FUNDRAISING

By Dorie Wilsnack

Scene I. *You make all the proper arrangements—setting up an appointment with a potential donor, sending your literature packet, bringing one of your advisors with you. The conversation flows easily as you discuss the latest political crisis and the need to organize your local community around the issues. Your potential contributor is enthusiastic about your efforts. The time flies. You finally take your leave, having had a most enjoyable morning. Halfway out the door, the gnawing truth hits you—* you never asked for a donation!

Even though that was what you came for, it never felt like the "right moment" to bring the subject up. The words got stuck in your throat because you kept envisioning a rejection and an air of polite coolness falling on the room. Now you are in trouble because you needed that contribution. All the organizing ideas you had just been discussing will never be a reality if you have no money to send out the mailings and stage the rallies.

Scene II. *Your disarmament program is going strong, attracting new participants, and developing good organizing strategies. You begin planning a major action for the spring but you are stymied about how you are going to pay for it. Someone on your mailing list agrees to temporarily loan you the money. Great! Your mind rests; you can delay your financial worries until the event is over.*

These two scenes are dangerous ruts in which organizers commonly find themselves. It is not helpful to support your work through a scatter-shot method of selling a few buttons and praying silently for donations. The following comments and ideas are offered to help set you on a better path. They cover basic attitudes and plans you will need, and some specifics about fundraising activities.

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Attitudes

We have a terrible ambivalence about money. We see it at the roots of the violent system we are trying to change, yet we are personally dependent on money and our organizations don't operate well without it. We carry with us childhood histories where we had too much or too little, and where money was often intertwined with love and attention. We need to be aware of and have opportunities to talk about this complicated mixture of emotions if we are to develop new attitudes about fundraising.

We need to build our projects around a simpler notion—money is an essential tool to organizing, much as people's time is essential to organizing. No matter how important the money is, it is always a tool and a tactic, not a goal. It is a challenge to our nonviolent politics to use money in ways that build on our value system. How can we use funds to encourage more sharing, collective structures? How can we put money to use in more creative ways? If we see ourselves actively making our finances work in a nonviolent manner, we will probably feel a whole lot easier about asking for funds.

Fundraising often gets postponed because a group's political work of educating the public is more compelling and more fun. There are some myths operating in this assumption. Fundraising is actually just another form of education. You are educating people about your financial needs as well as the issues, and you are educating a constituency with financial resources as well as your other supporters. Working with this definition, and using your imagination, fundraising can be as much a source of enthusiasm

among your members as all your other activities. Bake sales can double as information tables and attract even more people. Organizing a benefit houseparty is quite similar to presenting a small seminar with a keynote speaker. Working with a foundation staff will require the same kinds of approaches that you use with the press. They have a lot of clout, but they need a lot of political re-education.

Fundraising will bring you into close proximity with other groups much like yours. Your initial thought may be simply "we need to get there first." But is this consistent with the nonviolent, non-competitive society you want to build? How can you share information and coordinate fund raising calendars with other groups? What kinds of joint fundraising can you do that would not be feasible alone? When a competitive situation arises that can't be avoided, is your project willing to step back or compromise?

Your major source of funds is probably going to be individual contributors. This is where our mixed emotions are most apparent. We tend to assign donors a lot of power and then resent that power. None of this is healthy or quite accurate. Keep the thought that people who contribute to your work do so because *you* are doing them a favor, not vice versa. You are out there holding the rallies and press conferences and distributing the literature for something that they deeply believe in but don't have the time or inclination to work on actively. What they can do comfortably is make a financial gift. Respect them for that, and recognize that the work you are doing merits the money.

When we ask someone for funds and they say "no," we can't help but take it personally. We read lots into their response, e.g., that they don't like us or they don't like our project. In truth, there are many other possible reasons, such as cash-flow problems and political indecision, to name just two. Look at this from another perspective...when we ask someone for a few hours volunteer time and they say "no," we calmly take their response as reasonable and move on. We make a mental note to ask them again in a few weeks. We don't take their rejection personally. The trick is to see financial gifts in the same light. We need to include our donors as members of our community and think of them as important human beings, not pocketbooks or numbers. This principle is central to a nonviolent organization and it also produces more financial security in the long run.

