

Friends Forward



Special Issue—Summer 2012
Fundraising



Fundraising: It's All About Relationships

“**E**verything I know about fundraising I learned from the Peanuts Gang,” blogged Daniel Neel, president of The Fundraising Resource Group. You have to try some new tactics if you want to actually kick the football this year, Neel suggests. You have to develop a plan and a strategy, not just hope you’ll see the Great Pumpkin. You have to build relationships that will keep donors coming back.

Develop a fundraising plan.

This plan should include as many strategies to raise money as possible—online, email and “snail” mail, special events, innovative projects, bequests and endowments, sales and grants. Tips and examples of all of these are included in this special issue of *Friends Forward*.

Brainstorm ways to reach more potential donors.

Consider individuals as well as businesses (local and national), other nonprofit organizations that may be willing to partner with you, and foundations.

Make a compelling call to action.

Friends groups support some of the most beautiful, environmentally sensitive and ecologically valuable lands and habitats in the entire country. Can you express that in a concise, compelling and inspirational pitch? Create both a sense of urgency and a lasting



A pair of Clark's grebes display their courtship ritual.

impression, advises fundraising consultant George Ivey in a National Environmental Education Foundation [webinar](#).

Acknowledge all gifts promptly.

Keep donors updated throughout the year. Let them know that their money is being used effectively and in accordance with their expectations.

Be willing to try a new approach.

When the bottom fell out of the economy in 2008, [Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife](#)

[Refuge](#), MN, had to switch gears quickly on capital campaign plans. Friends president Sue Hix tells the story on page 4.

Embrace online fundraising.

For many Friends groups, the newest approach may be online. Friends groups are using Facebook and Twitter, Flickr and electronic newsletters. But are you making the most of opportunities to raise money online? Network for Good has some tips on page 11.

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Fundraising Letters and Email Go Hand-in-Hand

By Kendall Slee

With rising postage rates and the popularity of email, is a mailed fundraising appeal really necessary?

Fundraising experts say a paper letter is still an effective way to get the attention of people with overflowing email accounts, but use it wisely:

- Personalize letters as much as possible, starting with a prospective donor's name, rather than a generic appeal. Add other details if possible—such as appreciation for attending an event, or discussing part of your organization's work in which the prospect is involved or has expressed interest.
- If you have a donor or prospective donor's email and mailing address, use a dual-pronged approach to communication. A recent study by nonprofit service provider **Convio** found that retention rates for "traditional" donors who give by mail are higher if they are also engaged online. Email can bolster mailed solicitations with a brief follow-up reminder. Provide links to online giving methods in emailed funding requests, advises nonprofit fundraising **blogger** Karen Zapp.
- Letters can go into greater detail and depth than email, ending with a summary "P.S." message. Keep email messages brief—no more than 300 words.

Make sure that not all of your communications to donors are funding requests, Zapp advises. "Thank you notes, news releases, invitations to events or volunteer opportunities help build the

relationship and keep readers interested and involved," she writes. Email is great for keeping donors posted on how they are helping your organization accomplish great things, and about opportunities for them to be involved. It is less expensive and often more timely than print newsletters.

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, FL, sends out an email newsletter packed with photos of recent events, upcoming activities and refuge news. The newsletter is optional for members and nonmembers alike. Subscriptions are available from the organization's Web site or by signing up at the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge visitor center.

When a donation arrives, take the opportunity to thank the donor in a personal way. Bergie Vertesch, director of the "Ding" Darling

Wildlife Society, keeps an eye out for new contributors or those who have significantly increased their giving. "I immediately call them with a thank you," she says. Even if she just leaves a voice mail, she's heard from contributors that they really appreciate the personal acknowledgement.

"When you are competing with hundreds of nonprofits in your area, you've got to stand out from the rest," says Vertesch. "You can stand out by personalizing letters, hand writing notes or making phone calls. The donors remember that you went above and beyond to thank them."

Kendall Slee is a freelance journalist and frequent contributor to National Wildlife Refuge System publications. 



Barrett Elementary School

Fundraising experts recommend personalized appeals by mail, like these letters from Barrett Elementary School in Virginia seeking information from individual national wildlife refuges.

