

Prospect Review and Appraisal

Prospect review and appraisal is the process of identifying prospective donors, estimating their giving potential, establishing suggested asking amounts, and assigning the “right” solicitor. The donor appraisal committee is charged with this responsibility, which begins by collecting names of prospects and gathering sufficient information with which to make reasonable judgments.

Collecting names

Those most likely to support the campaign are the current, active members of the congregation. Start compiling a list of prospects by using the church’s mailing list.

Former and inactive members of the church also should be considered as prospective donors to the campaign. Many members, especially retirees who have moved away, may still feel a close connection with the church. A recent campaign in Kansas secured its lead gift of \$100,000 from a former member living more than 1,000 miles from the church.

Neighbors, businesses, philanthropic individuals in the community, and some private foundations should be considered prospective donors to the campaign. A city directory is useful for collecting names and phone numbers of businesses and individuals near the church. Don’t forget to include any businesses with which the church does a substantial business. Annual reports of local foundations will indicate whether your project is eligible for funding. If your project addresses the needs of a broader constituency than the congregation, donors to similar projects should be listed on your prospect sheets.

Gathering information

The best source of information is the prospect’s giving history to the church, both in annual support and during any previous capital campaigns. Lists of donors to other community campaigns may suggest giving potential, especially for major gifts. Other factors, e.g., residence, occupation, club memberships, and type of automobile often are useful in assessing potential. For some campaigns, especially where gathering information is very difficult, it may be necessary to ask other church members-- generally the campaign executive committee-- to recommend prospects at different

giving levels.

In gathering data, the committee should consider that many individuals with substantial wealth often live a relatively modest lifestyle. Others may have a high annual income but a relatively low net worth. A person in the latter category would be a likely candidate for a large annual pledge while someone in the former category might be asked to make a one-time gift of property.

Setting the amount

When the committee has gathered sufficient information, it then estimates how much to ask each prospect as a campaign pledge. The asking amounts should correspond to the levels on the major gifts chart. Additionally, the list of designated gifts should be used to match specific gifts to individual donors.

The committee should assume the person is motivated to give and will be asked by the “right” person. It is important to consider ability, not perceived interest, when establishing the amount.

A typical session will last two to three hours, during which 80 to 100 prospects can be evaluated. The committee should spend more time on the major gift prospects and less time on the others. Each prospect is considered separately. The following questions can be used as a guide when considering each person or family:

- If properly motivated, what is the most this person could give?
- Has the person been generous in the past?
- In what church activities has he/she shown interest?
- What specific element of the campaign will be most appealing to him/her?
- Are there specific circumstances, e.g., divorce or business reversal, that should be considered?
- Based on ability and interest, what amount is possible?
- Who is the best person to solicit this person?

The committee should agree on the amount for each individual. The targeted amount and suggested solicitor then are written on the master prospect lists.

The suggested amounts must be sufficient to realize the campaign goal. In general, it takes three prospects at each giving level to realize one gift. In addition, the total amount asked must be at least three times the campaign goal. This is one of those cardinal rules of fund raising; failure to observe it risks the campaign’s success.

Don't be afraid to indicate high amounts. The amount should be realistic but also challenging. A gift isn't sacrificial unless the prospective donor has to think about it. Amounts that are "easy" for the major contributors won't establish a high pattern of giving for intermediate- and lower-level contributors to follow. As a practical matter, lower-level donors should be asked to consider a gift at least three times the individual's or family's pledge.

It is very common for the initial listing to fall short of the required amount. The committee then should reevaluate each amount, starting with the largest prospective gifts. This process continues until the target amount is reached.