There are ways to analyze attitudes about money, donors, and fundraising in your organization's development. Have discussions on the agenda of the full group. Use role playing as a way to define emotions and to understand the perspective of the donor. Analyze and review fundraising activities from an emotional/political perspective as well as by financial returns. Take notes on these evaluations for the people who come after you.

There is a tendency to leave all fundraising considerations to one or two stalwarts. However, this not only encourages the myth that fundraising should be separate from "real program" work, but it will burn out the lonely individual who shoulders the responsibility. A good structure is to have a fundraising committee of 4 or 5 active members, and to include fundraising and finances on the whole group agenda regularly. If you have a fundraising coordinator, make sure the emphasis in on the *coordination* and not on being the sole fundraiser.

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Planning

Set up a fundraising committee, and discuss fundraising regularly at your general meetings.

One result of our emotional ambivalence about fundraising is our refusal to look too far into the future. (This probably reflects some political insecurities, too.) We resist developing one or two-year financial plans because we are afraid we'll never bring in the money we will need. Why make a plan that we're convinced will end in failure? Why not just wing it, one step at a time?

This is where you need to grit your teeth and think logically. Operating as you go is actually more emotionally wearing and draining on your project; it gives your donors a shaky image. Funding will come easier, believe it or not, if you plan ahead.

1. Set your program for the year ahead down in writing. Second-guess and project where you have to, but write a full year's program.
2. Develop an expense budget for the year. Talk with other organizations to glean estimates for your printing, mailing, telephone expenses, etc. You now have a goal for your fundraising.
3. List all your possible sources of funds by category (mail fund appeals, benefits, newsletter subscriptions, etc.).
4. Make realistic estimates of how much income you can raise in each area. Your aim is to come up with a fund-

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raising plan that can bring in a little more money than you anticipate needing. For example, this may require cutting back on your expense budget in one area and pushing for higher results at one of your houseparties.

5. Lay out your fundraising activities on a calendar, making sure they are spread realistically throughout the year. If you can set your expense plans down on a similar calendar grid, you can foresee cash-flow problems ahead of time, and alter your plans to avoid them.

Develop long range program projections, complete with costs and ideas for fundraising projects.

At this planning stage, it would be invaluable to create a "model proposal"—a two- or three-page description of your project; including purpose, program, and projected budget. Such a summary can serve to help your whole project in clarifying definitions, program goals, and strategies. It will also provide you with the basic first draft for foundation proposals, letters to individual donors, fund-appeals, and magazine articles your project may write.

A resource piece like this will provide consistency and give newer members a starting point.

Consider long range program projections. What do you see your project doing over the next five years? Where do you want your finances to come from? Your first year is the time to set up fundraising patterns that will ultimately provide you with self-sufficiency.

Political activists worry about the compromises and strings attached to the money they raise, especially from foundation grants and large donors. Some discomfort along these lines may have to be tolerated at first, but in making your long range funding plans, you can insure yourselves against such constraints. You just need to work toward an ever growing financial base of small and medium sized donations. Count on them for a third of your money at first, and aim to increase in small steps over the five-year period. This will mean a constant search for new supporters, and expanding opportunities to which people can contribute (e.g., newsletter subscriptions, a yearly raffle, an annual dinner or poetry reading).

A variety of activities guarantees your whole program won't collapse, if one of your fundraising events fails.

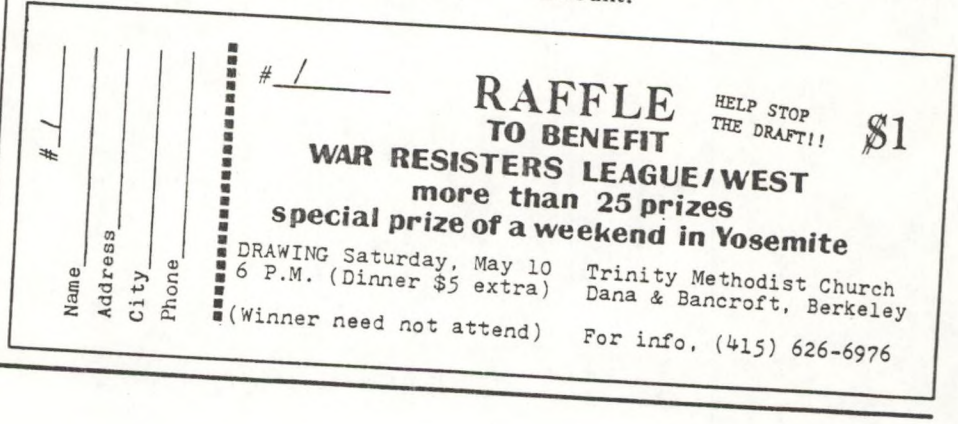
A variety of activities like the examples above serves another important function. If one of your fundraising events fails, you have a dozen other activities to fall back on. Your whole financial security was not resting on that one item. Remember that you don't need to plan a whole set of fundraising efforts above and beyond your group's political activities. Every film showing and public speaker, every pamphlet and button can serve as a fundraising opportunity as well.