Raising Money with Just the Right Event



The annual Wild Goose Chase attracted 775 bikers in 2011 and raised more than \$40,000 for the Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, MD.

Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island raises \$3,000 with a small wine tasting at the Westerly Yacht Club every June. Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges celebrates National Wildlife Refuge Week with a Wild Things Festival, bringing in 4,500 people and more than \$5,500 in a single day. Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, MD, nets nearly \$40,000 each year from a Wild Goose Chase bicycle ride.

Carefully planned special events can raise money even as they attract potential volunteers and Friends members, build relationships with the local business community and engage and educate visitors. A few tips:

- Agree on the event's primary purpose from the outset: Are you planning to fund all or most of your activities for the year from the proceeds of a single event or is the event intended to fund one project, exhibit or other refuge need?

- Make sure the amount of money you are likely to raise is commensurate with the amount of effort required to stage the event.
- Does your Friends group have the capacity to pull off the event—organizers, volunteers, in-kind contributions?
- Tailor your marketing to your target audience: families who could visit repeatedly, diverse members of the community who could make the refuge a part of their lives, or donors who support your cause.
- Identify an event chair who is excited about doing the job.

Wild Things Festival

Planning for the October Wild Things Festival, the principal annual fundraiser for the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, begins in January. That includes development

of a detailed timeline of tasks for each month. Two-thirds of the profit from the festival, which charges no admission, comes from sale of food and beverages; the remainder comes from sponsors. Sponsor levels are \$500, \$750, \$1,000 and \$5,000 in addition to in-kind donations. Each sponsor's logo is included in 10,000 fliers distributed to households as an insert in the local paper. A \$5,000 sponsor receives a designated tent with refreshments, private visitor center and canoe tours and lunch for 30 provided by the Friends at some future date.

Most of the sponsors are Friends members. Many support other refuge events. Five Guys Burgers and Fries was among several sponsors of the food booth but all the profit from food sales went to the Friends. Home Depot donated 500 bird house kits and volunteers to oversee construction by families and children.

The 14th Wild Things Festival in 2011 included 37 conservation-related guest exhibitors (all donated their time), a tent filled with hands-on activities for kids, canoe and pontoon boat tours, hayride shuttles, a Youth Wildlife Art Show, a casting pond and a fire crew demonstration that lets kids spray targets with the fire hose. The Friends group pays musicians; refuge staff arrange for tents and contacted many of the exhibitors.

Wine Tasting

Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island charges \$25 for a Micro Brew and Wine Tasting event, which attracts about 130 people who also participate in a silent auction. A 50-50 raffle charges \$5 per ticket, with half of the proceeds

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We Can Do This: Raising Money Means Staying Flexible

By Sue Hix

The Friends Forward Fall 2008 told the story of Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, MN, which began planning a \$6 million capital campaign for a new visitor center. “We know there will be ups and downs,” said Friends president Sue Hix at the time, “but we are convinced we can do this.” It is now 2012. There is no visitor center and no capital campaign, but Hix and the Friends of Sherburne remain persistent, optimistic and flexible.

The bottom fell out of the economy just as we were thinking about starting our capital campaign in late 2008. We had hoped that we might get American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding for our visitor center, but that did not materialize. Then a very negative

cartoon appeared in a local paper, featuring “Foreclosed” and “For Sale” signs on houses and a refuge sign in the background, with one guy saying to another, “And I hear they are getting \$6 million for a refuge visitor center.” That squashed the last hope for a capital campaign.

So instead, we directed our efforts to publicizing the refuge. With funding from a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, we produced two new glossy brochures—one promoting the concept of a “Discovery Center Without Walls” and another, called “Nature’s Calendar at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge,” with month-by-month phenology notes about what a visitor can expect to see at the refuge.

We joined six chambers of commerce. We encouraged schools and community groups to use the refuge as an outdoor classroom and with

the help of refuge staff, we offered free “outdoor classroom” workshops for teachers and volunteers. We also began dedicating part of our budget to pay for buses to bring students to the refuge. We participated in countless expos and fairs, even spending about \$500 for a booth at the huge Midwest Mountaineering Spring Outdoor Adventure Expo in Minneapolis. We introduced the refuge as a birding/hiking/hunting/outdoor photography destination only an hour’s drive from the Twin Cities to about 850 people during the two-day event.

