



Wise Women's Favorite Fundraising Strategies

On September 11, 2003, NCCADV and the Rural Women's Caucus facilitated a meeting of executive directors of domestic violence programs who have had success with raising unrestricted funding from their local communities. Present at the meeting were: Mary Beth Loucks-Sorrell and April Burgess-Johnson, NCCADV; Kim Gauss, Wesley Shelter; Pat Youngblood, Albemarle Hopeline; Amy Holloway, Orange County Family Violence Prevention Center; Lynn Weller, Chatham County Family Violence and Rape Crisis; Carla Midkiff-Frost, NCCADV Rural Caucus; Mary Ann Lama, Domestic Violence Shelter and Services in Wilmington. Three other directors who have been successful with raising local funds were contacted individually and agreed to provide information about their successes. They are: Natalie Simpson, Turning Point of Union County; Lynn Bryant, Outer Banks Hotline and Mary Margaret Flynn, CVAN Women's Program. Details of the ideas generated by these wise women are outlined below.

Fundraising Events

Events are the most common method programs use for raising funds. Events will vary from county to county, depending on the culture of each community. Some successful events were outlined at the meeting. Each of the people present stressed the importance of having a "signature event," something that is well-liked and expected by your community each year. When an event is repeated, people in the community learn to plan for and expect it. Programs also have the benefit of learning from mistakes and successes each year. Generally, events will become more successful over time.

Albemarle Hopeline sponsors an event each year known as "Reno Night." It is an event sponsored by their board of directors that includes an array of casino-type games, a "high-roller" table, a silent auction and light food. Winners throughout the evening receive slips with winning totals on them. The slips are cashed in at the end of the night for tickets used to win prizes which were previously donated. A disc jockey is used to keep activities moving. Admission tickets are sold in advance, and admittance is by invitation only. The event costs between \$4-5,000 to put together. Primary expenses are food, payment to the gaming company, decorations, disc jockey and printing. The board works for a few months to put the event together. Last year, they made a \$7,000 profit after all expenses were paid. They will host the event again this year, and expect to double their profits. Key to their success is the ability to secure space on federally owned land (because NC gaming laws prohibit gambling on non-federal property) and locating a gaming company that sets up and handles all aspects of the gambling. At the event, they have a "spectator" area with tables and chairs for those who simply want to eat and watch, as well as a talented DJ, who is able to "float and promote." They also create a solid list of potential attendees, enabling them to sell out their tickets in advance. Also in advance of the event, they ensure their success by letting people know how much fun they could have regardless of whether or not they gamble and secure a few very appealing donations for the silent auction.

Each year the Wesley Shelter sponsors a "Bridesmaid's Ball." The event is a tongue-in-cheek semi-formal event. Attendees are asked to wear bridesmaid's dresses from previous weddings. The event features a band, dancing and an open bar. Contests and games are offered throughout the evening, with

prizes for the tackiest dress, most members of the same wedding party in attendance, etc. Other fundraising events such as a silent auction occur during the ball. The event is underwritten by donors and local businesses, so all up front costs were taken care of in advance. To make the evening safer and more enjoyable, they worked with a local YMCA, who sponsored a lock-in for children so that their parents could attend the ball. In addition, a local limousine company donated free rides to attendees. The event was extensively advertised in the local paper, and through individual invitations. Those receiving invitations were asked to RSVP, and each RSVP card contained a line asking those who could not attend the event to make a donation instead. The first ball was attended by 300 people, who were charged \$100 per couple to raise a net profit of \$15,000. The second ball raised \$25,000.

Surry Women's Shelter sponsored a low-tech fundraiser on a nice Saturday afternoon. Borrowing an idea from the Shriners, supporters of the program donned orange vests and stood at busy intersections with buckets to solicit donations. The project required no setup time and had no up front costs. They raised \$1,500 in a day.

For 11 years, Domestic Violence Shelter and Services has held a Fashion Show and Auction. In order to reach the widest possible audience, the event is held twice on the same day, once during lunch and once at dinner. Planning begins at least 8 months in advance. This year's event was titled "Courageous Hearts." The show is widely advertised, and advance invitations are sent out and tickets are sold through the organization's newsletter. Admission is \$25 for the luncheon show and \$35 for the dinner show. Local television stations sponsor the event, and local TV celebrities will wear the show items in advance to market the event. Celebrities also model the clothes during the show. All fashions that are modeled are taken from the organization's "Vintage Values" thrift stores. In addition to the fashion show the event features a silent auction and art sale, as well as a meal. Local restaurants donate the food. Sponsorships are solicited for the event in order raise money up front and to cover up-front costs, including space rental, decorations, advertising and printing. Much of the proceeds for the show are raised in advance through the sponsorships. Show programs are printed, and sponsors are given advertising space. Potential sponsors are offered the opportunity to participate at the following levels:

