

Does just reading the word “fundraising” give you a chill?

By: Ishbel Dickens

You are not alone. Many people respond negatively to the thought of asking another for money. Why, you ask? Is it fear of rejection, a sense that talking about money is a taboo subject, or simply that they are not themselves invested enough in the organization for which they want support to feel confident in their “ask”? Whatever the reason, hopefully this article will allay anxiety and encourage you to “give” and “ask” for money joyfully.

When we are asked to fundraise for our home owners’ association whether it be our local HOA, our state HOA, or the National Manufactured Home Owners Association (NMHOA) we tend first to think of corporations/foundations (Gates, Kellogg, Ford, etc.) However, over the past several decades the amount of giving by corporations and foundations has remained steady at 10%. Indeed the amount of giving by individuals has remained steady too – 82%, with the balance coming from bequests (8%). In other words 90% of giving is done by people not corporations. In addition to this, the vast majority of giving (82%) comes from people who earn less than \$50,000/annum. In other words your best sources for fundraising are the people you know best!

The ideas that follow are based on the fact that this article is about fund-raising. There may be future articles on making the best use of volunteer time and expertise, but for now we are talking about ways to raise money for your organization since there are usually at least some items that will incur expenses even when running an all-volunteer association.

Obviously, asking for membership dues on an annual basis is an easy first step. It is true that people will appreciate your association more if they are asked to contribute to it financially. Setting a realistic annual membership fee is relatively simple – the board can establish an amount and members can pay it all at once or quarterly, whichever works better for them and for the Treasurer, who is keeping track of the income.

However, you need to set an example. If you are a board member or active volunteer in your HOA, then are you giving an amount to the organization that is a bit of a stretch for you? It is not enough simply to pay your membership dues, board members especially ought to be modeling the kind of joyful giving they are hoping others will copy.

While we all donate many hours of our time and expertise to our HOAs, it is money that keeps the doors open and allows us to do the work we care so deeply about. If you are asking others to give \$1/week to your HOA, then are you able to give \$2/week? It can be paid in monthly installments, but a board of ten members each contributing \$2/week would result in over \$1,000 for your HOA every year. Or how about everyone decides to donate the equivalent of one day’s wages if employed, or a half day wages if retired? That way everyone donates relative to everyone else.

Alternative fund raising ideas where you are asking members to contribute might revolve around special events. Several HOAs hold ice cream socials, recipe book sales, and other member-to-member kinds of events. More ambitious HOAs have been known to hold “Fairs” – half or full-day events where vendors or practitioners “buy” a table for \$100 and use the opportunity to show their products, or encourage home owners to engage with them in other ways. For instance, Health Fairs might attract several different social service agencies, senior service agencies, pharmacies, etc. to participate. Or you might consider a Travel Fair, or a Product Fair for vendors who specifically market to manufactured home owners. Having 10 tables would result in \$1,000 income without too much effort on the part of board members and volunteers. Special events can sometimes be personnel heavy so it will be important for the HOA board to determine what resources they have available to take on such an undertaking. Perhaps you might want to start with a Silent Auction as part of your annual meeting and encourage attendees to donate items for sale (homemade are usually highly sought after), and also to bring their check book to purchase items that have been donated. At the other extreme, the Illinois State Association (MHOAI) has done tremendously well with a “Day at the Races” or a “Day on the Golf Course”. Their volunteers solicit raffle prizes; sell books of raffle tickets; provide dinner and entertainment at the venue which is donated by a community owner (!); and generally make \$10,000 profit on such an event.

Therefore it is good for the HOA Board to determine how it wants to proceed. Some methods of fund raising are more time and volunteer intensive than others. Some ask more of members in terms of giving, but all can induce joyful giving when everyone appreciates that the giving is being done to benefit manufactured home owners.

One final tip.

It is good to think of fundraising possibilities in three concentric circles.

1. The inner most circle is where you are most likely to find support. This circle contains board members, people directly affected by the work of the HOA and who know this, staff, volunteers, and current donors whether members, supporters, or foundations/corporations.
2. The second circle consists of people who know who we are and “get” what we do. These could be family members, people indirectly served by the HOA, and vendors who make money from manufactured home owners.
3. The third circle is where it may be hardest to fundraise as it consists of people who do not know about the work we do, but who would support us if they did.

Get together with your board members and map out your three circles. You will be amazed at the possibilities! Keep things as personal as possible – no form letters, no invoices for renewal reminders, but genuine “thank yous” to people who donate – they are much more likely to donate again in the future if you have thanked them personally.

Please join NMHOA at our annual conference being held at the Hilton in Seattle on November 13-15. There will be a workshop on fundraising where we look forward to sharing more about tips about fundraising with you.