In mid-2010 we signed an agreement with the Initiative Foundation, a foundation serving 14 counties in central Minnesota, to establish endowment and fundraising accounts. For a very reasonable fee (\$250 annual minimum), the Initiative Foundation (IF) maintains donation records and prepares gift acknowledgements for our Friends’ president to sign and mail. IF also prepares all the required reports and keeps our treasurer in the loop. The IF Investment Committee makes investment decisions for our fund, which is pooled with millions of dollars from other funds also managed by the IF Committee. This is an all-around good deal for an all-volunteer organization like ours.

Funds for the Future

With a somewhat changed economy in 2011-2012 we raised more than \$20,000 in less than a year, the minimum required to draw annual grants from the proceeds from the endowment fund. Donors included a core group who pledged \$10,000 and challenged the rest of the



Christopher J. Franklin

The Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, MN, have been persistent, optimistic and flexible in fundraising.

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Raising the Big Bucks

Capital campaigns can be daunting, but large and small Friends organizations have met the challenge. Developing a fundraising plan, stating the case for your fundraising goal and identifying initial donors are key steps.

Friends of Maine Seabird Islands used a \$5,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to develop a strategy to raise \$1 million over five years. The grant paid for a book of conceptual sketches for each space in the new Rockland Visitor Center. The sketches will be shared with potential donors, who will be asked to consider funding additional rooms or areas, such as an outdoor playground with a simulated island. With the help of a “Hard Hat Gala,” the Friends collected enough funds to finish one classroom and an art gallery.

Stephanie Martin is a board member recently hired part-time by the Friends to raise funds and help develop the visitor center. Before any donations are requested for such a



Maine Seabird Islands

Friends of Maine Seabird Islands is seeking donors eager to fund specific sections of the new refuge visitor center, including this simulated island.

major undertaking, says Martin, it's important for “Friends and refuge staff to be on the same page about

what you want people to take away from their visit to the refuge ... The

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We Can Do This: Raising Money Means Staying Flexible —Continued from page 4


organization to finish the job. A letter campaign to about 50 long-time supporters plus promotion in our quarterly newsletter helped us reach our goal. Starting in 2012, we will be able to withdraw 5 percent of the fund balance annually for environmental education, refuge events and interpretive activities.

Additionally, we recently received a National Environmental Education Foundation Every Day Grant to help develop annual giving as part of our organizational culture and increase our overall fundraising capacity. With current economic conditions,

it seems unlikely that we'll get funding for our entire visitor center very soon, so we are refocusing our efforts (again!) on funding an outdoor classroom with utilities and restrooms. The refuge has applied for two grants for this facility and the Friends pledged a minimum of \$10,000 as a match for one grant.

We organize our online giving through giveMN.org, which works with Razoo.com. We have our own page where we highlight the value of different donation levels. GiveMN.org heavily promoted a “Give to the Max Day” in 2011 and we raised \$670

with very little work. This Web site is a huge benefit, and the processing rate is only about 3 percent. We also have a “widget” embedded on our Friends homepage for online donations through GiveMN.org. And it's available 24/7 for purchasing or renewing memberships as well as making donations.

Sue Hix is president of the Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. 

Fundraising: It's All About Relationships —Continued from page 1

Online fundraising didn't exist when Beverly Heinze-Lacey wrote *Building Your Nest Egg: An Introduction to Raising Funds for National Wildlife Refuge Support Groups* in 2000. But her analogy to a bird's nest remains apt. Birds—and Friends—must have a plan with an expected outcome, use a variety of intertwined materials to make a solid structure, build relationships and nurture the result. 🦋



The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance in Detroit raises \$60,000 by sailing the Detroit River to a Canadian island for an evening of dining, browsing and buying. (next page)

Raising Money with Just the Right Event —Continued from page 3

going to the winning ticket and half to the Friends.

