Marketing Planned Gifts on a Limited Budget

We all have limited marketing budgets for planned giving. What is perceived as a large budget at one organization may be perceived as small at another. Nevertheless, there are essentials that every planned giving marketing program should include, regardless of its budget.

Take Inventory
You know what your budget is for marketing expenses, such as mailings, website and electronic marketing, advertising, print collateral, and events, but chances are additional resources exist outside of your department and budget that can be an important component of marketing planned gifts at your organization. Take advantage of the fundraising communications infrastructure that already exists as much as possible to promote planned gifts. “Piggybacking” on items such as organizational newsletters, annual fund acknowledgement inserts, and annual reports is the first step in operating an effective planned gifts marketing program on a limited budget.

Identify Your Allies
This is just another way of thinking about available resources. They may be your peers, a board member, a retired faculty member, or a passionate volunteer. A board member who has made an estate gift could act as a persuasive example for other board members or could review your donor list for the purposes of introductions. A passionate volunteer, who is a grateful patient, could assist in prioritizing prospects. By identifying those who care about your mission, you can encourage them to be your emissaries and help carry your marketing mantle.

Define Your Goals
The purpose of marketing is to do one or more of the following:

- **Attract** – promote awareness, generate interest, demonstrate your value
- **Educate** – provide news and facts, explain your mission, brand this content as yours
- **Cultivate** – generate leads, gather information, inspire prospects to seek additional contact
- **Steward** – continue to build upon and sustain the relationship

These four stages are not exclusive of one another, but they do need to be viewed that way when deciding which marketing tools to use. In general, your marketing will require a mix of approaches that address one or more of these goals.

Define Your Message
What’s the compelling story that you want to convey? Why would a donor want to give to your organization versus a similar one? What makes your organization extraordinary? Communicating that mission must be an integral part of your message. Yes, you may be a planned giving officer trying to increase the number of bequest commitments or life income gifts, but that is secondary to conveying the passion and worthiness of your organization’s purpose. This is what will drive a donor to give. Tying planned giving to your mission is the message you need to deliver.

Obtain the Tools

**Web Presence** – A planned giving Web presence is a must. Information should be easy to find, no more than two clicks from the home page, if possible - and easy to understand.

**Collateral** – Printed marketing material is required to generate interest and to satisfy inquiries.

**Accurate Donor Data** – Your marketing message is contingent on who you are trying to reach, so your data must be as accurate as possible. Your time and budget may be totally wasted if you are not targeting the right audience, especially since age is such a critical factor in planned giving.

**Prospect Tracking** – Have a prospect tracking process in place. It is a prerequisite for measuring your progress and identifying your priorities.

**Lead Acquisition Activities** – There are non-marketing activities that have been proven to produce more leads than traditional mass marketing efforts:

- Create awareness among internal stakeholders that the organization is interested in planned gifts.
- Solicit board members to make a planned gift commitment, even if only a revocable bequest.
- Establish a specific number of planned giving asks expected of major gift staff each year.
- Train major gift and annual fund colleagues on how to recognize planned gift prospects and how to solicit planned gifts.

Prioritize Your Audience
The purpose of any specific marketing effort will depend upon the audience you are targeting. You need to have a clear picture of who you are trying to reach and why. If yours is like many organizations, you’ll have multiple audiences to reach, but not all of them will carry equal weight. You will have more audiences than you can afford to reach, so understanding the role and influence each has in your program will guide you in your prioritization.

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Maximize Your Communications Channels
It's your job to get the right message to the right audience at the right time. To increase your ability to time your message appropriately, frequency and context must play an integral role in your program. How do your best supporters find out about you? Each channel offers pros and cons in terms of the goals you are trying to achieve.

Direct Mail
- Use of targeted marketing is more economical than mass marketing
- Segmenting by age and life stage is still the most effective approach to lead acquisition

Email
- Virtually no material costs, but of limited use due to age bracket of planned giving audience
- Easy to measure success
- Cost-effective for mass marketing, but can be perceived as spam
- Traditional use for email is personalized marketing

Advertising
- Piggyback on existing publications
- Stake out planned giving territory
- Leverage all in-house opportunities that don’t add to your budget

Social Media
- Virtually no material costs
- In its infancy for planned giving
- Can build a word-of-mouth marketing campaign
- Leverage all in-house opportunities that don’t add to your budget

Telephone
- Underutilized tool
- Leverage all in-house phone-a-thon opportunities that don’t add to your budget

Events
- One-on-one contact vs. a gathering
- Legacy specific – lectures, luncheons
- Leverage all in-house opportunities that don’t add to your budget

Increase Your Budget
We are all asked to justify an increase in funding at one time or another. Use the potential dollars raised as an argument for increasing your budget. Demonstrate what you could accomplish with more resources (staff, as well as dollars). Show what you are doing, as well as what you are not able to do. Management can be persuaded to increase your budget year-over-year once it understands how much is being left on the table.