



Stuck in the Starting Blocks? Ideas for Getting a Quick Start on Major Gift Fundraising

"The distance is nothing. It is only the first step that is difficult."

- Madame Marie du Deffand

Do you feel overwhelmed at the prospect of starting a major gift fundraising program? Don't let these feelings keep your organization from pursuing this most effective fundraising strategy.

In major gift fundraising, as in most things, the sooner we start, the sooner we begin to see the benefits. Many nonprofit organizations that began the work of building strong funding relationships with individuals 30 years ago now have steady unrestricted funding streams and, often, significant endowment funds. Don't wait any longer to make a beginning.

Here are four ideas to help your organization get off to a quick start in major gift fundraising and, ultimately, raise more money for mission:

1. Create a giving society in which membership begins at your ideal introductory major gift level. Depending on your organization's funding history, that level might be \$500 or \$1,000. This sets the sights of new donors (and board members too!). Donors who give at this level become your major gift prospects and you can focus future cultivation on them. When I was President of the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition, we wanted to encourage donors to give at a level of \$1,000/year or more. We created the "Margaret Mead Giving Circle" and the board and staff worked to inspire donors to give \$1,000 or more in each year. All who did so were invited to a special event with their peers the next fall at a special "access-only" location.
2. Ask a current leadership donor for a time-limited matching challenge to inspire new donors. Encourage her to set the parameters of the match at your ideal introductory major gift level and to place a deadline for the challenge at the end of your fiscal year. You can use this opportunity to begin to create a pattern of annual giving at this new introductory level.
3. Engage the entire board in a strategy of asking community leaders for help with a non-fundraising challenge of the nonprofit such as planning an event, recruiting people with certain expertise for an ad hoc committee, or networking to increase the impact of the nonprofit in the community. Give them talking points to help them network around this challenge and include a reference to the giving society and the match. For example, they might say, "By the way, my fellow board members and I are telling everyone we know about a wonderful matching challenge offered by one of our donors this year. New donors at the \$1,000 level who give before June 30 will have their donations matched one-to-one. Is there any way you could consider making a gift to the organization this year?"

4. Be sure that all organizational volunteers and smaller donors are aware of the new giving society and the match. Don't assume they won't be able to participate at this level. These are some of your most loyal supporters and they want to be invited to take part. Some of them may surprise you.

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