A local liquor store arranges vendors for the wine tasting at no cost to the Friends. A local food store provides fancy hors d'oeuvres at cost. And there is cachet in the location, says event organizer Ed Morschauser—the Westerly Yacht Club donates the space but operates a cash bar during the event. The one possible change this year? “We are considering liability insurance for the first time because people are drinking,” says Morschauser.

Bike Riding

The annual Wild Goose Chase, a bicycle weekend for women, attracted 775 bikers in 2011 and raised more than \$40,000 for the Friends of Blackwater National

Wildlife Refuge, MD. Virtually all the money is raised from the \$60 registration fee, although this year for the first time, registrants will have the option of making a specific donation to the Friends. Started as a one-day event five years ago by Georgena Terry of Terry Precision Cycling in New York, the event now includes kayak rentals, a ranger-led tour of the refuge's Wildlife Drive and test-rides on Terry bicycles.

Terry herself is an active member of the Friends of Montezuma Refuge, NY, but became a passionate supporter of Blackwater Refuge during family visits to Maryland. “Picture this,” says the event Web site, “flat roads, no-to-low traffic and pristine salt marshes offering protection for migratory waterfowl on the Chesapeake Bay.”

The bike route is carefully mapped to avoid disturbing waterfowl; parking and other activities are set up in a neighboring high school parking lot. Proceeds have been used for boardwalks, spotting scopes and wetland enhancement. The 2012 Wild Goose Chase (October 13-14; register at Active.com) will fund new exhibits in the renovated visitor center.

Terry's advice for Friends considering such an event:

- The organizers themselves should be avid cyclists.
- Develop community support, plenty of volunteers and synergy between Friends and refuge staff.
- Start small and build it up! 🦋

Selling for Nature

By Kendall Slee

On a May evening, more than 300 people boarded a touring ship near Detroit and a scattering of smaller American and Canadian vessels to meet at a lodge on a Canadian island in the Detroit River. There they dined, browsed through artwork, antiques, hunting gear and other goods and services at a silent auction, and bid on a few big-ticket items during a brief live auction. When the ship departed that evening, the event had raised about \$60,000 to support the **International Wildlife Refuge Alliance**.

Not bad, for one evening. But behind this success were months of preparation plus years of building relationships and establishing the event's reputation among participants and sponsors.

Since the event began in 2006, the annual banquet has grown, corporate sponsors have signed on. Now a corporate sponsor provides the venue, the touring vessel and the dinner, allowing the Alliance to keep more net revenues. Ducks Unlimited members help solicit donations for the silent auction and promote the event.

Alliance chair Richard Micka's top advice to organizations planning similar events is to pay strict attention to state laws on auctions, raffles and sales tax, and to hire a certified public accountant to help. (The Alliance also pays for an annual external audit.) Also, plan events at least nine months in advance, he advises. "We start planning for the next one the week after the banquet," he says.

Auctions and Shops

Friends of Patuxent in Maryland sells space rather than items at its



Artists pay \$300 per booth to sell their work at the Friends of Patuxent art show in Maryland.

annual art show at the Patuxent Research Refuge's National Wildlife Visitor Center. Artists pay \$300 per booth to sell their works. This year booth sales and sponsorships netted about \$5,000.

While the group traditionally held a silent auction at the art show, in 2011 it opted for a holiday bazaar to sell new and gently used items—most donated by Friends members. While the bazaar raised less than the silent auction—\$1,500 as compared with more than \$3,000—it was considerably less work because it didn't require soliciting business donations, said Friends of Patuxent chair Emmalyn Holdridge.

The group also operates a gift shop/bookstore in the visitor center. The store is staffed at least 28 hours a week by volunteers and managed by a part-time employee. "It's a big commitment, and most of the volunteers we have are very dedicated and come one day a week," Holdridge says. "If they can't come, the bookstore doesn't open, so you really need reliable volunteers." Paying an employee cuts into net

revenues but keeps the accounting and inventory operating smoothly, Holdridge says. The store raises \$5,000-\$10,000 in net revenues a year.

Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges President Rick Shields got a crash course in retail when he volunteered to manage the organization's new gift shop in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge visitor center in South Carolina in 2010. For new stores, Shields advises stocking just a few of each item until sales patterns become clear, and to carry place-branded items. Nature shirts with refuge logos on the arm are top sellers.

