



# **Getting Your Paws on More Money: Overcoming Fundraising Phobia**

*by  
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*The National Feral Cat Resource*



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**Alley Cat Allies (ACA)** The national information clearinghouse and advocacy organization working to establish effective nonlethal programs, including Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), as the standard method of reducing feral cat populations. ACA functions through print, video, and web-based information; workshops and conferences; and by consulting with individuals, groups, agencies, and institutions that work directly with feral cats. ACA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit association based in Bethesda, Maryland, with more than 95,000 supporters. For more information, go to [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org).

**N**o matter how much we may wish it wasn't so, money is essential to achieving our goals for the animals. You need to bring financial resources in on an ongoing basis.

As with so many things, a lot of the difficulty with fundraising lies in our perceptions and attitudes. Our beliefs can prevent us from seeing what needs to be done and can make getting the job done seem impossibly difficult. In other words, we can defeat ourselves.

There are two commonly held attitudes that can cripple your efforts. But if you can recognize them, you can break through these myths:

**Myth #1: "If we just work hard and do the right thing, the money will come."**

Good intentions, warm and fuzzy feelings, and hard work alone will NOT make your organization a success. The truth of the matter is that your nonprofit organization will succeed or fail as a business.

Although your organization has a charitable purpose, you'll need to employ sound management principles and good business practices to achieve that purpose. The growth of a successful organization doesn't happen by accident. It happens by understanding what needs to be done and applying oneself to that task with the same fervor that we bring to caring for the animals.

**Myth #2: "One day we'll arrive and the struggle of fundraising will be behind us."**

Successful fundraising is not a point that you arrive at, it's a process, an ongoing one. There is no magic answer, no secret key to eternal prosperity, no one-shot solution.

But take heart! As soon as you accept fund-

raising for what it is and begin to plan for it, it gets easier! REALLY! Your success will build on itself and you'll reach an ever-increasing number of supporters with your message. And while you will never be done with fundraising, you may discover that successful fundraising is rewarding!

## **Developing a Fundraising Plan**

You'll need to develop a plan to bring in money on an ongoing basis. Donations from individual donors, usually as the result of a fundraising appeal letter or newsletter, are the primary source of most successful organizations' funding. While regular newsletters and appeal letters should be the foundation of your fundraising strategy, it's best to develop a plan for raising resources from a variety of different sources.

## **Developing a Comprehensive Plan**

Your plan should include several different fundraising strategies that seek resources from several distinct groups of potential donors:

- Members and volunteers (through annual dues, pledges, sponsorship programs, in-kind donations, and volunteer services)
- Those who share your concerns (through community outreach tables, brochures, newsletters, direct mail, door-to-door canvassing, telemarketing, news articles)
- The public at large (through special events, fees for services, sale of goods)
- Businesses and foundations (through grants, matching gifts, in-kind donations, sponsorships, partnerships)

## Fundraising Strategies

Here are a number of ways that you could raise money for your cause:

- Appeal letters and newsletters targeted to donors
- Individual donations
- Membership dues (annual fund drive)
- Telemarketing
- Walk or other pledge-driven event
- Corporate gifts
- Corporate partnerships
- Matching gifts
- Income from sale of merchandise or services
- Auction
- Raffle
- Bingo – Las Vegas night
- Telethon
- Sponsorship programs
- Premiums for donations
- Adoption fees
- Fees for services
- Special events
- Outreach tables
- Advertising book sales
- Recycling program
- Civic and professional club gifts
- Speaker’s fees
- Coin canisters
- Memorial and in-honor donations
- Board members’ annual contributions
- Yard sales
- Bake sales
- United Way
- Combined Federal Campaign
- Personal visits with potential donors (major gifts)
- In-kind donations (services, goods)
- Donation of a percentage of proceeds from the sale of publicly sold products/ services
- Bequests (planned giving)
- Foundation grants
- A capital campaign (a special fund-raising campaign to fund purchase of a building, land or major expansion)

We’ll explore a few different fundraising strategies you may want to include in your plan. But first we’ll look at fundraising appeal letters, newsletters and mailing lists.

### The Keys to Successful Fundraising Appeals

**Know yourself.** Fundraising experts often refer to this part of the process as “developing your case statement.” All that really means is putting together a written statement about your organization’s mission and work which will inspire the public to support your efforts. Your case statement will form the foundation for your future funding appeals.

**Keep your audience in mind as you write your case statement.** The goal is to spark feelings of empathy and compassion – a desire to join in your efforts to help the animals.

**Know what motivates donors to give.** Common responses to the question of why people donate include: “It feels good,” “tax reasons,” “to serve the community,” “to gain recognition,” “a sense of duty,” “guilt,” “I wanted to help out,” and “to gain a sense of belonging.”

