

Ten Practical Steps for Annual Fund Success – Part Two

Shawn D. Ingram and Linda Lipscomb, Vice Presidents

The previous edition of *Arts Insights* explored the first five practical steps for year-end annual fund success. These included: 1) Create a Collaborative Development Plan, 2) Fine Tune the Timing of Your Appeals, 3) Utilize Your Board More Effectively, 4) Conduct Targeted Prospect Research, and 5) Take Advantage of Opportunities. Here are the remaining five steps to build success at the end of the calendar or fiscal year and to prepare for the next year.

Step 6: Design the Year-End Messages Now

Start drafting year-end messages early! Think about what has resonated with donors and stakeholders in the recent past or has produced strong financial results for the organization in previous seasons. Without being duplicative, can those messages be reconfigured for use at the end of the calendar year? If the development staff or organizational leadership does not have this kind of institutional knowledge, use this as an opportunity to build bridges with more seasoned staff members. Poll the entire organization to determine what was the most successful end-of-year campaign ever run. What made it special or memorable?

As development professionals, a big part of the job is thinking about and planning for the future. Pinpoint what is unique about the organization and what will put it at the forefront of donors' minds. By thinking about these topics now, while development staff members have more time and perspective, the organization will see greater results when those messages are put to work.

PRO TIP: Rather than compete for success, build collaborative messages by bringing the marketing and box office teams to the table early. Work with the marketing department to incorporate development messages into traditional ticket sales messaging, especially for highly popular holiday shows.

Step 7: Survey Your Audience

To position giving messages more effectively, work with the marketing team to create a brief, thoughtful, incentivized survey. Consider creating different versions to segment responses from current donors and subscribers versus those who have lapsed. Use this as an opportunity to seek demographic information such as what percentage of respondents have children under the age of 18. How might this impact education or youth arts engagement solicitations? How many households are over the age of 65, and what would that mean for messages about planned giving?

In addition to demographic information, be sure to include questions regarding the artistic/cultural aspects of programming and the patron experience. A good rule of thumb is to devote approximately one-third of the questions to each of these areas. The survey should include specific questions about where the organization falls in the hierarchy of entertainment or philanthropic priorities. Provide room for participant comments and offer the opportunity to provide contact information if respondents would like follow-up from the organization.

To incentivize the survey, the perk(s) should be specific to the organization and perhaps out of reach for many donors. Consider offering inclusion in a drawing for an exclusive back-of-house experience or a walk-on role in a show. Perhaps they could conduct a brief musical excerpt in a concert, take a behind-the-scenes tour of the archives, or any number of other sought-after experiences. Incentivizing the survey will result in significantly higher than average response rates, providing the development staff with invaluable information.

Step 8: Collaborate with the Board Chair on a State of the Organization Document

Everyone wants to be part of a winning team—and donors are no exception. They appreciate and respond to accomplishments, so highlighting organizational achievements from the past year in a formal statement can build success for fundraising and across the organization. A strong engagement, development, and business tool, a state of the organization document is a very effective way to end one year and set the stage for the next.

Often written by the development and marketing staffs and signed by the Board Chair or executive leader, this statement is a mini-annual report (minus the audited financials). While it can be mailed digitally, sending hard copies to major donors and significant institutional partners can have greater impact. Include a personalized, signed note on letterhead or a branded notecard. The delivery of this document makes it easy for a board member, Artistic Director, or Executive Director to follow up and set a meeting to steward the donor.

Step 9: Increase the Use of Online Channels for Solicitations

For many arts and culture development staffs, the subject of digital engagement and social media campaigns is frequently on the table. While some organizations may have good results from traditional appeals, the relatively quiet summer months are a great time to consider other options. Every year online giving continues to grow exponentially, increasing 12 percent in 2017. More importantly, arts and culture organizations saw an increase of 17.2 percent in online giving.¹ Email solicitations are easy to implement and cost effective. There are a variety of excellent user-friendly options for designing effective email campaigns. The most impactful campaigns use a combination of traditional and digital methods. Supplement traditional direct mail campaigns by using email and social media for last minute reminders.