Beyond revenues, Shields sees the store as an outreach tool for the refuge and Friends group. "People will come in, ask questions and browse. It's a great way to start a conversation."

Kendall Slee is a freelance journalist and frequent contributor to National Wildlife Refuge System publications. 

Where There's a Will, There's a Way to Raise Money

By Leigh Ann Vradenburg

There's no time like the present for Friends to develop a long-term fundraising strategy that includes planned giving, from simple bequests and beneficiary designations to gift annuities and charitable trusts.

The National Committee on Planned Giving reports that almost 90 percent of planned gifts come as bequests from an individual's will. A basic program requires minimal setup and maintenance to capitalize on this lion's share of planned gifts. Bequests may be directed to your general fund or designated for specific projects or an endowment. A donor may also choose your Friends group as a beneficiary of an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or insurance policy.

Planned giving is often an opportunity for people to leave a legacy. Donors are likely to be

less interested in leaving funds for operating expenses than to a building fund or an endowment that could sustain environmental education, trails, scholarships or visitor center exhibits. For example, the **Friends of the Bosque** and the Learn Family formed the Emerson Learn Bus Scholarship Endowment in memory of an influential past president. This fund, which provides stipends for schools to visit the refuge, is a lasting testament to Emerson's passion for connecting children to the refuge. The Friends Web site includes a separate "donate" button for others who might wish to add to the endowment.

Growing Your Program

When you are ready to attract and manage more complex giving options, your board may want to consider annuities that pay out over a period of time. The donor contributes money and the group agrees to pay that donor an annual income for life. This is riskier

than a simple bequest program. Gift-annuity contributions must be invested; regular tax reports must be provided to donors. A Friends group can manage a gift annuity program independently or hire a financial services provider. Gift annuities require a contract between the Friends group and the donor; charitable remainder trusts require establishment of a legal trust.

If your board is willing to accept non-cash gifts, you will need to develop policy and protocols regarding the types of gifts you accept, such as stock or real estate. Consider costs for transportation, storage, selling/marketing, property taxes, maintenance/repairs—and the item's usefulness and salability.

Marketing Your Program

When you develop marketing materials for a planned giving program, refer to simple, yet well-designed examples online, such as **The Nature Conservancy**. Have your program reviewed by a financial professional, but don't feel that you have to be an expert. Individuals interested in using such gifting tools should be encouraged to consult their own financial advisor.

Focus on "selling" your group and your program: demonstrate your relevance, staying power and positive impact on the refuge; describe any benefits to planned givers, such as name recognition, inclusion in a "legacy club" with special newsletters and invitations to exclusive events; and connect their objectives for giving with the long-term needs and viability of the refuge.

Add notes about planned giving



Friends of the Bosque

Friends of the Bosque raised funds to complete the purchase of Chupadera Peak for donation to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM.

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Embrace Online Fundraising for Long-Term Success

By Caryn Stein

Studies have repeatedly proven that engaging donors through multiple fundraising channels—online and off—yields the best results, with donors giving more, more often. In this era of the citizen activist and the wired fundraiser, donors expect a convenient, personalized and interactive experience with your organization.

Online fundraising also saves time and money. Email is vastly less expensive than offline outreach, and online donations are far more efficient than processing checks. Another bonus: membership levels and recurring gifts are easier for you—and your donors—to manage.

Not sure where to begin? The good news is that you don't have to be an online expert overnight. In fact, it's recommended that you start small and try a few manageable things at a time to effectively measure and assess their impact on your organization.

Coordinate Your Efforts

- If you have an event or giving campaign, make sure people are able to donate from your Web site. Add an event listing to your Friends Facebook page.
- Include your online information in your offline efforts—add your Web site address to all printed materials and encourage offline donors to sign up for email updates.

Accept Online Donations

- Make sure you can accept online donations through a secure, branded giving page



Kilauea Point Natural History Association was a winner in an online Hampton Hotels Save-A-Landmark contest in 2011. Read more in Friends Forward Spring 2011.

like those from Network for Good, CrowdRise, Razoo.com or Causes.com. Services like these will do most of the technical heavy lifting for you.

