



Planning a Golden Future

A recent study of charitable giving showed that the series of disasters in recent years has caused a shift in the way people give.

"More and more organizations are competing for donors' attention and a share of a finite pool of resources," according to the study titled "Fundraising in Light of Disasters," which was conducted by CommULinks of Colorado, Philanthropy Now, M.L. Hanson, and Whole Brain Technologies.

One of the findings was that while most people who are in the habit of giving regularly to specific causes still give. But because of the compelling needs created by disasters, many have chosen to divide their gifts differently. Thirty-two percent of regular donors diverted at least part of their contributions away from charities they normally support, and gave instead to disaster relief. Of those, nearly eight percent diverted all of their usual gifts to assist disaster victims.

One of the major problems noted by both donors and representatives of tax-exempt agencies is that there are simply too many requests. About half of each group agreed that contributors may be suffering from "donor fatigue," after being bombarded with requests from all over.

What does that mean for the not-for-profit organizations that depend on those contributions for survival?

Charles MacLean, PhD of Philanthropy Now says not-for-profits must understand the differences between donors who stop giving to their organizations and those who are totally fatigued and are not giving anywhere. He contends that organizations need to look at how to reverse donor exhaustion. In addition, MacLean suggests strengthening relationships with donors "by telling them what their dollars did so they won't be one-time, knee-jerk, easily disillusioned givers."

To counteract the challenges of so many compelling interests that compete with established charities, not-for-profits need to work harder to come up with innovative approaches to fundraising and increase organizational efficiency. Here are a few ideas:

- **Share lots of good news.** Increase the number of mailings sent to donors, but focus on your group's accomplishments. For example, describe expanded programs or new leadership, rather than just asking for direct solicitations.
- **Change your tone from competitive to cordial.** Fundraising executives report that many donors shy away from strident appeals, preferring instead to support causes with more solicitations backed with heart-warming photographs and testimonials.
- **Take your case to the public.** Make the effort to generate more coverage in the media about your good deeds - especially in local publications if your group has a state or local focus. Ask supporters to write "Letters to the Editor." Try to schedule meetings with the editorial board of your local newspaper. Submit letters suggesting articles and send more press releases.
- **Thank current donors.** In your next mailing, don't just solicit a gift outright. Instead, consider sending a letter thanking donors for their past support, and enclose a donation envelope with no suggested amounts. Also, make it a practice for your group's chief executive to telephone major donors personally to thank them. (One similar "thank you" campaign for a charity in Kansas City brought in 27 percent more than the previous year's appeal.)
- **Bring donors into your daily activities.** Find other ways to give supporters a firsthand experience with your organization. For example, send staff members to give talks to the employees of companies that support you, hold smaller fund-raising parties in homes or invite donors to spend a day at your facilities.
- **Emphasize the tax breaks that result from donations.** Educate and remind contributors of the tax breaks they can get from being generous to your organization. Ask donors to investigate whether their employers offer "matching" contributions. Check with your tax adviser to ensure that your solicitations comply with the rules governing charitable donations.



For more information on highlighting the tax benefits your contributors can receive, read our previous article, "[How to Encourage Stock Donations](#)"

Raising a dollar today may take much more effort and creativity than it did in previous years so be prepared to experiment with new appeals and methods.