Step 10: Cultivate and Steward Your Donors

When arts and culture development staffs complete subscriber drives they often discover new subscribers who have never given before. What kind of audience engagement experience will connect these new subscribers to the organization's work and increase their likelihood of becoming donors? Perhaps the development staff, along with select board members, can host a new subscriber day with a tour of the theater and a visit to the costume shop.

Think back to Step 1: Create a Collaborative Development Plan—at the start of the new fiscal year. What kind of plan could be developed with marketing colleagues for a January or July event? What kind of mailing could engage first-time single ticket buyers during the holiday season? Again, collaborate with the marketing department on an engagement (not an ask for money) plan in January or July and plan for a solicitation in June or December.

Conclusion

There is a misguided perception that all the larger nonprofit arts and culture organizations are experts at these tasks and include all these elements in fiscal year-end planning. While some do, a wide range of organizations with varying budget sizes only accomplish some of these ten practical steps each year. Rather than doing it all, development staffs should focus on doing it well! As organizational and financial capacity grows, development teams can find what works best for their specific and unique organization. More of these elements can be added once planning efforts are streamlined and seamless. Do not get overwhelmed. There are 154 days from the end of July until the end of the calendar year, and 365 days after that. Make every day count!



Shawn D. Ingram, Vice President

Mr. Ingram is a human capital and revenue enhancement expert with more than 25 years of professional experience in nonprofit fundraising and management in the arts and social services. Joining the Los Angeles office in 2016, Mr. Ingram leads the firm's Contributed Revenue Enhancement practice, where he supports a comprehensive national roster of ACG clients with strategic management and fundraising solutions. Mr. Ingram has served as Interim Director of Development at Laguna Playhouse, Interim Vice President of Development for Para Los Niños, and provided similar services for The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company. He supported New Roads School's early stages of a \$20 million capital campaign and the American Youth Symphony in enhancing their major gifts program. Mr. Ingram has also held positions as Executive Director at My Friend's Place, Director of Corporate and Foundation Development at La Jolla Playhouse, and Director of Development at the San Diego LGBT Community Center,

¹ 2017 Charitable Giving Report, Blackbaud Institute for Philanthropic Impact, 2017

Equality California, and The Trevor Project. Mr. Ingram began his career in fundraising at Harvard University, working several years at the American Repertory Theater. Mr. Ingram has performed extensively across the country as a professional singer and dancer and holds a bachelor of science in communication from Boston University.



Linda Lipscomb, Vice President

Ms. Lipscomb joined ACG in 2016, bringing nearly 30 years of experience in fundraising, marketing, and sales to her consulting and interim management work for the firm. She has expertise in facilitating major capital campaigns, maximizing annual funds and major gift programs, conducting feasibility studies, and performing interim management services. Ms. Lipscomb has served in interim management roles, leading the development departments at Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Fort Worth Opera, and Fort Worth Symphony. As Interim Vice President of Development at Dallas Symphony Orchestra, she successfully reversed several years of annual fund declines, increasing those efforts to meet targeted fundraising goals. At Dallas Museum of Art, she led the final phase of the museum's \$185 million endowment and operating campaign. As Deputy Director of Advancement for Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Ms. Lipscomb increased annual fundraising by nearly 50 percent and expanded the base of donors

following a capital expansion. In these positions, she successfully tackled the challenges faced by nonprofit organizations seeking to improve contributed revenue, build systems and processes, expand major gifts, and mentor fundraising staff. Ms. Lipscomb holds a bachelor of arts in history of art from Sweet Briar College in Virginia and a master of business administration in finance and marketing from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

**Contact ACG for more information on how we can help your organization
create fundraising solutions and achieve annual fund success.**

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