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| Title Sponsor | \$7,500+ |
| Grand Benefactor | \$5,000-\$7,499 |
| Benefactor | \$3,000-\$4,999 |
| Patron | \$1,000-\$2,999 |
| Underwriter | \$500-\$999 |
| Sponsor | up to \$499 |

Corporate sponsorship opportunities include flower sponsorship, food sponsorship, and printing sponsorship. Advertisement space in the program is offered for sale, ranging in cost from \$50 to \$500. The two show event consistently raises just under \$30,000 per year.

Community Sponsored Drives

A creative way to gather the community support and financial benefits of a fundraiser event without the intensive time investment is to find a local business that is willing to sponsor an event in your agency's honor. Businesses get extra publicity while giving something good to the community. Family Violence Prevention Center (FVPC) in Orange County has two community-sponsored drives. They have an arrangement with the local Saturn dealership. Saturn agreed to donate \$25 to FVPC for every test drive during which the driver mentioned the FVPC promo, and \$100 for every Saturn sale during which the purchaser mentioned the FVPC promo.

FVPC is also sponsored by a campaign from the local Molly Maids Foundation. Molly Maids is a cleaning service. During a specified time each year, Molly Maids solicits donations from their customers on behalf of FVPC.

Resale Shops/Items

Several domestic violence agencies have experienced success with running resale or thrift shops. In most cases, the merchandise sold in the stores is donated from the community, then sorted, priced, and placed in the store for resale. Some agencies pay thrift shop staff to run the store, and some stores are operated by volunteers.

In 1984, the Outer Banks Hotline in Dare County opened one of the state's first Thrift Stores run by a domestic violence organization. They began with one store that was run by volunteers and raised about \$26,000 during their first year. Since that time, they have expanded to 6 stores and raise just under \$1 million in unrestricted funds per year, most of which comes from sales from their shops. Lynn Bryant, the Executive Director of the Hotline, attributes much of their success to the network of community partnerships they have been able to forge. They contact local businesses and real estate agencies for donations. They have arrangements with several local retail stores that when merchandise is returned and cannot be re-shelved (due to defect or light wear) the stores donate that merchandise to the Outer Banks Hotline shops. They work with real estate agencies to receive furniture items that were left by tenants or become available when furnished apartments or condominiums are redecorated. Storage warehouses donate merchandise to them when they confiscate the contents due to delinquent rent payments. The Hotline also has standing arrangements with the local churches, volunteer fire departments and the Department of Social Services that if someone is in need or crisis, they can receive items from the stores at no cost. In this way, they receive support and publicity from the churches and community organizations.

The thrift stores were initially volunteer operated, but coordinating and recruiting volunteers consumed so much time that it became more efficient to hire paid managers. Now all but one of the stores is staffed by a paid manager, who recruits, trains, and schedules the volunteers who help staff the store. One of the ways the Hotline maintains such a strong volunteer base is by ensuring that the volunteers are made an integral part of the mission of the organization. To that end, they produce a monthly volunteer newsletter that keeps them in touch with current issues and information about domestic violence and sexual assault, and find many ways to show volunteer appreciation. As well as getting the immediate benefit of volunteer assistance in the stores, the Hotline is also able to apply the volunteer hours toward satisfying grant match requirements. Also key to their success is the ability to pick up large donated items. This service began with two people who had a truck and volunteered their time. The organization now owns a box truck with a loading lift, and employs two people who are responsible for picking up all donated furniture and other large items.

The Hotline recently began a spinoff business using clothing from the store that was not in good enough condition to sell in the shop. The material is used to weave handbags and other items, which are then sold in the stores. The businesses are of benefit to the organization's clients in many ways. First, clients often volunteer as a way to keep busy and avoid boredom. Shelter residents are given the option of working for pay as a way to get some extra money. Some people will use the store as a confidential point of entry to access other services.

Lynn says that she believes that one of the reasons that they have had so much success with fundraising is because they consistently make fundraising a way to raise consciousness. The stores are run as businesses, but they always serve to promote the cause of ending violence against women. All of the stores contain information about domestic violence and sexual assault and flyers about how to access the Hotline's services. Lynn extends the opportunity for anyone interested to come and visit the shops to learn about their success. They have an apartment available for people to stay in when they come to visit.

Specialty Item Sales

Selling specialty items can be an ongoing fundraiser for your organization.