As you can see, people give for all kinds of different reasons, but there is one thing that nearly all donors have in common ... they

were ASKED! People usually do not give unless they are asked!

**Focus on the beneficiaries of your work.** People give money to help animals and people, not to help organizations. Donors do not care about the survival of your organization; they care about making a difference for the animals. In your communication with donors, don't whine about how broke you are; instead, tell them how you are addressing the needs of the animals and solving the problem with their help.

**Don't be boring.** No one wants to read about what you discussed at the last board meeting or how many hours a day you're working. Don't complain about what other groups are doing either. Always focus on the good works of your group, the difference that you are making for the animals.

**Relate one-to-one.** People can identify with another individual, a person or an animal that needs help, but it's difficult to relate to "millions." Personalize things, relate the story of one animal as a unique individual, deserving of attention and care.

**Keep in mind that "A picture is worth a thousand words."** A good photograph and graphics can make a world of difference in conveying your message effectively. The look of your materials is also important. Recruit a volunteer with desktop publishing skills to produce your literature.

**Don't just provide information – evoke action!** To motivate the public, you need to engage their emotions. You want to convey a sense of urgency in your fundraising appeal, but not disaster or panic. It's fine to say, "Your help is especially needed now because we have set a goal of spaying 250 cats this spring, to prevent the births of thousands of unwanted kittens." It's not good form to threaten, for example, "If you don't send money now, we'll have to close the doors next week!"

**Keep it simple.** Write in clear, simple, direct language. Avoid using jargon.

**Keep it positive.** People like to feel that they are making a difference. Avoid doom and gloom or appeals that rely on guilt. Share your successes with your supporters.

**Educate and inspire.** Don't assume that people know about the problems you're working to solve or about your organization's work. Give them the information they'll need to be inspired to donate to your cause.

**Make a specific request.** People need to know exactly what you want them to do to help. It's proven that donors give more when you suggest specific amounts.

**Make it easy to give.** Include a donation form and an addressed return envelope.

**Have information and materials available to back up your appeals.** Maintain a file of news clippings about your organization, statistics and information about the problem and your solution, brief bios of your directors and staff, and a list of your accomplishments.

## **Building a Mailing List from Scratch**

Your organization's mailing list is your most valuable fundraising asset. You don't have one yet? While it's a bit of work, it's entirely possible to build one from nothing at all. Here's how:

- You'll need a computerized mailing-list database program to maintain the records. There are sophisticated programs available for fundraising, but in the beginning you can get by with a simple database program. As the organization grows, maintaining accurate donor records becomes critically important, so eventually you'll need to obtain fundraising database software.

- Start with a list of all your friends and relatives who like animals. Ask them for the names and addresses of others.
- Go through the Yellow Pages for the addresses of businesses that relate to animals: vet clinics, pet supply stores, groomers, trainers, etc.
- Set up information tables at area pet supply stores, supermarkets, fairs, etc. Bring flyers, a donation canister and a colorful poster that says who you are. (Don't forget to use photos of animals!) Be outgoing and engage people in friendly conversation. Record the addresses of everyone who expresses any interest in your project. Have a clipboard on the table clearly labeled "mailing list." You may want to have a separate clipboard marked "volunteers." The mailing list form should have prominent headings asking for their name, mailing address and phone number. (If they give you their number, it indicates that they don't mind being called. Personal phone contact can be a great way to cultivate donors!)
- Include the names of people your organization has helped, folks who come to your events, adoptive families and donor prospects you wish to cultivate.
- Obtain dog license lists, available from many town halls for a small fee.
- Ask members to spread the word. Ask them for the names of friends who may like to learn about your work.
- Hold public meetings in different communities and collect names to add to your list.
- Trade mailing lists with a local business or another nonprofit organization.
- Get publicity for your organization. Articles in local newspapers can generate new supporters.

## In-Kind Donations

If you can get what you need donated, that's as good as raising the money to buy it!

In-kind (non-cash) contributions can include donations of office equipment, printing services, accounting services, veterinary care, office supplies, pet food and animal handling equipment, mailing lists, training, meeting space, refreshments for meetings and events, furniture, free advertising space (to put adoption ads in newspapers, for example), legal advice, land, billboard space, vaccines and medical supplies.

Sources of in-kind donations include your members, the public, corporations, retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and local small businesses.

To publicize the need for donations, maintain a "Wish List" of needed items and services and share it with your members.

