



Members from Neighbor to Neighbor chapters rallied in Boston for an increase in the state minimum wage. Delivering the message that “a buck is not enough,” volunteers showed legislators what an extra 50 cents an hour would mean over the course of a year.

Silos Are for Farms

How to Make Fundraising a Part of Your Organizing

By Tina Cincotti

WHEN I STARTED FUNDRAISING about 12 years ago, I was working as an organizer. A few years later, when I read the *Journal's* classic article by the late Vicki Quatmann, “Organizing & Fundraising: Sisters in the Struggle,” (Vol. 13, No. 6, Dec. 1994), something clicked. Organizing and fundraising felt connected. Vicki helped me figure out why.

Since then, I've strived to bring a “culture of fundraising” to all the organizations I work with—a culture where fundraising and philanthropy are just as much a part of the organization's core mission as their program work is. The two cannot be separated.

Barack Obama's campaign for president brought together organizing and fundraising more powerfully than has ever been done on such a huge scale. The country experienced a level of volunteerism and a level of giving that we'd never seen before. And we are still seeing increasing numbers of people volunteering.

These responses demonstrate the proven connection between giving time and giving money. A study by researcher Penelope Burk showed that 93 percent of donors volunteer and 95 percent give to the organizations where they volunteer. So there is a natural connection between organizing people to give time and organizing people to give money. Notice that I used

the word “organizing.” Fundraising is organizing. If you can do one, you can do the other. In fact, if you can do one, you must do the other.

This idea of building an organizational culture of fundraising makes sense to a lot of people in theory. Yet, often times they don't know how to make it happen in practice at their organizations. A big part of my work focuses on helping groups integrate their fundraising and their organizing.

This article builds on the ideas Vicki raised and offers practical suggestions for breaking down divisions between program work and fundraising. Here are some tips and strategies to get you started.

1. Discuss the Similarities of Organizing and Fundraising

At their core, organizing and fundraising are both about building relationships and building community. Unfortunately, we often hear the word *fundraising* and immediately jump to the part where you ask someone for money, even though that's only 5 percent of the job. Undoing this misconception is critical. Start by taking a step back and expanding your view of what fundraising is really all about: building a broad network of like-minded people who will give you time, money, advice, power

THIS DONOR TOTALLY DEFIED THE ORGANIZER'S VISION OF WHO A \$1,000 DONOR IS. THAT EXPERIENCE BROKE DOWN THE CONCEPT OF "US VERSUS THEM," OF DONORS BEING SOMEHOW DIFFERENT FROM PEOPLE SHE KNOWS.

in numbers, moral support in good times and bad, and lots more. Organizers and leaders from your membership base will see striking similarities between identifying and involving new volunteers and identifying and involving potential donors. Both start by recognizing those who are predisposed to your cause and learning more about their interests, then getting them involved when the time is right by starting small, and continuing to build the relationship to steady, more dedicated involvement. Seeing these parallels helps organizers and membership leaders realize that they already possess most of the skills needed to be a great fundraiser—because they are the same skills that it takes to be a great organizer. This insight won't single-handedly compel anyone to start fundraising, but it's an important first step in understanding what fundraising is really all about.

2. Create Space to Talk about What Is Hard about Fundraising

Fundraising is scary for virtually everyone at first. There is no getting around that. It's also incredibly rewarding and empowering, but that doesn't come until later for most of us. U.S. culture is riddled with taboos about money—it's something that polite people just aren't supposed to talk about. So, what does that say about those of us who are not only talking about money but also asking you for some of yours?

Here's what it says to me: It says we will not play by these rules. It says we will not allow a system that has created such a vastly unequal distribution of wealth to go unchallenged. It says that we are proud of the life-changing work that we are doing, that we need money to do the work, and that we aren't afraid to ask for it. Fundraising doesn't support political work; fundraising *is* political work. Fundraising doesn't support organizing; fundraising *is* organizing. Fundraising doesn't support movement building; fundraising *is* movement building.

Now, as I get down off my soapbox, let me say how important it is that you talk with anyone who is new to fundraising about the societal taboos around talking about money. These are very real. Discuss where they come from. Talk about people's first associations and earliest memories of money and share yours. Create space to talk about how they feel about asking someone for money. Depending on the culture of your organization, you'll have to think about how personal you want to get with this conversation. We certainly don't want anyone to feel put on the spot or as though they are being forced into

some kind of group therapy session. Be aware of this danger and respect people's limits as well as your own boundaries.