- Once you can accept online donations, don't forget to add a large, colorful "Donate" button in a prominent location on your home page. It may sound absurd, but many supporters actually assume you don't need their donations if they don't see an easy way to give!
- Donation widgets and charity badges are icons, videos or photos that can be embedded on your Web site or blog, encouraging people to donate, share information about your Friends group or attend a fundraising event. Your Web site may already have Facebook and Twitter icons,

for example. Here's how to build a charity badge.

Personalize Your Strategy

- Instead of simply asking for donations, tie fundraising amounts to specific impacts—\$10 plants a tree, \$50 helps band three ducks, etc. Invite volunteers to ask friends or businesses to pledge \$1 for every invasive plant that is removed.
- Use specific examples in your outreach and fundraising appeals. Think "Provide Kayla with the beauty of nature for years to come" or "You saved this heron from pollution" vs. "Thousands of acres of wetlands are in jeopardy."

Ask for Help

- Take advantage of free training and advice on online fundraising best practices as well as webinars and blogs from Network for Good, NTEEN.org, SocialBrite and the National Environmental Education Foundation.
- Many consultants and students offer pro bono services and advice for nonprofits. Another option: Sparked.com is a "microvolunteering" network that matches up volunteers with organizations needing help with online tasks and services.

Caryn Stein is content strategist for Network for Good, which provides online fundraising services and training specifically designed for nonprofits. Visit the Network for Good learning center for more tips on online fundraising and nonprofit marketing.

Grants Galore: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

By Teal Edelen

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation recognizes the important role refuge Friends organizations play in building critical community support for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System. NFWF provides competitive seed grants (\$1,500 - \$5,000) for creative and innovative proposals in three categories.

Many Friends groups were initiated with the help of a **start-up grant** through NFWF. Funds provide formative and/or initial operational support for such things as membership drives, tuition for non-profit training programs, brochure and newsletter development, logo design, office equipment, or consultant fees for planning a mission and strategic plan.

Once initiated, Friends organizations must sustain themselves. To address this need, NFWF offers **capacity-building grants** to existing refuge Friends organizations. Capacity-building refers to projects that enhance the abilities of Friends organizations while allowing them to achieve measurable and sustainable results. Projects may include outreach, business plan development or other strategic planning, and membership or board/leadership development. The grant could pay for training, development of exhibits or nature/book store start-up.

The third and final category of Friends grants are **project specific**. Examples include conservation education programs for local schools, communities, and private



The new **Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp** received a 2012 NFWF start-up grant to develop a website and promote the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp. This year's winning image of a wood duck was painted by Joseph Hautman.

landowners; habitat restoration projects; building an observation tower; providing interpretive materials and programs; creating watchable wildlife programs.

Funding for the grants is provided through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Since 1998, the Friends grant program has provided 372 awards totaling over \$1.6 million. While matching contributions are not required, over \$990,000 has been contributed toward these projects, significantly leveraging the limited investment of federal seed funding.

There are typically two application rounds each year, with deadlines in early April and early September. Members of the review team meet to

rank proposals, and final decisions are announced in mid-June and mid-November. Projects typically last 12 to 18 months.

NFWF coordinates other grant programs open to all nonprofit organizations; search under "Grant Programs" at nfwf.org.

Teal Edelen is manager, Central Partnership Office, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. 🦋

Grants: Paying Attention to What is Out There

“Keep turning rocks over,” says Russ Roseberry, past president of Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, WA, always on the prowl for appropriate grants

- Use connections in your community. Ask friends in the nonprofit community about foundations they know. Community Foundations are a good place to start
- Approach businesses for small grants of \$2,000 - \$5,000 and ask if the business has a foundation. Banks at both the national and local level often have foundations.
- Search for grants from state government and national conservation organizations. “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society recently received \$18,350 from the Sea Turtle Conservancy to purchase educational materials about endangered sea turtles, including life-sized replicas of a loggerhead hatchling and adult. Chincoteague Natural History Association received funds to help restore the Assateague Lighthouse from the Virginia Department of Transportation because the lighthouse is still


an active navigation aid (see “Raising the Big Bucks,” page 5)