Other avenues to encourage in-kind giving or reduce expenses include setting up pet food donation bins in local markets; requesting dented cans and damaged food bags from local businesses, food banks or reclaim centers; using volunteers rather than paid staff; borrowing equipment or reference books; sharing facilities; and purchasing items in bulk.

## A Crash Course in Special Events

**Why hold a special event?** Special events not only raise money for your organization, they also create public exposure and help to engender a feeling of cohesiveness among the volunteers.

**What event is right for you?** There are many different types of special events. Some examples are an auction, a night of bingo or a walk for the animals. Consider these factors in your decision about which kind of event to hold:

- You need to maximize your profits. Which event will be the most economical, not only dollar-wise, but in terms of volunteer time? You'll need to estimate all the potential expenses, everything you may need to purchase or rent. Don't forget the price of services, such as printing and postage. What could you possibly make on this event? Estimate the number of people who will probably attend and multiply that by the average amount of money you expect to get from each person. Plan carefully; it's possible to lose money on a special event.

- Will the community respond? Is it right for them?
- Find an appropriate theme for the event, something that will inspire people to participate. (Hint: It should be fun!)
- Does it fit into your mission statement?
- Can you piggyback other fundraisers onto the event? Can you sell refreshments? put out donation canisters? sell merchandise? hold a raffle?

**How do you plan for success?** Here are some tips:

- Create a timeline for your event. (See the sample timeline on the next page.)
- Pick the right date: Don't compete with other large events; avoid holidays, the last or first week of school, election day, etc.
- Pick a convenient location. Is it easy to get to? Is there plenty of parking?
- Set a financial goal for the event and tell everyone about it.
- Select an inspiring purpose and theme for the event. Tell everyone about that too!

Remember to do a post-event evaluation while it's still fresh in everyone's minds. Write the comments down. If your event was a success, make it annual! If you keep careful records of your preparations, it will be even easier the next year and the event will grow – raising more money with less work.

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## Sample Special Event Timeline

### Six to twelve months before the event:

- Appoint an event chairperson
- Determine the purpose of the event
- Recruit and meet with committees
- Select a theme or concept for the event
- Locate and confirm a site/location
- Create a list of potential sponsors, entertainers, vendors, etc.
- Invite exhibitors, vendors, key volunteers
- Prepare the event budget and set a financial goal for the event
- Seek an honorary/celebrity chairperson
- Devise a publicity plan
- Develop publicity materials, logo, color scheme

### Four to seven months before the event:

- Schedule regular meetings with staff and volunteers
- Select a caterer, entertainers, speakers and other key staff
- Develop the site or logistics plan
- Apply for any necessary permits and confirm details in writing
- Create a detailed distribution plan for publicity materials
- Order premiums
- Arrange media interviews

### Two to five months before the event:

- Print and send invitations, brochures, posters, etc.
- Finalize and confirm plans and arrangements with key people in writing
- Organize the registration process
- Finalize the details regarding the menu, the event schedule, etc.
- Send press releases to periodicals and the local media

### One month before the event:

- Purchase paper goods, materials, decorations, prizes

- Rehearse speakers, train volunteers
- Finalize the logistics/site plan, seating arrangements, etc.
- Send a final press release, media advisories
- Call all key people to confirm details
- Call media contacts to invite them to send photographers/reporters
- Pick up donated items, arrange deliveries and storage
- Prepare name tags and registration materials
- Prepare an emergency plan, have phone numbers in place
- Prepare information on the organization for distribution at the event

### Event day:

- Put up directional signs enroute
- Meet with site officials
- Set up registration tables, etc.
- Get activities going and keep them on schedule
- Clean up

### One day after the event:

- Take down outdoor signs
- Return borrowed items
- Make notes on event evaluation

### Post-event (within two weeks):

- Send thank-you notes to volunteers and donors
- Send a post-event press release
- Meet with committees for a wrap-up meeting and evaluations
- Finish all budget-related details – calculate profit (or loss)
- Gather and organize materials and data for next year's event
- Recuperate!

## Grant Writing Basics

If you haven't done it before, writing a grant can seem like an intimidating task. But, there are ways to break it down to size.

First, do research at your public library or grantmaker's library to select funders that may be interested in your project. Obtain their grant guidelines and follow their instructions completely. (To find the nearest grantmaker's library, contact the Foundation Center, 79 Fifth Avenue, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10003-3076, phone: 212-620-4230, website: [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org).)