The other piece that's important to recognize is that what's challenging about fundraising can be different for different people. If you grew up in poverty or struggling to make ends meet, your perspective and feelings about asking someone for a donation may be different from those of your co-worker who was raised upper-middle class. This is not to say that organizers or people from families who didn't have to worry about money are comfortable fundraising, nor is the opposite necessarily true—that folks who grew up poor are always reluctant to ask for money. It's simply to say that everyone's comforts and discomforts will vary.

Race and class dynamics are as present within fundraising as with anything else, probably even more so because we are dealing directly with money. Be conscious of this factor and incorporate into your conversations about fundraising the ways racism, classism, and privilege are at play.

3. Start with Small, Less Scary Fundraising Work, and Demystify Who Donors Are

It can be reassuring to organizers and members to see all the different ways they can help raise money without actually having to make "the ask." This isn't to say that they won't grow into that part of fundraising. But it's helpful to get one's feet wet doing other things first—calling donors to thank them for their gift, accompanying a seasoned fundraiser on a cultivation or stewardship visit, giving tours to donors, leading an open house, or writing handwritten thank you cards to people who recently attended a luncheon.

By beginning to have direct contact with donors, everyone will start to see them as the real people they are. For example, I remember working with an organizer-in-training to write personal notes on thank you letters. She came across the letter for a close organizational ally and was blown away by the size of the woman's contribution. This donor totally defied the organizer's vision of who a \$1,000 donor is. That experience broke down the concept of "us versus them" for that organizer, of donors being somehow different from people she knows. This was a critical step for her. She not only realized that she could be successful in asking for a donation of that size or more, she also discovered that she herself knew people and could relate to people capable of giving significant gifts.

4. Make Fundraising Part of Leadership Development

Leadership development is a core program for many grassroots organizations. When members get involved and volunteer, they might learn about the political process, how to write a press release, public speaking skills, and so on. Fundraising rarely makes this list. That has to change. Your members don't need to be shielded or protected from the complications of budgets and balance sheets. Understanding the organization's finances helps a person appreciate the need for fundraising. By not including fundraising and organizational finances as part of our leadership development curriculum, we are colluding with the same system that makes money a societal taboo that's not to be discussed.

Educate your members about the role of fundraising in building a movement for justice. Show volunteers your budget and help them understand how to read it. Tell them where you get the money to pay for all the work your organization does and all the time that goes into raising that money. Talk to them about how they can help, and not just by selling raffle tickets and organizing a yard sale. See if your volunteers would be willing to come with you to meet with a supporter to talk about the impact the organization has had in their lives. Ask them to write a "thank you" note to a donor or call a new contributor who just gave their first gift. For a supporter, there's nothing more powerful than hearing directly from people on the ground about how their donation made a difference.

5. Offer Different Ways to be Involved in Fundraising

Everyone has different talents. Match people up with the fundraising strategies that play to their strengths. If someone is a great writer, they may be able to help write direct mail appeals, newsletter articles, grant proposals, or donor acknowledgments. A born party planner could take the lead on house parties or grassroots events for the organization.

Always, always think about ways to connect organizers and members to individual donor work, including with donors who give significant high-dollar gifts. Don't assume your organizers only know low-dollar donors. They know prospects for "major" gifts as well. Remember—giving is not a state of wealth; it's a state of mind. As I touched on above, the more you equate "major donor" with "rich person," the less successful your fundraising will be.

Finally, don't assume that so-called major donors won't want to meet with organizers or membership leaders. These high-dollar supporters are exactly the ones who want to hear firsthand stories about the work, and who better to tell them than an organizer and a lead volunteer.



Neighbor to Neighbor volunteers from the city of Lynn, MA, take part in a phone bank.

6. Provide Structure and Build in Systems of Accountability

Fundraising should be part of every staff person's workplan alongside their organizing responsibilities. At Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts (N2N-MA), where I was the development director for seven years, each organizer is assigned a list of donors, fundraising goals, and a timeline. There is also an agreed-upon amount of time that each person will spend fundraising each week. The time may vary from person to person and from week to week but it is planned into the organizers' schedules. Otherwise, it won't happen. It can't be an add-on for when there's extra time. Because, as any organizer knows, there's never extra time.