A variation of this idea came from the Wesley Shelter. They solicited donations of old wooden chairs from the community, and obtained many from a school that was closing. Staff stripped the chairs of paint and varnish. The chairs were then decorated and painted. After the chairs were refurbished, they were sold at a fundraising event.

Domestic Violence Shelter and Services in Wilmington sells a “Gates of Wilmington” poster. A local artist took photographs of famous and historical gates in the area and assembled them into a nice poster. The posters are sold for \$25 each, and are marketed through the Chamber of Commerce and with local businesses, who give them as corporate gifts.

Wills and Bequests

A long-term method of raising sustainable funds is to begin a campaign encouraging that people support your program through planned estate giving. Domestic Violence Shelter and Services in Wilmington sponsors a program called the “Doors of Hope Society” in which friends of the organization support them by including the program in their estate plans. Usually this includes a bequest in their will. Other options for membership in the society include designating the organization as a beneficiary of all or part of a life insurance policy, investment opportunities such as gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, or secondary beneficiaries. Brochures about the program are printed and are widely available in the offices of attorneys who specialize in estate planning. The brochure gives potential Society members the option to become a member by designating the program in their will or bequest or to get more information on the program. Members of the Doors of Hope Society are thanked with a beautiful charm to identify their commitment to the organization.

Holiday Campaigns

Holidays represent a time for giving for many people, and are therefore good times to solicit donations. Domestic Violence Shelter and Services in Wilmington prints holiday cards each year. The cover of each card features a holiday drawing made by a child who lived in the shelter. The cards are marketed as a creative alternative to buying gifts. People are encouraged to make a donation to the organization in the name of a loved one, teacher, neighbor, friend or co-worker. When a donation is made in honor of someone, Domestic Violence Shelter and Services sends them a card with an inscription reading “May the peace and hope this gift brings to women and children be felt in your home throughout the year,” along with the name of the gift giver. In order to publicize the campaign, the organization prints 1/3 page flyers with information about the campaign, the card inscription, and how to purchase cards. An order form is on the back of the flyer. Flyers are distributed as widely as possible during the holiday season. Printing costs are underwritten, and the campaign raises \$10-12,000 annually. Similar cards are designed and mailed for mother’s day.

Solicitation Letters

Sending out a well-written and concise solicitation letter is a time-efficient way to raise funding. The Wesley Shelter conducted two types of written solicitations. First, they located online a list of NC Foundations. They composed a two-page letter outlining the mission, history, types of and need for services offered, and number of people served by their program. The letter was signed by their board chair, and a copy of their 501c3 letter was attached. They sent out 75 letters. The first two years they received \$25,000 each year and the third year produced \$15,000. The Wesley Shelter also conducts an annual membership drive. Letters are sent out to previous donors and potential new donors. The letters are made as visually appealing as possible, mailed in clear plastic envelopes with pictures of women and children visible through the envelope. On the back of the picture is a one-page letter thanking the donor

for support during the previous year, outlining services provided and accomplishments for the year, and asking the donor to renew membership and financial support. A donation envelope is provided inside the letter. They send out about 1,500 letters each year and raise \$25-30,000 annually.

A effective and time-efficient method for assembling solicitation letters is through the development of a donor or prospect database. Names and contact information of past or potential donors can be entered into an Access or Excel database. You can then use Word to create a letter to be sent out to donors. Using the “mail merge” function, you can insert the donor’s name, past contribution and suggested donation to create a letter for each donor. Such personalized invitations tend to yield higher profits than a general “Dear Friend” letter. To access detailed instructions on completing a mail merge using Word, go to “Help” in Word, then select “Get Help Online.” Once on the website, you will be able to get printable instructions tailored to your specific version of the software. This method of solicitation requires a good deal of up-front time to develop the database, but will save time and energy over the years. You can also use your database to track the giving trends of your donors.

Individual Donor Programs

Individual donor campaigns focus on building a personal relationship with those who financially support your organization. Family Violence and Rape Crisis in Chatham County looked at the time and energy that they devoted to fundraising events and the number of people that actually became donors as a result of those events. They determined that it would be a more productive use of their time to work one-on-one with donors who were interested in providing ongoing support to their program, rather than conducting multiple events aimed at reaching many people at once. They are in the process of developing a multi-step individual donor program. The process will involve setting up an initial meeting, usually breakfast meetings, with a potential donor who has been suggested by a Board member or ally. During the initial meetings, staff members will educate donors about the organization and about domestic violence. A personal relationship is cultivated with the potential donor. The individual meetings are followed by a “big ask” event, in which the potential donors are asked to give money to the organization.

