relationships exist. It is rare to receive large gifts initially. Donors usually test the waters and start small and increase giving later in the relationship when the funds are put to identifiable, measurable, positive outcomes.

Assess your byway organization’s strengths and weaknesses. Is your byway aligned with partners so as not to compete but rather to complement each group’s roles and goals. Competition can be over recognition, funds, objectives, territory, volunteers and partners. Move away from competition to complementary relations. Empower the constituents and enhance attractions along the byway. The byway is a means to an end.

Focus on how, what and why when seeking funds. Be a chameleon – be adaptable and consider the objectives of the potential partner(s). Effective research and communication is the starting point. Common ground must be discovered quickly. Cultivation of prospects is necessary to get a foothold in

their donation stream. Publicity and promotion build a general impression of the byway organization and the byway itself. The local DMO promotes sites along the byway. They do the branding and “image management” for the byway corridor and its attractions.

Never think you need to apologize for asking someone to give to a worthy object

- John D. Rockefeller

When it comes to donors, the byway leaders have to create a “direct, personal involvement” with the prospective donor/partner. Engage them, invite them to significant events and cultivate them. Ask them for

advice. They should be made to feel like an “insider”. Make them feel that they can make a difference. Show genuine appreciation without doting on them. Show real respect, but do not let them “take-over”.

The Ask: Do’s and Don’ts

Asking for money from a donor can be difficult and awkward for people. It feels like begging. The less confident person should not be put in this situation. But people don’t give until they are asked. The “Asker” needs to experience a small success as the outcome of an “Ask”. The Ask comes after you have cultivated a relationship with the prospective donor. You have already asked them for their opinions and advice. You know their interests and motivations. Talk about opportunities that you already know fill a mutual need. Now position the donor with an appeal to “make a difference” and have an impact. Know that you can leverage funds as needed. Other donors may be brought in to secure the deal. Know your prospective donor’s interests and “sweet spot.” Mention the dollar amount or resource in question only once as part of the conversation. Do not oversell. Do not overstay your visit. Be brief! Do not be needy, pushy or aggressive. Let them think. Let ideas be theirs.

The Close

Be thankful for any donation. If it is smaller than expected, be grateful and say “the door is always open”. Always follow-up promptly in writing regardless of the outcome. You never know when the donor or prospective donor may have a change of fortune and give. Just because they failed to meet your expectations on that day, they may make a different decision in the future.

Reference: Fisher Howe. [The Board Member’s Guide to Fund Raising](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991.