Regular reporting about fundraising should be integrated into staff meetings and supervisory check-ins. At N2N-MA, I put fundraising as the first item on the agenda as often as possible. Having it at the top made sure the group was alert and that we didn't run out of time and have to cut the discussion short. When you meet, have people report on their fundraising priorities, accomplishments, and struggles, just as they do with their organizing. This sharing also provides a level of group accountability so each person can hear what their peers are working on.

Absolute transparency around income and expenses is even more critical for organizations where all staff have fundraising responsibilities. Report on budget projections and provide financial reports regularly so that it's clearly known how much money needs to be raised, how much has been pledged, and how much remains to bring in. Also, discuss potential shortfalls as a group and troubleshoot new fundraising strategies to close

the gap. Everyone in the organization deserves to know and understand the state of the group's finances. It also helps staff to understand how their piece fits into the big picture.

7. Give Trainings, Templates, Tools and Talking Points

Spend time regularly on skill-building exercises related to fundraising. At N2N-MA, I tried to give the organizers a new fundraising script every month or two, and I'd pair them up at staff meeting to practice. I'd have people sit back-to-back so it would feel as close to a real phone call as possible, without the benefits of eye contact and body language. I'd also sometimes pair veteran organizers who had been fundraising for a while with newer recruits for peer mentoring and support. It was incredibly powerful for organizers with little fundraising experience to see what skilled fundraisers they could become. I'd plan enough time so that each person got to play the donor and the fundraiser at least once. Then I'd bring the group back together to share what worked well and where they got stuck.

With any new script, I found the organizers were more comfortable getting on the phones if they'd already had a chance to run through it a few times.

In addition to training, it's important for development staff to consistently provide template letters, sample voicemail messages, and talking points on recent accomplishments and upcoming campaigns. Some people use them. Some don't. Some just feel better knowing they have them if they need them. Either way, giving organizers all the tools they need to succeed maximizes the effectiveness of their fundraising time and enables them to hit the ground running. You don't want each person reinventing the wheel every time a follow-up letter needs to be sent out.

Providing these materials also sends the message that you respect and value their time—something that all organizers never have enough of!

8. Not Everyone Will Grow to Love Fundraising

Although every organizer can be an effective fundraiser, that doesn't mean it's going to be everyone's favorite thing to do. Some will like it. Some will love it. Some won't. That's okay. They don't have to love, or even like, every aspect of their job. But fundraising is a core skill. All organizers and members need to know how to do it.

This model is also the most sustainable way to build a long-term, integrated movement for social change—so it's responsible organizing too. Because fundraising isn't the primary job responsibility of any organizer, it's important to understand that they will have more time to give to fundraising at some times

than others, depending on the ebb and flow of your group's program work. Be sympathetic to this flow.

At the same time, it is also important to remind organizers that often the best time to raise money is at the height of a campaign. This is a delicate balance. It is also one of the reasons why it is so important to have a structure in place where fundraising is part of everyone's weekly workplan and is discussed regularly at supervisory check-ins and at staff meetings. Otherwise, it's the first thing to go at crunch time!

9. Lead By Example—It's a Two-Way Street

It should go without saying that fundraising staff must be included in strategic planning sessions, staff retreats, and other organizational meetings. As a development director, I also found it important to spend some of my time organizing. Not at the level that organizers spend time fundraising, but a few times each year spending some time in the field door-knocking or phone-banking kept me connected to the work.

This kind of involvement isn't anything fancy that requires training as a professional organizer, but it's enough to give you a real sense of the work on the ground. And since I usually "volunteered" at peak campaign season when extra hands were desperately needed, the organizers and the membership really appreciated it as well. This involvement was good for our relationships and contributed to all of us feeling like part of the same team.

10. Consider the Benefits

These practices won't all work exactly as outlined for every organization. And transitioning to this model can be a long process. But you have to start somewhere and the benefits are enormous. Here is just a glimpse of what you can expect if you take steps toward breaking down the divisions between your organizing and your fundraising:

- More collaboration within your organization
- More resources dedicated to fundraising
- Stronger relationships with your donors
- More volunteers as donors
- More donors as volunteers
- More money for program work
- A stronger movement for change

Now, who wouldn't want all that? ■

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