Turning Point of Union County recently conducted a capital campaign to raise money for the purchase of a new shelter building. They spent an initial \$2,000 to commission a feasibility study from the Urban Institute at the nearby UNCC. The study strongly documented the need for a shelter in Union County. With this information in hand, board members and friends of the organization approached affluent members of the community and asked them to be involved in planning the new shelter and to donate toward its purchase. As a donor was identified, the board member or ally who knew them would set up an individual meeting. Natalie Simpson (Executive Director) would attend to answer questions about the program and to give a packet of information about the organization and their need for a shelter. Borrowing from a system often used by universities, donors were given the opportunity to name different rooms in the building, depending on their level of contribution. For example, a donor could name a bedroom for a \$10,000 donation, a larger room for \$25,000, \$50,000, or \$100,000. They solicited assistance from successful business owners in the area to help them raise the funds. Natalie said that their philosophy was to ask the people who knew how to make money to help the organization do the same. The planning committee for the shelter was made up primarily of major donors, giving each donor personal input and investment into the process. Donors would call furniture companies and solicit donations of furniture for the rooms they had purchased. Donors also solicited donations from the interior decorators who had decorated their own homes, and therefore knew them personally and had an investment in assisting the process. In the end, they raised \$1.2 million in six months to purchase the shelter. Natalie attributes their success to finding people in the community with a greater vision and an outside perspective for the project, allowing those knowledgeable about financial matters give direction and have real impact and influence on the outcome.

C-VAN in Cabarrus County sponsors an annual campaign called Men For Change. The concept behind the campaign is involving men in ending men's violence against women. The program asks men from the community to each donate \$100. In return, the men are listed in an ad placed in the newspaper on Father's Day as being a member of Men for Change. Mary Margaret Flynn (Executive Director) says that the drive is successful in part because of its ability to combine community education with fundraising. Although organizing this event is certainly different than what is involved in putting together more "traditional" fundraisers, it takes an equal amount of planning and attention. Key to the ongoing success of the project lies in being attentive to the details such as making sure that all of the men's names get listed in the paper and are spelled correctly and keeping the mailing list up to date. Also important is to establish "ground rules" from the outset. For example, programs should decide if businesses can participate, if they will accept donations in honor or memory of someone (and if so, if they can honor or memorialize women), and if several men can "share" a listing. It is also important to remember that while your first year will be a success, the second year will still require an equal amount of time and energy. As with any fundraiser or mail campaign, about 66% of initial participants will renew their participation during the second year. A strong committee can follow up with personal contacts to the 33% who did not renew. This tactic upped C-VAN's renewals to 85%. Even so, you must recruit new participants each year to continue the same level of success and to grow. C-VAN sends each former participant a personalized letter thanking them for participating last year and urging them to renew. They also send a general letter to their entire mailing list advertising the campaign. Another of the details to which they must attend is avoiding duplication when sending out both mailings. Mary-Margaret encourages others to remember that this fundraiser, like fundraising in general, is a long-term commitment which takes time to grow. During their first year, they raised \$15,200. They have held the event for 9 years, and raised over \$40,000 last year.

United Family Services in Mecklenburg County also conducts an annual Men for Change campaign. They began the campaign in 1998, and have made significant changes over time to better meet the needs of their community. In the beginning, they operated the campaign much like C-VAN. Recently, they have altered the campaign to incorporate a "big ask" event. In preparation for the event, the Men for Change Committee members solicit pledges of participation from 10-20 other men. The committee then organizes a breakfast meeting for all of the prospects. A "save the date" card announcing the breakfast is mailed out to all prospective participants. At the breakfast, all men in attendance receive a pledge form and a handout explaining the campaign. Members of the committee solicit donations from the men at the breakfast. Key to their success is the personal man-to-man invitation and solicitation. All Men for Change are listed in a full-page ad in the Charlotte Observer. The major expense for the campaign is the cost of the ad, at about \$15,000. After expenses, they earn between \$30,000 and \$50,000 each year. More information about their campaign is available at www.unitedfamilyservices.org.

Ask, Ask, Ask

Sometimes it feels like we are constantly asking for money while trying to do this work. However, experience has proven that people want to give and to support programs. They are just waiting to be asked. Directors present at the meeting noted that each time a newspaper article ran about their organization, they received unsolicited donations, so do not hesitate to call your local press to offer information about your program. The Wesley Shelter raises \$5,000 per year just by putting donation envelopes inside each copy of their quarterly newsletter. Consistently, the attendees encouraged programs to send donation envelopes with everything they send out. Small envelopes are easy to insert into standard sized mailings, and can be printed for a relatively low cost.

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