



GATHERING PROSPECTIVE INDIVIDUAL DONORS;

A Friendly Fundraiser for Nonprofits

Relative to other fundraising techniques, the *informal gathering* is probably the most enjoyable both for the persons being asked to contribute and for the personnel doing the asking. As Terry Axelrod, founder and CEO of Raising More Money, Inc., has shown, this is a high energy technique that effectively conveys the “emotional hook” of your vital mission.

The gathering usually takes the form of an informal get-together at someone’s home. The guests include your friends, co-workers, business contacts, people who attend services at your house of worship, and local politicians. Modest refreshments are served. Guests enter and are made to feel at home. They meet one another and converse as if at a party or reception.

Unlike a party, the gathering is tightly scripted. At a certain moment, the host asks for the guests’ attention and a short program is presented. The program is designed to be emotionally-charged, informative and, above all, brief. At the end of the program, pledge cards are distributed. The guests are invited to fill out the pledge cards, some of which are collected on the spot, and others as the guests depart.

The event lasts approximately 90 minutes. People leave in good spirits. They made new contacts, had a drink, had some pastry and snacks, and learned more about an initiative they were interested in. No one feels that the fundraiser has intruded on too much of their time.

We recommend this method of fundraising for two reasons: First, it is very cost-effective. As the host makes available his or her living room, you don’t have to pay for space, and the costs of invitations and refreshments are minimal. At the same time, a significant amount of money can be raised. The direct expenses are usually under \$200, and the proceeds typically average \$6,500. An informal gathering recently staged for another LAPA client generated pledges of \$24,000.

LAPA organizes informal gatherings for our clients in the following way:

1. We talk with certain people connected with the program to see if they might be interested in hosting the event.
2. When a host is identified and a date set, LAPA furnishes invitations. The host is asked to cover the cost of snacks and drinks, and to provide a list of friends, acquaintances, and contacts who might be interested in the agency and its programs. Certain other people, such as program volunteers and Board members, may also be asked to provide lists. Local business leaders may be added to the list. LAPA emphasizes addressing the invitations to two people: a husband and wife, a person and his/her significant other. Invitees are 60% more likely to attend if they are invited to bring someone they know.

3. To assure the success of the event, persons who compiled lists will be asked to call the people on their lists and express the hope that they will attend. LAPA provides talking points to make these essential phone calls easy.

4. The most effective gatherings are those where persons directly involved in or served by the program attend the gathering to give personal testimonials. We help our clients identify the people who can most effectively speak about what the program means to them.

5. The basic outline of the event is as follows:

- One hour for hors d'oeuvres and drinks (alcohol is at the discretion of the host). Guests should be greeted at the door. Agency staff and LAPA personnel perform sign-in functions and distribute name tags.
- 2 – 5 Minute Welcome Speech by the Host/Hostess (The host will be prepped by Laurence Pagnoni and will be given speaking points.)
- 2 – 5 Minute Welcome Speech by the Executive Director of the agency, speaking about the organization's history and mission.
- 5 Minute Testimonials by program clients and/or volunteers.
- 5 Minute Inspirational Talk – “How You Can Be Involved”—presented by Laurence Pagnoni. Laurence will explain the “units of service” costs of your program, which will be calculated prior to the event.
- Host – Thank You – The host will thank the guests for coming and announce that Laurence and the Program Director or Executive Director will be available to personally answer questions throughout the evening. The host should invite people to stay for more refreshments and chat.
- One half-hour – Wrap-up. Pledge cards are distributed throughout the crowd and collected as guests exit. Informational packets are distributed to departing guests.