



Urban Ecology Center's 10 Rules for Raising Money

1. It all starts with a good idea: Be it a program, a person, or a product that you want to fund, the “idea” needs to be finessed, polished and critiqued in order to make it clear and concise before presenting to a funder. Share it with everyone on your staff; test it out on friends and colleagues. Perfect the idea. Don't be shy! With a good idea raising money becomes fun!
2. The idea needs to be packaged: The main idea (or abstract) should be able to be explained verbally in two minutes; in written form it needs only one page, 14 font and one inch margins. (Most funders are older so respect their ageing eyes). Nothing leaves our office, from a letter, article, or a grant, without at least three sets of eyes editing/reviewing it. Gloss is not necessary, but a professional look is. Pictures help in oral presentations.
3. Have a clear budget: You have to know your needs ... don't pad it, but don't undervalue either. If it's a good idea (which it must be!) it is worth a solid investment. Integrity here is key. We usually create a draft budget before we write or present an idea as it drives and perfects the idea. In a written proposal state the request amount on the first page with the title so expectations are clear. We usually determine the request amount by asking the simple question “How much can/should I ask for?” from the source.
4. Know your funding sources: Do your research. Know what they have funded and know how much they fund. If it is a foundation or corporation know who is on their board and find volunteer contacts to that board.
5. Find the Hooks: A given idea may have three or four hooks to hang a presentation on. (In our case it might be community development, science education or central city issues as examples). Figure out which hook to use for which funder based upon research done on the funder.
6. Develop and use your volunteers: If possible, don't have a staff person make the “ask”. A volunteer who is invested in the organization and has contact with the funding source is the ideal person for this. If you don't have an appropriate volunteer, don't let it stop you. An ask with “no” as the answer is better than no ask at all. Use volunteers to open relationships.
7. Follow through from an attitude of excellence: It all about relationship!!! This can't be emphasized enough. Our goal is to send hand written thank you notes within two weeks (usually one) of receiving money, be it \$10 or \$100,000. We visit large donors just to visit, talk, and report on life (often theirs), so that we are not seen as money grubbing every time we interact. We send email up-dates occasionally with personal notes attached, and we craft our newsletter to serve the same purpose. We want our funders to know our business,

both positive and negative. Don't miss deadlines! We have set up excellent excel spread sheets for keeping up on deadlines and communication. Email us and we'll send you templates. Have patience with this offer as we are extremely busy.

8. Know your own strengths and weakness: You can't let your ego get in the way. If you are not a good writer, get one on your staff or from volunteers. If you are not a good speaker, use someone else. If you can't keep things organized acknowledge this and hire accordingly. Use the best resources from among your people.
9. Treat everyone like they are a millionaire: Give the same deference, time, and appreciation to everyone no matter who it is you are presenting or speaking with. You don't know what their resources are and you might be surprised. Researching potential funders is important, but treating thy neighbor as thyself is more so. It works!
10. Provide enough time to make it realistic: Think no less than six months out on any project. We've funded things in less time, but it takes up valuable relationship capital which can impact future funding. It is not fun to do it fast (quality is diminished) and it adds the risk of burning relationships.

Other notes that may be of value:

- Remember - the work is in the preparation. Grant "writing" is only 10% of the job.
- People like to fund success. Spin your situation into a positive light. Be honest about failure, don't hide it, but stress the positive.
- Be creative. Operating costs can be sold as a project or sponsorship opportunity.
- We use a triage system of seeking funds. Our staff is small with no development officer. We have families, hobbies and interests. Given limited time we seek the best return from our investment. Government grants are generally too much trouble for our situation. If we can swing a site visit from a funder we have a 90% success rate. A personal visit in their office yields over 50%. Sending off a grant with no connection yields less than 15% success. Thus we spend a lot of time working on getting the site visit. Frankly, it is rare that we send out a proposal with out being pretty sure that we are getting the money. The proposal becomes a formality. If we miss a deadline ... well it'll come again so don't stress out ... there are plenty more sources to find.
- If you ask for \$100,000, but only get \$5000, be just as effusive with your thanks! Keep disappointment to yourself.
- Don't put your eggs in one basket. You should have multiple requests out for every project. Getting too much money for a project is a good problem to have!

Have fun and good luck!