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In nature, courtship leads to perpetuation of the species. Similarly, perpetuating your Friends group is all about relationship building. You can't succeed at fundraising or at accomplishing your goals without strong relationships. Indeed, fundraising isn't really about raising funds at all, it's about making *friends*. The more friends you have, the more secure your organization will be.

This section lays the framework for why people support organizations and offers suggestions on how your group can begin building and expanding its friendships.

Friendraising (“Courtship”)

Relationships Are Key:

The most important key to fundraising success is relationship building. To be successful fundraisers, your group needs to be in the business of making and keeping friends (“fundraising is friendraising”). The more friends you have, the more money you’ll have, because your friends understand personally the value of your group and support it through their donations. Understanding why people give will help you find ways to match your group’s needs with those of your donors and begin developing the relationships you need to build your nest egg.

Why do people give?

People give for many reasons, some are altruistic, others economic. Others may give simply because they feel an obligation to return some of their good fortune to their communities. Consider the following:¹

- ❑ **Because they are asked** — “The number one reason people give away their money is simple: *somebody asked*. If it’s someone they know and trust—their sister-in-law, parish priest, or car mechanic—so much the better. All fundraising, including grantwriting, begins with the simple act of one person asking another for money (Robinson, 1996, p. 13).”
- ❑ **Values and beliefs** — The organization represents issues that are consistent with the values and beliefs of the individual. As individuals they have little power to affect change, but as members of an organization they can make a difference.
- ❑ **Sense of community or altruism** — They care about the issue, believe in the group, or agree with the group’s vision.
- ❑ **Sense of personal worth or feeling good** — Giving makes them feel good because the group expresses their personal ideals and helps them to reinforce their image of themselves.
- ❑ **Posterity** — They want to leave something of themselves to benefit future generations.
- ❑ **Sheer fun and pleasure** — They enjoy the group and want to see it succeed.
- ❑ **Pure exchange** — They join for the newsletter or other tangible items, such as a tote bag or bumper sticker.
- ❑ **For the tax credit** — They choose to make a donation to a nonprofit group of their choice rather than pay more taxes on their income.

1. Adapted from Klein (1996), Robinson (1996), and Seltzer (1987).

- ❑ **Out of a sense of guilt** — Some people feel guilty about how much they have or how little service they have done in their life and giving helps relieve some of that guilt.

Corporations and foundations are not unlike individuals in their giving. They give to groups whose accomplishments and plans correspond with their own vision and goals. By building personal relationships with the *people* who are involved with these organizations, your group will be in a better position to receive funding awards.

Making and keeping friends:

Regardless of their reason for giving, individuals choose to give to some groups and not others. Your challenge is to match your needs with the interests of your prospective donors so that your group will be the one to receive the donation and not some other group. Here are some ways you can increase your chances of attracting donors to your organization.

- ❑ **Show Clarity of Purpose** – You’ll be more likely to attract members and donors to your group if you can communicate a clear vision. If your message is muddled it will be harder for people to identify with your group.
- ❑ **Build Credibility** – Have a clear plan of action and do what you say you’re going to do. Be fiscally responsible. People are more comfortable giving to a group they believe will handle their donations with care.
- ❑ **Be Visible** – Build a public relations plan into all of your activities. The more press you get (e.g., via the news, cable, radio, and your own newsletters), the more people will begin to recognize your group, become members, and make donations.
- ❑ **Address the Needs of the Donor (offer them something of value)** – Subscribe to “WII-FM” (“What’s in it for me?”). Think about what you have to offer potential donors. Consider how you can make people feel good about being part of your organization (e.g., fun socials, volunteer opportunities, programs). Offer something that will involve individuals on a personal level.
- ❑ **Match Interests** – Consider how you might match your organizational needs with those of your potential partners, such as businesses and corporations. What do you have that they might want (e.g., volunteer opportunities for their employees) and what do they have that you could use (e.g., expertise, equipment, free labor).
- ❑ **Have FUN!** – People want to join a group where they can make new friends and have fun. Even though your group is focused on a serious issue (i.e., protecting and perpetuating refuge lands), you can still have lots of fun with your programs member outings, and volunteer activities.

Many Friends groups have learned the value of building strong relationships. These are important not only to fundraising, but to all aspects of the organization, from working well as a board and with refuge staff, to attracting volunteers and building community support. The more friends you have, the easier it will be to accomplish your mission.

The two Friends stories in this section show just how important relationships can be—from a chance meeting to careful planning, the experiences of these groups is just a sampling of what’s possible when you focus your group’s energies on making personal friendships. Other stories throughout this book exemplify the same principle—individuals make all the difference.

Friends/Refuge Relationship is Key to Fundraising Success

Building strong relationships with refuge personnel as important to fundraising as the relationships groups develop with potential donors. Remember that project and program implementation will be done as a joint effort, so everyone will want to work together toward the same goals. Refuge personnel can also play a key role in helping groups make important connections

in the community and beyond. Taking time to build a mutually supportive relationship will help the group and refuge personnel meet their goals and will prove key to fundraising success. See *Taking Flight* (1997) for a relationship building model that works (a copy of the “Guiding Principles for the Friends/ US Fish and Wildlife Relationship” is provided in the Appendices).

