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Welcome to Frontline Fundraising: Getting Started in Eight Easy Steps

"I have tried raising money by asking for it, and by not asking for it. I always got more money by asking for it." – *Millard Fuller, Founder, Habitat for Humanity.*

Library fundraising takes place every day and at all levels of complexity, from the smallest library's book or bake sale to the large urban library's multimillion dollar capital campaign. You can design a fundraising effort that is perfectly suited to your library, your community and the resources of each. This Frontline Fundraising Toolkit will help you position yourself to do just that.

The guide covers the basics of annual funds, memorials and tributes, online giving and planned giving. It will also teach you how to deepen relationships with your donors and move your donors from being one-time givers to long-term library supporters. Remember that successful fundraising isn't about money. It's about relationships, and wise fundraisers understand the importance of nurturing those relationships.

Regardless of what methods you use to raise funds for your library, start with these eight easy steps.

1. Recruit help. In small or rural libraries, most of the responsibility for leading this effort will fall on the shoulders of the library director or manager, but he or she need not embark on this alone. If you are the director or manager, find responsible, well-positioned people to assist you. You don't need a huge committee. Six to eight people who have passion (and time) for the library as well as connections to your community will be enough. Some will be members of your Friends group, your staff or your board. Others might be individuals who are well networked and positioned to be effective spokespeople to potential donors. Think broadly when putting this team together.

2. Examine your library's community. Work with your committee to look at your community's political, economic, social and cultural environment. What are your community's strengths? Its challenges? Its important issues? What is happening with education, business, jobs, the arts? Take time to think about and to articulate these because they will be the foundation of your library's position as it seeks private funding. Create a checklist of your community's ten most important attributes and issues.

3. Tie your library to community issues. If you've done a good job evaluating your community, connecting your library with its issues and values should be fairly straightforward. Take the checklist you have created and determine how the library relates to each one. Preparing children for school? Your library has story times and early literacy activities for children and families. Resources for students? Your library offers homework and research help every day. Unemployment? Your library is a major destination for job seekers who need computers to search and apply for jobs. Literacy for non-English speakers? Your library offers classes in English and materials in several languages. Got the idea? This is a good ongoing exercise whether or not your library is developing a fundraising plan.

4. Develop your case. People will give to you because you meet needs, not just because you have needs. What are you raising money for, and why is it important? Maybe you need funds for general operations, or maybe you want to raise dollars for a specific program or service. This is the time to take all of your analysis and state your case for support as clearly and succinctly as you can. Develop a proposal that you can submit to businesses, civic groups, and others that explains why your library is pivotal to the success of your community, why public funding is inadequate to maintain its services, and why it needs help from private sources too. Turn "problems" into fundraising opportunities!

5. Identify potential donors. Who is in a position to support your library? Is it local businesses? A civic or fraternal organization? A book club or garden club? Parents? Which individuals are likely in a position to write a check? Use your committee to develop this list, then determine what the best approach is for asking each one on the list. Remember that sometimes, it's not what you ask for, but who does the asking, so give careful thought and planning to who "makes the ask" for each potential donor you have identified.

6. Make your fundraising visible. Consider planning activities that call attention to your library's role in the community and its vital services. Events such as book sales, contests, read-a-thons, speaker programs, and others are all great ways to add some spin to your fundraising efforts. A word of caution here: Don't lose sight of the notion of return on investment. If you plan an activity that is labor intensive or logistically complicated, and the potential fundraising return is small, it may not be worth it. Consider your library's resources.

7. Be realistic about the kinds of fundraising your library can succeed at. This is not about being negative; it's about being honest. Set goals that are ambitious, but achievable in the context of your community's size, its resources, and the environment you have evaluated.

8. Have fun with fundraising! With careful planning, an effective and energetic team to help you, and some good old-fashioned determination, you can make your library's fundraising effort enjoyable and profitable.

2. Laying Your Foundation

Frontline Fundraising Toolkit Home

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation
50 E Huron St., Chicago IL 60611 | 1.800.545.2433