Here are some additional tips:

- Get to know the funder. Don't hesitate to ask questions. Talk with the administrator to gain insights into their goals and selection process.
- Give it the personal touch! Your proposal must be tailored to each foundation.
- Clearly state the goals of the project. Include measurable results.
- Assume a positive, active voice in your writing.
- Brevity is usually appreciated. Keep it concise and factual.
- Avoid using jargon or technical terms.
- Make the proposal appealing to look at and easy to read. Use a clear, logical format. Bulleted lists are often effective for outlining plans or conveying facts. Include photos when they support your case.
- Double-check those numbers! Be sure that your budget is accurate and realistic.
- Explain how you will fund this program after the initial grant. Funders want to know that you have other support and resources. Plan carefully, especially when seeking funding for a new project. If you only receive part of the requested monies, how else will you fund the project?

- Have at least two people proofread the proposal.
- When you receive funding, be sure to say "thank you!" You should thank the donor in a variety of ways – send a note, mention them in your newsletter, write a news release.
- Follow up with complete, accurate and timely reporting of the results of the project and the use of the funds.

## Tips for Major Gifts Fundraising

How do you find a major gifts prospect? Well, you'll need to play detective. Read the local papers, including the society columns; watch for the names of people who contribute to charities and may be interested in yours. Scan the newsletters or annual reports of other organizations for donor names. Check out smaller family foundations, which may often be overlooked. (To find them, try the reference department of your local library and watch the local newspapers.) Does anyone on your Board of Directors or anyone you know have any corporate connections? Try local civic clubs and professional organizations.

Once you have a prospect list, talk with people to find connections to those on your list. If you talk to the right person, and he or she puts you in touch with someone else, and that person introduces you to someone else, etc., you could theoretically end up chatting with the President or the Pope! The point is that it's not impossible to meet that wealthy mover-and-shaker whom you would love to tell about your cause. Finding the right connection is time-consuming and takes patience, but don't give up – remember, it's a process!

## Approaching a Major Gifts Prospect

Before you approach a prospect:

- Make a contribution to the organization yourself
- Know something about your prospect
- Prepare and practice – know your case, have your facts together
- Always ask in person. Make an appointment to meet

When you meet, remember to:

- Bring evidence with you – written materials and photos give you credibility
- Avoid using guilt as a way of pushing your cause
- Stress the cause, not the organization – ask for the animals and the people who care about them
- Ask for a specific amount of money
- Keep it short and sweet – don't overstay your welcome

“Never accept or pursue a donation that would restrict the choices of the organization.”

– Joan Flanagan

*The Grass Roots Fundraising Book*

## The Forgotten Fundraising Tool

If there was a simple way to motivate people, to keep them interested, to make them feel involved and encourage them to keep on giving, you'd gladly use it. Wouldn't you?

Well, such a tool does exist – it's the thank-you note! The words “thank you” can have magical powers. The thank-you note is an important key in building long-term relationships, both with volunteers and supporters. A thank-you can help to make an occasional donor a regular donor and a small donor a big one. If people give to make a difference, to feel involved, to be appreciated or acknowledged, or to feel good, your note is the best way to keep them in a generous mood!

Make your thank-you notes as personal as possible, specifically mentioning what they did, what was so special about the way they did it, what they donated and how it has helped.

You say you have no time for thank you's? Too expensive? REALLY???

Each donor needs to feel that his or her contribution counts – and it does! One person's donation of a couple of cans of cat food may be a greater sacrifice than another person's \$100 check. Since we (as advocates for the animals) are trying to encourage these warm and giving feelings, then clearly both donors deserve a gracious thank-you.

Special ways to say “thanks”:

- A personal handwritten thank-you note
- Multiple notes from different individuals within the organization (a handwritten note and an “official” agency note)
- The donor's name in your newsletter
- A plaque or other public acknowledgment of the donor's contribution
- A certificate of appreciation

- An in-person thank you
- A letter sent to the donor's boss
- A small personal gift
- A letter sent to the editor of the local paper
- A subscription to the newsletter and other membership benefits

## Assigning Tasks

Once you have selected the components of your fundraising strategy, you'll need to assign tasks to specific individuals and set deadlines. Create written job descriptions and a timeline for accomplishing essential tasks.

These steps will make it easier to get effective volunteers on board, train new people and measure performance. A job description should include the person's responsibility (a brief statement of the job function or purpose) and a listing of the tasks he/she is expected to manage or complete. The job descriptions

should also clarify whom they report to and who they're supervising.

Take care to plan events and tasks in doable amounts. You don't want to over-extend your volunteers and staff. The key to successful fundraising is to do your tasks well, not just barely get it pulled together, with everyone exhausted from the effort.

Finally, everyone needs to feel appreciated. Remember to recognize the contributions of volunteers and staff.

## How Are We Doing?

Don't forget to evaluate your progress. What's working? What isn't? Keep written records of your evaluations. Make adjustments to your plan as you go along – remember, fundraising is a process!