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⇒ *Section 1* ⇐

The Hows and Whys of Fundraising

As the founder of the National Association of Pet Rescue Professionals (NAPRP), almost every day I talk to people involved in helping homeless animals. Virtually every rescue group is started by people with the best intentions. Some organizations thrive and save literally thousands of homeless pets every year; however, many animal shelters, humane and rescue groups struggle to raise money. In some cases, they are actually just a few dollars away from folding. Often people seem to think that “if I only could get that grant” everything will be just perfect!

Rescue groups that continue to struggle year after year often treat their organization like a hobby. They may set up occasional, haphazard, or scattershot fundraising efforts and become frustrated with the results. Non-profit does not mean no money. You need money to survive. People often make excuses: “the economy stinks” or “I can’t think of an easy fundraiser.” In these cases, eventually the founders get burned out and the

organization folds. But the real losers are the animals that are no longer being helped.

It doesn't have to be that way. Fundraising is not new and countless humane organizations have figured out ways to successfully raise money for the animals, no matter what economic indicators are doing. The reality is that even during the Great Depression, some people still had money and some businesses actually did quite well.

In my case, about eight years before I founded NAPRP, I was involved with a small, private, local humane society, first as a volunteer, then an employee, and finally as a member of the board of directors. As the head of public relations, I helped organize and produce fundraisers, dealt with media, and created countless designs and artwork.

Later I consulted with other groups somewhat informally. During that time, I kept seeing the same problems cropping up over and over again. I realized I could help more groups if I formed a national organization. Now the National Association of Pet Rescue Professionals offers tools and information to help rescue groups raise more money and save more lives. Naturally, successful fundraising is one of the things we discuss a lot.

When fundraising works, it's a whole lot of fun and incredibly satisfying. You can see your effort quickly produce tangible results for the animals. This book is designed to give you some of the basics on getting started with fundraising and then gives you 101 ideas for animal-related fundraisers. To find these ideas, I scoured magazines, news sites, and the Internet to locate the coolest ideas people have thought up to help raise money for the animals.

Among the fundraising ideas you'll find in this book:

- How one humane society laughed themselves all the way to \$43,000 with a fun comedy fundraiser.

- How working with restaurants can net big profits, like the shelter that told everyone to "Eat for Pete" (who is a very cute dog, by the way).
- How you can creatively ask for money using a simple letter-writing campaign instead of a bake sale, picnic, or dog walk. An SPCA made \$980 the first day they used this tip.
- How to use the power of "small change" to your advantage. A few pennies can turn into a lot of dough!
- How to use nothing more than card stock and your printer for a super-quick and easy fundraiser.
- And 95 more. Armed with these 101, you'll never struggle to think up another fundraising idea again!

The introduction to fundraising at the beginning of this book and the 101 fundraising ideas give you a lot of food for thought, but I encourage you to learn more. The more complex the fundraiser, the more research you should do and the farther ahead you should plan. Don't be afraid to check out a lot of books from the library or even contact other charitable groups for advice. With a bit of extra research and advance planning, you may be able to avoid mistakes and earn more money!

Keys to Successful Fundraising

Fundraising doesn't have to be difficult; the key to successful fundraising is to raise money from a broad base of people. Although I mentioned that it seems like many organizations are stuck on getting grants, grants are not a long-term solution. Many grants are tied to one-time projects, such as improvements to a facility. Obviously grants are fantastic, but for basic day-to-day expenses you need to get a fundraising program in place.

In addition to the obvious advantage of bringing in more money, your fundraising efforts also have some side benefits. When you connect with people, you begin to establish a base

of support for your organization—often more than financial—that you can draw upon for years to come. Donors may become members and often volunteers, as well. If there is a natural disaster or problem, your cadre of supporters will be the first people to come to your aid.

Don't underestimate the value of creating long-term relationships. In the "for-profit" business world, companies consider the "lifetime value" of a customer. The principles behind the lifetime value of a customer are actually quite simple and apply to connections in the non-profit world as well.

From a business standpoint, in order to calculate what a customer means to a business, time has to be included in the equation, because many customers will return. For example, suppose you own a hardware store. In 1999 a customer named Fred walks in and buys a \$29 widget. Six months later in 2000, he sees an ad for your store, comes back in and purchases a mega-widget for \$59. In 2001, he gets a postcard from you and buys a micro-widget for \$109. Sometime in 2002, he moves out of state and you don't hear from him again (i.e. he's no longer a customer). Fred buys a total of \$197 of merchandise from you over the course of three years. The average sale was \$65 (\$197 divided by 3). The key is that Fred's patronage is worth way more than that initial \$29 sale.

In much the same way, many novice fundraisers focus so much on "getting more donations" that they don't consider what a simple contact can mean to the donor relationship over time. Perhaps you hold a fundraiser and it doesn't seem to do very well. You only get \$100 in donations from 10 people. If you just grab the \$10 and move on, you've missed a huge opportunity. What if you also take the time to ask each donor if you may add him or her to your newsletter list? Those people who donated \$10 then receive a newsletter a week later asking people to sponsor a dog for \$25/month for a year. If even one of those \$10 donors signs up, you've now transformed that \$10 contact

into \$300. If you follow up at the end of the year and the donor renews, the \$10 that seemed like such a “failure” to begin with may have a tremendous “lifetime value” impact.

There’s an old saying in business that it’s always easier to sell to an existing customer. The same is true with donors. If you treat them well, past donors can be future donors.

In addition to helping you establish relationships, fundraising also gives you incredible opportunities for great publicity. Local media are dying for stories, so don’t be lax about sending out a press release. Not every day is a “big” news day and people love human-interest stories. Puppies, kittens, bunnies, and other critters make for great TV. All this publicity increases community awareness of your organization and introduces you to other people who may want to help.

A recent ZooToo.com survey showed that 80% of people don’t know where their local animal shelter is. Every community has animal lovers. It’s vital to tell them where you are and what you’re up to.

When you have fundraisers, you have an incredible opportunity to tell the media what you are doing. You have at least three (sometimes more) opportunities for publicity for everything you do:

1. **Before the event:** tell them what you are doing and when it’s happening.
2. **During the event:** get someone to cover it. Or tell a story about someone affected by the fundraiser. (“Fido got adopted *and* a new Nylabone; we’re thrilled!”)
3. **After the event:** do a press release describing the results and thanking everyone involved.

When it comes to the media, an “event” doesn’t necessarily mean something big at a particular time, like a dog walk. It can be something much simpler or smaller, such as a letter-writing