- Read *Big Gifts for Small Groups* by professional fundraiser Andy Robinson—a short read with valuable ideas, says Roseberry.
- Write boilerplate copy about your Friends group that can be used every time you prepare a grant proposal—visitation to your refuge, number of student visits, details of the programs you have organized, the state of your group’s finances.
- If you find a foundation that invites groups to apply for grants, call the grants administrator to find out how you can be invited.
- When you have identified a possible grant source, look at the actual projects or organizations that have been funded.
- Seek grants for projects that are innovative and promising rather than operating expenses—but you must also show how you plan to sustain the project after the initial funding runs out.
- Pay attention to details—meet the deadline, answer all the questions, don’t exceed the page



Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, WA, appeals to national and local businesses and foundations to help fund environmental education programs on the refuge.

limit, make sure your proposal is crisp, succinct and powerful.


- Consider a subscription to The Foundation Center. Its Foundation Directory has databases on 100,000 foundations, corporate donors and grantmaking public charities. Monthly and yearly subscriptions area available. The Foundation Center also offers free reports, search tools and tutorials, both online and in its offices in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, New York and Cleveland. 

Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way to Raise Money —Continued from page 8

to member correspondence, newsletters, public outreach events, Web site and visitor center. Upon request, provide a copy of your 501(c)(3) letter, indicating where funds will be directed and suggesting wording for a bequest. Maintain a permanent file of planned giving correspondence—you are forming long-term relationships.

Not every donor will be a Friends member. More importantly, not every planned giver is readily identifiable as a wealthy philanthropist. Stewardship of your donors and members is critical: that \$15/year senior member may turn into a \$43,000 bequest (ours did!). This donor had no family when she died but felt the refuge had made enough of an impact to include us in her will.

You never know who your big donors will be, so let everyone know that their support matters.

Leigh Ann Vradenburg is executive director of Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM. 

Raising the Big Bucks —Continued from page 5

Rockland Visitor Center is in a town away from the refuge, so we must devise innovative ways to connect people to our islands.” And then the Friends must connect with donors.

Engaging Big Donors

Metropolitan Group, consultants for social change organizations, uses a **fundraising pyramid** (pdf 64 kb) to visualize a campaign. Four or five prospective donors must be identified for each one who will actually give, especially at the highest levels. Major campaigns generally require asking some people for very large gifts—whether board members or their friends and contacts. Big donors could also be community development or conservation organizations, foundations, and local and national businesses or corporations.

It is also advisable to raise a significant amount of money before the campaign is announced publicly. This “quiet phase allows you to test donors’ receptiveness to the idea of the campaign, learn what questions they have, train your volunteers and get some donors who may help you reach others,” explained Kim Klein in the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*.

Appealing to Small Donors

Engaging donors at more affordable levels may include extended pledge periods of a year or more (giving \$10 to \$50 a month for example), opportunities for naming bricks, tiles or murals, appeals to youth



Chincoteague Natural History Association used broken glass from the Assateague Lighthouse to create 1,000 sun catcher medallions, each selling for \$50.

(Pennies for the Refuge) or even giving donors a piece of history, as the **Chincoteague Natural History Association (CNHA)** is doing. The Association is raising \$1.5 million to restore the Assateague Lighthouse on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and create a maintenance endowment. Work is proceeding as funds are being raised. The largest single source of funding is visitor admissions. Because the lighthouse is still an active aid to navigation, CNHA also won two grants from the Virginia Department of Transportation, one for \$465,000.

The most creative fundraising tool, says CNHA executive director Beth Hanback, is the sale of lighthouse medallions. After old glass was removed from the lighthouse’s lantern room, intact panes were preserved. Broken panes were crushed and taken to artisans in Jamestown, VA, who created medallions imprinted with the lighthouse and the year of its construction in 1867. One thousand medallions, each with a velvet bag and a certificate of authenticity, are being sold for \$50 each, with all proceeds going to the restoration fund. “We are within sight of our goal,” says Hanback, “by taking one bite at a time.”

FriendsForward

Address editorial inquiries about this issue to:

Karen Leggett
USFWS-NWRS
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 632
Arlington, VA 22203
703-358-2375
Karen_Leggett@fws.gov

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