

# MAJOR DONOR FUNDRAISING

Margaret M Holman  
Lucy Sargent

# **Major Donor Fundraising**

Margaret Holman and Lucy Sargent

**The fundraising series**

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# The Fundraising series

Fundraising evolves within a constantly changing fiscal and societal framework. The environment in turn influences the way in which funds are raised and how fundraising is conducted. Fundraising techniques and practice also evolve in response to the changing fiscal and societal environment. In order for fundraisers to be effective it is vital that they are a step ahead of the game. Successful fundraisers identify future trends, anticipate demand and develop new techniques to meet it.

The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), Institute of Fundraising and Directory of Social Change (DSC) fundraising series seeks to address the full range of fundraising activity and techniques in one series. Each successive volume seeks to address one key element in the spectrum of fundraising techniques. As fundraising techniques evolve and develop, new titles in the series are added to and old ones revised.

The titles are intended as texts that encourage and debate fundraising within a professional framework – written and used by academics and practitioners alike. Each title seeks to explore the fundraising activity within its historical, ethical and theoretical context, relate it to current fundraising practice as well as guide future strategy.

The Institute of Fundraising is well placed to assist in the development and production of this series; without the support, assistance and expertise of its members and their colleagues, the series would not be possible. I thank all those who have contributed and continue to contribute to the most comprehensive fundraising series available today.

**Megan Pacey**  
*Director of Policy and Campaigns*  
*Institute of Fundraising*

## **Dedication**

We dedicate this book to our husbands Richard Holman and Nick Sainsbury whose unwavering encouragement and support continues to be our inspiration.

## **About the authors**

Margaret M Holman has over 30 years of professional fundraising experience and is president of her own fundraising consultancy in New York City, Holman Consulting.

Lucy Sargent has worked in fundraising for 11 years both in the UK and internationally. She has an MSc in Charity Marketing & Fundraising.

# Foreword

Once upon a time, less than two decades ago, not a single trade publication existed for fundraising, books and guides were scarce and those that did exist tended to focus on the type of fundraising done in the community aimed at collecting people's loose change.

This guide by the Institute of Fundraising and the Directory of Social Change concentrates on major gift fundraising and fills a considerable gap. It is the guide I should have liked to have used when I started to try to raise support for my first charity. Lots of people were charming and helpful. But success only came when I had learnt to fundraise from potential donors in an organised and strategic way.

Since then, I've learnt to understand that successful fundraising is reciprocal and that, as Lynn Truss suggests in her recent book on manners, for every good deed there's a proportionate acknowledgment which precisely repays the giver – the aim being for no one to emerge in the red. Fundraising is but a part of the ongoing relationship with a charity's stakeholders.

Relationships are at the core of any campaign, and – just as in life – are made *over time* through tests of trust. One may want to hurry the process up, but it is not advisable as a success tactic. So there are no shortcuts to raising major gifts. Plain and simple: it's very hard work. It takes great chunks of time and bigger chunks of money to raise funds in a sophisticated and thoughtful manner.

I believe that fundraising should always be professional and never fall below an acceptable level. In line with my computing background, I also believe that human memories need to be augmented by database software and that we need to accept that gifts via the Internet will continue to increase in both volume and average value.

The guide's advice is grounded in commercial management practice and common sense. It is not glamorous, but it identifies a step-by-step approach to raising large gifts, repeat gifts, and ultimately legacies. It comes complete with practical tips, how to develop a team approach, and numerous success stories.

Fundraisers will find this comprehensive and practical guide useful in framing their own strategies for success.

Dame Stephanie Shirley  
*Chair, The Shirley Foundation*



# Introduction

Welcome to *Major Donor Fundraising*, a hands-on guide for fundraisers, trustees and volunteers who are either new to major gift fundraising or who would like to learn more about this specialised fundraising discipline.

This book came about whilst we were planning a presentation in London for a wide variety of charities to address the issues in identifying, researching, cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding individuals who were capable of making large gifts. Because one of us lives and works in the United States and the other in England, we did separate research on the latest statistics and theories to underpin our presentation. We found that very little information is available to British fundraisers, while at the same time an overwhelming amount of major gift programme facts, theories, and best practices is available to American fundraisers.

This book builds upon current best practices in the UK but also looks to the US to share the experiences, theories, and best practices of American major gift fundraising.

We interviewed 20 charities in Britain and five in the US to provide examples of best practices.

Generally, the charities we interviewed fit into one of three models:

*Model One:* A small organisation with no major donor base and only one or two staff members.

*Model Two:* A mid-sized organisation with a few major gift donors and some involvement of high-profile individuals or celebrities through special events. These charities may have a fundraising director or the chief executive is the fundraiser.

*Model Three:* A mid-sized organisation with the classic appeals committee that helps the staff identify, solicit, and steward major donors. These charities have both a chief executive and a fundraising director involved with fundraising.