The Power of Saying “Thank You!”

“

Always, always, always thank everyone for every type of donation. Even if you have to stay up all night writing these notes, do it!”

— Flanagan, 1995, p. 99

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One of the most important ways to nurture your relationships with your donors is to acknowledge their contributions with a simple “thank you.” Saying “thank you” is a great way to make your donors feel valued and appreciated. People like to be thanked (even if they tell you it’s not necessary!), and are likely to give, and to give more, the next time they are asked.

Saying thank you is too important to leave to chance, so you'll want to ensure that you have one or more people in place whose job it is to write notes (or even make telephone calls) for each contribution. A thank you note should be hand-written to each and every donor, no matter how large or small their contribution. Klein (1996) notes that thank you notes should go out within two days of receipt of the donation, a week at the outside, and should be signed, if possible, by someone who knows the donor (p. 170).

In addition to personal thank you notes, you can recognize your donors publicly in news articles, letters to the editor, newsletters and other mailings to members or with plaques or name plates attached to purchases made with donations. Be sure to check with your donors about recognition first. Some folks may prefer *not* to be acknowledged publicly.

You can also show your thanks to major donors² by keeping in touch with them several times each year. Some ideas include:

- ❑ Write a personal note on reports or newsletters;
- ❑ Send birthday or holiday greetings;³
- ❑ Send copies of news releases or articles with an added personal note that says something like: "Your contribution helped make this possible!"

“

Overall, experience shows that, all else being equal, when you thank donors you keep them and when you don't you lose them.

— Klein, 1996, p. 170

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If you are launching a fundraising campaign of any sort—from a membership drive to a capital campaign—you'll want to make saying "thank you" an integral component of your campaign. Remember, as Flanagan (1995) writes: "Thank-you notes make the donor feel appreciated, and she or he will remember that the next time you ask for something (p. 100)."

2. The definition of a major donor will differ for each group. For smaller, start-up groups, \$50 may be considered a major donation, while more mature and well-funded groups may set their major donor baseline at \$500 or \$1,000.

3. Take care with holiday greetings: know your donor's preferences or send generic cards.



Cultivating Relationships Proves Key to Success in Adversarial Climate

Friends and Volunteers of Refuges (FAVOR), Florida

At the outset, Harold and Susan Nugent, founders of Friends and Volunteers of Refuges (FAVOR), realized that their group would need to build positive community relations if they were to succeed. This was a huge challenge because controversies between developers and conservationists over the endangered Key deer on Key Deer NWR had been one of many polarizing events in the community (which stretches over 150 miles along the length of the Keys).

To gain support, the group needed to be viewed as a positive force in the community. They needed to get beyond the adversarial climate and make lots of friends who would support their goals. To do this, they took a strategic approach to organizing that included three main components: choose the right board members; stay focused on their goals; and choose highly visible projects.

❑ **Choose the right board members:**

As they sought board members, they recognized the need to be careful who they partnered with—they needed to associate with the “right” folks (people who were respected and would not be viewed as adversarial). Friends and former Refuge Manager, Barry Stieglitz, worked together to select people who would best fit the needs of the organization, weeding out folks who had potential conflicts. Not only did this process help find the right board members, it set the stage for the group’s working relationship with the refuge and the community.

❑ **Stay focused on their goals:**

The group developed four goals focused on: education, advocacy, volunteerism, and fundraising. Objectives for each goal were developed. Each board member focuses on two of these and all activities have to be consistent with the goals. In addition, they organized their budget around these four categories, which creates a budgeting process that can be understood and easily managed by all board members. In fact, Harold recommends, “If a budget item doesn’t fit your goals, you probably should let someone else do it.”

Being focused has helped the group enormously. FAVOR can clearly communicate its goals and accomplishments to members and the community. They are prepared to respond quickly when opportunities present themselves.

❑ **Choose highly visible projects:**

FAVOR made a conscious decision to focus on activities that would be highly visible. For example, they adopted a road to clean, which gets their name on a road sign and attention when they are out cleaning the road. Other activities have included speaking engagements on popular subjects, such as crocodiles and alligators, creating a butterfly meadow, and designing a FAVOR license plate.

“

Piggyback onto other group’s events to get exposure. Get your name out. The more you associate with others, the better.”

— Susan Nugent, FAVOR

”

FAVOR’s strategy has helped in their fundraising efforts:

By creating a nonadversarial board committed to building relationships, sticking to a clear plan, and being visible, the group has built credibility and recognition in their community. This approach has had huge payoffs: volunteers are stepping forward, former skeptics are now partnering with FAVOR, and donations of funds and services are beginning to roll in. For example:

- ❑ **The owners of a rather expensive tour boat donated a day-long trip** that FAVOR used to plan their refuge birthday celebration. *Fifty people* participated! The boat’s owners, who are friendly to environmental groups, are also willing to help with a future fundraiser.
- ❑ **Thirty volunteers came forward to help establish a butterfly meadow** after Harold gave a speech at a workshop held by Discovery Florida Keys.
- ❑ **FAVOR has established partnerships with boat captains who had formerly been both skeptical and contentious.** These partnerships have led to joint activities, such as back country clean-ups that use donated boats for access and FAVOR volunteers to pick up trash.
- ❑ **Two major donors stepped forward in the group’s first year.** One \$1,000 donor stated, “If you give us a budget, we’ll give you money.” FAVOR was prepared to respond, making it easy for the donor to give.

