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FIVE WAYS TO BRING INNOVATION TO YOUR ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

When was the last time you brought a little innovation to your annual campaign? Now might be a good time to raise the bar on campaign strategies, as more and more donors try to juggle their available gift-giving dollars with support for national emergencies, increased community need, and rising transportation and housing costs.

First, offer your donors a number of giving opportunities. Send out your direct-mail piece. Follow up with a phone call for those who don't respond promptly. Send a handwritten reminder. Schedule your newsletter and provide a donation envelope to coincide with the campaign. Promote your campaign and offer a "donate now" option on each page of your Web site. Send a viral e-mail. Announce your campaign and ways to donate in the press. Hold a fundraising special event to kick off the campaign. Plan small, intimate gatherings to raise funds in support of the campaign. Develop membership opportunities with benefits.

Second, make sure you have alternative methods of processing gifts. Build your infrastructure to receive and process online gifts, credit card donations, recurring gifts, in-kind donations, stock gifts, real property and more. Take pledges and send invoice reminders. Make it easy for your donors to give.

Third, keep your campaign mission driven. Tell your clients' stories. Relate the before-and-after tale. Use testimonials, use pictures, use video. Describe the impact your program is making on clients' lives and in your community.

Fourth, use your fundraising appeals to educate the community about your programs and build awareness about the social issues you address. Aside from raising much-needed funds for general operations, the annual campaign is a wonderful opportunity to connect to your greater community and re-connect with donors and volunteers. Write letters to the editor, be a guest on a local radio or cable show, send out PSAs, make presentations at local service clubs and the chamber of commerce. Nurture your donors and volunteers with compelling updates and announce your accomplishments and successes. Make them be proud to be involved with you.

Lastly (and most important in order to ensure the next gift), don't forget to acknowledge your donors with a prompt thank you. Be sure to thank them in a number of ways, depending on the size of their gift: form letter; handwritten thank you; listing in the next newsletter or annual report; phone call; public recognition; etc.

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