This book is organised to reflect the eight steps fundraisers use to encourage major gifts. Each chapter is headed by a list of topics covered in it and

includes a synopsis of the chapter's important points, as well as a resource section to give you access to further reading or the source material for the chapter's contents.

Whilst we recognise that applying a blanket approach American-style fundraising in the UK (where a different political and cultural climate influences philanthropy) could lead to debate, we advocate that there is much to be learnt from our US colleagues. We think Oscar Wilde said it best: The Americans are identical to the British in all respects except, of course, language.

Differences between the UK and the US have been described as to do with not so much a difference in the culture of giving, but with the culture of asking. For this reason, we believe that the time is right in the UK to change the way donors think about giving, so that donors feel good about giving, and so that these gifts transform causes and ultimately improve society. We need to have the courage and the confidence in our causes and in ourselves to ask for money.

We trust that you will find our book to be a practical guide that will help you organise and implement a successful major gift programme.

Margaret M Holman  
New York, USA

Lucy Sargent  
London, UK

## CHAPTER ONE

# Identifying Major Gift Donors: What is a Major Gift and who are Major Donors?

*Fundraising is the gentle art of teaching the joy of giving.*

— Hank Rosso

Henry A ‘Hank’ Rosso (1917–1999) was a founder of the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana, US) and founding director of the Center’s Fund Raising School.

### What you’ll learn in this chapter

- Pros and cons of major gift fundraising
- The variety of definitions of major gifts
- The characteristics of major donors
- The types of charities and programmes with the most appeal to major donors.

### Introduction

Today, more than 187,000 charities are registered in the UK. By comparison, more than 900,000 charities operate in the United States. Keep in mind that the US population is nearly five times that of Britain. The ratio of UK to US charities mirrors that of the population, i.e. each country has about the same number of charities per capita, but despite this similarity, UK charities raised £8.2 billion (\$14.23 billion) while US charities raised £108.24 billion (\$182.92 billion) from individuals in 2004 – over 13 times the amount raised in the UK. Clearly British charities must work hard to achieve the same level of giving.

Competition is great among charities and continues to grow as new charities compete for philanthropists. Conventional wisdom holds that 80% of all charitable gifts came from 20% of an organisation’s donors. The new wisdom recognises that at least 90% of all gifts come from 10% of an organisation’s donors. Identifying this 10% segment is the challenge for every fundraiser and the focus of this book.

## Pros & Cons of Major Gift Fundraising

Before embarking on a major donor fundraising programme, consider some of the advantages and disadvantages.

### Advantages

- Identifies your most important people and allows you to look after them according to their wishes
- focuses on major gift donors who are likely to be long-term supporters and therefore advocates for your organisation
- provides an opportunity to secure legacy gifts through relationship-building
- allows major gifts to be used to leverage other gifts
- mobilises other support from within the networks of major donors
- creates board ownership of the work of the organisation when members are involved with the fundraising for the organisation.

### Disadvantages

- Ensures failure will result if your organisation isn't ready to undertake major gift fundraising, e.g. case for support is not developed, systems not in place to undertake good customer care
- doesn't offer a short-term solution for cash injections
- requires a resource commitment to the long term: stop/start approaches will damage relationships with donors
- requires the ability to research and compile donor profiles and fundraising plans
- raises the prospect that staff and trustees in your organisation are unlikely to be educated about major gift fundraising
- requires board members to become involved in the fundraising process by making their own gifts and by helping to identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward donors.

## What Is a Major Gift?

How does your organisation define 'major gift'? Is it £5,000 or more? £10,000 or more? £50,000 or more? In a study completed by the Institute for Philanthropy ([www.instituteforphilanthropy.org.uk](http://www.instituteforphilanthropy.org.uk)), the majority of

British charities interviewed indicated that a major gift was considered to be upwards of £5,000, with a mid-level gift in the range of £1,000, and the lowest-level gifts less than £1,000. Not only do these categories vary from charity to charity, but the passage of time typically plays a part in defining a major gift.

In the 1970s, many American charities considered a major gift to be \$1,000. Today, depending upon the size of the charity, a major gift is classified as \$25,000 or more. During the ensuing three decades, the pound (or the dollar) just doesn't buy as much as it used to, and ten years from now, the value of the pound again may be less – thus inflating the minimum amount to qualify as a major gift. Organisations must be sensitive to the time-value of money, and must also begin to regard major gifts from a new perspective – that of each donor.

If you haven't yet settled on an amount for your major gift level, keep the following in mind as you determine this threshold.

