
8 ways to raise \$2,500 (or more) in 10 days (or less, sometimes)

BY KIM KLEIN & STEPHANIE ROTH

Everywhere we turn we see good organizations cutting back, laying off staff, or closing altogether. These are weird and hard times, and we need long-term solutions. But sometimes we just need cash. This article focuses on the immediate. It does not suggest that you change your board structure or write to your Congressperson or think strategically — even though we are in favor of all those things. The purpose of the article is to help you buy some time so you can make all the changes in your organization that we have recommended in our other articles!

1. Make a list of all the people you know who are supportive of the work you do and admire you for being willing to work for low or no pay to change the world. Write them a letter explaining that you have set a goal of raising \$2,500 in ten days and hope that each of them will consider a gift of \$100, \$500, \$50, \$25, or whatever they can afford. Include a simple reply card and a stamped return envelope to make it as easy as possible for them to give. At about Day Seven, call all the people who have not responded. Remember that 50 percent of the people you ask will not give, and 50 percent of the people who do give will give less than you asked them for, so you will need to ask about three times as many people as the number of gifts you need to reach your goal. If you are thinking that you have already asked everyone you know, here's what to do: ask the people who have helped you who they know, and ask if you can use their name in contacting them. Make sure you really have asked everyone: your neighbors, your colleagues at work, your chiropractor, your optometrist.... Be sure that you know that the person you are asking cares, at least a little, about your cause, so that you don't wind up in an argument.

2. Send an e-mail to everyone in your e-mail address book (as in #1, taking out people who don't agree with the cause you are working for) in which you refer people to the website of the organization. Ask your friends to go to the site and make a pledge. Be sure the site has a "Donate

Now" icon that either takes people to a secure area to make a credit card donation or allows them to download a form and send it in. Your e-mail should be very brief but stress the urgency of your request.

3. Host a house party. Invite your friends to a barbecue at your house and tell them it is a fundraiser for your cause. Either make a presentation at the party asking for money or set an amount you want everyone to pay as they arrive. Be sure to let people know in the invitation that even if they can't come they can send money. The three secrets to a successful house party are:

- Invite at least three times as many people as the number you want to come
- Make follow-up calls a few days before the party to encourage people to come
- Be sure you make it clear how people are to give their money. If they are to pay as they come in, then someone needs to stand by the door and collect money. If they are going to hear a presentation and a pitch, then someone needs to hand out envelopes for people to put their checks in and then pick up the envelopes.

4. Host a virtual house party. Send an e-mail to your friends and include pictures of your house and yard. Tell them you really wish you had time to invite them over, but the urgency of the work precludes this. Talk about the work briefly and ask for money. This is particularly effective for people who have a lot of friends who live far away and wouldn't be able to come anyway.

5. Do a phantom event. These can be done virtually or with real mail. Invite people *not* to come to something. The classic is a tea party, where people are invited to a tea party, and a tea bag is enclosed in the invitation, which reads, "Come to a tea party. Have it whenever you want and invite whoever you want. Use this teabag. Before sitting down with your friend, write us a check and put it in

the enclosed envelope.” Phantom events are fun if you can describe an event that people really don’t want to go to. “You will not have to get dressed up or find parking. You will not have to balance a plate of raw vegetables and dip and a drink while trying to shake hands with people you don’t know.” The appeal is designed like an invitation, so few words are used. A phantom event works when the people receiving it are familiar with the organization and don’t need a long explanation about what the work is. Again, include a reply device and a return envelope. The reply device should continue the fun: “I won’t be there. I am so looking forward to that! Here’s my gift. Thanks for letting me stay home.”

6. Organize a yard or garage sale with your neighbors. If you have neighbors who admire your organization, they may be willing to donate all the proceeds to it. If not, then offer to do all the work in exchange for a percentage of the proceeds. Be sure to advertise the yard sale in your community newspaper and put up a lot of signs. If you have some high-ticket items, like exercise equipment, antiques, or furniture, you may be able to make your \$2,500 on this event. If not, to reach the goal think about selling some stuff through an on-line auction service such as E-Bay.

7. Call all donors who have not given in the last eight months and ask them for an extra gift, or in the case of those who have not given in the last fourteen months, ask them to renew their commitment to your organization. Tell them you are calling because you need to raise \$2,500 in the next ten days and need their help. Usually 5 to 15 percent of the calls made will result in gifts. (The rest of the calls will end with answering machines, disconnected numbers, or people who decline to give.) On this one, remember ahead of time that people who are otherwise very nice often feel free to be rude on the phone. Some people will say, “I am going to report you because I have signed up for the ‘Do Not Call’ list.” Explain that nonprofits are exempt from this law, but

that you will make sure to note in their donor record that they should not be called in the future. Do not argue and do not stay on the line any longer than you need to.

8. Identify a few friends or colleagues who have high incomes or inherited wealth and ask them one-by-one, personally, for gifts of \$250–\$1,000. These might be people you went to college with, significant others of people in your group, or even people in much larger nonprofits. (It is not unusual for the executive director of a multimillion-dollar agency to make over \$100,000, and it is not unusual for a development director at a university or large hospital or museum to make \$90,000 or more.) The universal lament of grassroots activists, “I don’t know anyone with money,” becomes a mantra that keeps you from realizing that you probably do know people sympathetic to your cause who earn more money than you.

For more details on any of these strategies, see the *Journal’s* detailed index of previous articles at www.grassrootsfundraising.org.

Having a goal and a short time to reach it is part of what makes these strategies work. As you think about using these strategies, be more inclined to lower the goal than to extend the time. Volunteers will also be more likely to help you in a short time frame than a longer one. You will be more focused if you know the goal must be reached quickly.

To be sure, not all these suggestions will raise \$2,500 in ten days. Sometimes it is worth adding a couple of weeks onto the preparation time to increase the income. The ten days also do not include follow-up, which is essential. Thank-you notes, data entry, and reports on how well each strategy worked are key to getting out of the kind of bind that would make you read an article on how to raise \$2,500 in ten days. **GFJ**

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