The experience of Friends and Volunteers of Refuges clearly shows how strategic organizational development sets the stage for successful fundraising. By proving they had something valuable to offer not only the refuge, but the community, FAVOR is positioned to raise more than money—they are raising lifelong friends and supporters of the Florida Key National Wildlife Refuges.



Making Connections Spells Success

Friends of Anahuac Refuge, Texas



In a remote Texas community with a population of only 1,900, the ability of a Friends group to thrive seems difficult, if not impossible. Yet, Friends of Anahuac Refuge has experienced phenomenal success in just four short years since the group was established in December, 1996. During this period, they have:

- ❑ Developed a highly successful environmental education program for area schools.
- ❑ Established a reading program in local schools.
- ❑ Offered regular events and programs.
- ❑ Donated thousands of volunteer hours to the refuge, including a team of “greeters” who introduce the refuge to visitors.
- ❑ Become a visible presence in the community and garnered tremendous support, both financial and personal.

Grady Skillern, Friends President, credits much of the group’s success to their relationship with refuge staff: Friends members are treated like staff and they have been through all the training and are included in staff meetings. Friends members have become trusted friends and they feel they are taken seriously by the staff.

This Friends/Refuge relationship proved critical to a surprise corporate donation made by an oil company. While Grady notes that their group’s experience was a bit of a fluke, the story shows how critical building individual relationships are to organizational and fundraising success. It also underscores how important refuge personnel are to the success of Friends groups—they play a key role in helping groups make the connections they need to succeed.

Friends of Anahuac Refuge Receive \$50,000 Corporate Donation:

About eight months after the Friends were operational, oil exploration was done on the refuge. Manager Andy Loranger had the foresight to invite members of the Friends to a meeting between the refuge and the companies doing the work. The Friends provided information about their organization and gave the companies an opportunity to offer financial assistance. Grady notes that “They knew they had no leverage with these companies, but the Friends’ speakers were eloquent and managed to get their message across.”

The oil exploration created damages for which the refuge ultimately sought repair. As chance would have it, the Friends had a golden opportunity to speak directly with the geophysicist in charge of the exploration project during a local town festival. He stopped by the group's booth during the event, and the group's members seized the opportunity to voice their concerns and discuss the ramifications for refuge wildlife.

This personal connection proved fortuitous for the Friends. When the refuge submitted their request for the damages to be repaired, the company asked what the Friends needed as well. They donated \$50,000 to the Friends, as Grady notes, "to make up for some of the damages they knew they had caused, but which they couldn't repair." In return, the Friends have recognized the company's donation on some refuge signs.

This story underscores some key principles in corporate fundraising:

- ❑ **Corporations donate funds in situations where it will help their image, bring in profits, or benefit their employees in some way.** In this situation, the company chose to donate funds to the Friends because they were interested in maintaining an image as good neighbors who were concerned about the environment.
- ❑ **Like other sectors, corporations don't give to "organizations," they give to people.** The group was a known entity to the corporation from their early meetings with the refuge staff. They had also made an important personal contact with the company's geophysicist when he visited their booth. These contacts made it possible for the corporation to donate to *people* they knew personally.

Building on Success:

Friends of Anahuac Refuge used a portion of the \$50,000 on an environmental education program that has helped the group establish strong community relations. In its first year, the program brought nearly 1,000 students to the refuge, involved volunteers who had never before set foot on the refuge, and engaged both teachers and parents.

The environmental education program was spearheaded by Grady's wife, Lu Skillern, who modeled it on a similar program offered at a Houston area nature center. It is designed for all schools in the county, grades K through 5, and includes an outdoor school field trip that uses volunteer teachers. Local teachers were involved in the program's design and all who have participated have given it rave reviews and are anxious to return for more classes in years to come.

The program has received a tremendous amount of publicity in the local newspapers. Indeed, the Friends have developed such good relations with the press that, as Grady notes, "We can now write anything we want and get it into the local papers because the editors love to see our stories!"

The Friends of Anahuac NWR are finding that success truly breeds success. Their many relationships and enthusiastic support has led to more donations. For example, one bank recently sponsored a full set of classroom kits and donated a repos-

sessed trailer that the group refurbished and now uses for their supplies. In both of these situations, the work of the Friends was well-known and members had established personal contacts that led to the donations.

So, in this small town of 1,900 people, relationships—between the refuge staff and the Friends and the community—have made the difference. While the group will always struggle to build membership because of its limited population base, it has found a local recipe that works for being a successful, well-supported organization. This group's experience underscores an important fundraising principle: ***people give to people.***