- Look at your current donor base to see how many individuals are at each level. If you have a significant number at the £100 level, a few at £250, and none at £500, you may want to consider setting your major gift level at £500 for the first three to five years. Once you have more than 100 donors each contributing at least £500, it will be time to create a new major gift threshold of £750 or £1,000. It will be important to review this on a regular basis.
- Review your top donor's gift history. If you see that there are several community leaders or opinion makers whose sizes of gifts are clustered together, you may consider setting that amount as your major gift level.
- Involve your board and CEO. This will be vital to the success of your organisation's major donor strategy, so therefore ensure you discuss these levels with them. Make a recommendation for their consideration and have them help you determine the right amount, keeping in mind that whatever amount you choose will set the bar for other prospects for the next several years.

Whatever the amount your organisation designates as the minimum level of a major gift, its real definition is whatever the prospect or donor considers to be a major gift. For the purposes of this book, we define a major gift as a 'personally significant gift'; that is, the sum that the prospect decides fits into his or her personal philanthropic portfolio.

For instance, a donor's major gift to Organisation A might be capped at £100, because this organisation is not high on that donor's priority list. For the same donor, a personally significant gift to Organisation B might be £5,000, because this organisation has been a favourite charity of that donor

for many years. It will also vary depending upon the donor's perception of the organisation's size and need. Determining where your organisation is in a major donor prospect's portfolio takes time, effort, and sleuthing.

### A Brief History of British Philanthropy

Philanthropy in the UK traces its beginnings to the early 1600s, when laws were established to promote philanthropy to the emerging merchant class and the country's aristocracy and to raise money to be distributed to the 'deserving poor' or to provide work for the 'undeserving poor'. The Poor Law remained in effect until 1948.

In 1793, an act was passed to provide formal recognition to 'friendly societies', groups of people whose resources were combined to create funds to be used in times of sickness or old age, or for burials. This act was the forerunner of building and housing societies, and encouraged ideals of self-help and self-reliance. These societies rose to their highest profile in the nineteenth century, when private charity expanded enormously in response to extreme poverty and housing shortages. Social science studies conducted during the period found that 30% of inhabitants in many major UK cities were living 'in poverty or want'. These studies and the work of pioneering philanthropists such as Octavia Hill, whose work resulted in an influx of affordable rented accommodation for the poor, played a huge and important role in bringing poverty to the attention of government and other philanthropists. Many of the UK's most well-known charities that exist today were established during this time. Among them is the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), founded in 1884, and Barnardo's, a children's charity, founded in 1869.

Most important, these efforts laid the foundation for a recognition of the need for government to intervene, and the state moved decisively into the provision of housing, education, and public health. This trend continued, and in the late 1940s the then Labour government claimed responsibility for hospitals. At this time there was a cultural revulsion against charities, which were seen as a mechanism for patronising the less fortunate. A UK public opinion poll conducted in 1948 found that more than 90% of respondents believed that there was no longer a need for charities in this country.

The blurring of the lines of responsibility between charity and the state has helped to define the culture of giving that exists today. Even

# **Other publications from the Directory of Social Change**

DSC is the leading provider of information and training for the voluntary sector. It publishes an extensive range of guides, handbooks, and CD-ROMs, covering subjects such as fundraising, management, communication, finance and law.

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## **The fundraising series**

Published in association with CAF and the Institute of Fundraising.

### **Capital Campaigns**

Trudy Hayden

Capital campaigns require precisely defined, tightly structured fundraising strategies that can radically improve the fundraiser's chances of success, yet smaller organisations often lack the resources to hire specialists to manage their campaigns for them. This new guide gives the fundraiser, the CEO, the trustees and other management staff the information necessary to run a successful capital campaign – with or without a consultant's input.

Drawing upon her experience planning and managing several highly visible and successful campaigns, the author first defines what a capital campaign is, before going through each stage of their preparation and execution, including:

- the decision to run a campaign
- establishing goals for your campaign
- preparing strategies
- post-campaign tactics.

128 pages, 1st edition, 2006, ISBN 1 903991 62 5

**Community Fundraising**  
Edited by Harry Brown

Volunteer networks are a key resource for fundraising, but are often not appreciated as they should be. This new title demonstrates how to make the most of your volunteers. It covers:

- what community fundraising is
- why people volunteer, the value of volunteers and staff attitudes to volunteers
- the recruitment, retention and development of volunteers
- the management of staff working with volunteers
- case studies from a range of different types of charities – and what can be learned from these.

192 pages, 1st edition, 2002 ISBN 1 900360 98 5

**Corporate Fundraising**  
Edited by Valerie Morton

Corporate Fundraising is a fast-moving area and the second edition of this book has been completely revised and updated to include:

- new chapters on corporate social responsibility and on evaluation
- a new appendix on the internet
- a revised section on the legal and tax framework
- a range of new case studies from major charities and companies such as NCH, Diabetes UK, One2One and the Mencap–Transco partnership.

The book continues to offer a comprehensive overview, detailing the variety of ways in which charities and companies may work together to mutual advantage, and addressing key issues around ethics and standards.

200 pages, 2nd edition, 2002 ISBN 1 903991 00 5

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