Mail Fund Appeals

- Develop your house mailing list. Send information materials as well as fund appeals out regularly (3 to 6 times a year is common). People will count on receiving them at the same time each year, and will plan their contribution schedule around that.
- Decide how many mail appeals to send, spreading them over the year. Time them to coincide with certain events (e.g., tax day, Hiroshima day, your project's anniversary). Fund appeals have been found to be the most effective in the early fall, the December holidays, and the spring.

Time your mail appeals to coincide with key events and key seasons (tax day and December holidays).

- Personalize your mailing as much as you can. If you have the time, hand address the envelopes and personally sign each letter. If you have the money, send them first class.
- Include a return envelope with your mailing, postage paid if possible. Also enclose a return card where contributors can fill in their name and address and check a box identifying their contribution size. Filling out such a card has the effect of encouraging donors, and labeling the boxes with $10 to $500 encourages them to give a larger amount.



- You can also leave space on the return card for the suggested names of other people who would be interested in your project. Encourage your donors to recommend their friends.
- To add new names to your contributors list, you may want to do a mass fund appeal once each year. This is a very basic introduction to your project sent to "new" lists, such as subscribers to a publication, church rosters, and organization mailing lists. Include a nicely designed brochure with your letter. The goal of a mass mailing is more to acquire names than to make a lot of money; if you can break even on the mailing costs, you have been successful.
- Though your letter will have the most integrity if signed by one of your group's members, you occasionally may have the opportunity to send an appeal signed by a well-known public figure. Or you can combine the two by having someone famous write a supportive "P.S." at the bottom of the page.
- A *successful* mailing to your own list will bring in a 7% or better return. A *successful* mass mailing to another list will bring in a 1% return.
- If bulk rate mailings are used have a postage meter imprint on the envelope, rather than an imprint put on by the printer. It looks more like postage at first glance, thus more important and more likely to be opened.
- Large donors should be given an annual budget. It indicates you're serious about planning and have a good grasp on financial matters.

Assorted Notes on Fundraising Possibilities

- Encourage people to become pledgers. That will assure you of some consistent income.
- Donors identified as capable of giving more can be phoned. If you are unsure of yourself, phoning allows you to have a list of reminders in front of you, and it is less threatening than getting all dressed up and ringing a doorbell.
- Every project should have a built in fundraising aspect. Literature can always have at least a soft sell and events can always have a verbal pitch as part of the program.
- *Pass the hat* at all meetings, marches, and rallies generally advertised to the public. Make an announcement and appeal sometime during the meeting, then pass around buckets appropriately labeled. Make sure you have enough 1-quart buckets, about one per 50 people is sufficient.
- *Literature* does not usually bring in a great deal of money but can be a fairly reliable and steady source of income if handled carefully (see "Literature Program" chapter).
- If you think you can attract large donations or foundation grants, you should investigate the possibility of acquiring tax-exempt status. This can be done through applying to the IRS, or finding a "fiscal sponsor" who will act as your fiscal umbrella. Tax-exempt monies cannot be used for political lobbying or illegal activities, but they can be used for "educational" purposes. They require clear financial record-keeping.
- *Foundation grants* are for puddle-jumping. They can help a project get off the ground, or they can help an ongoing organization start a new program. They are one-time gifts, rarely more. The require lengthy preparation time, but they are large enough to be worth it usually. They involve researching the most appropriate foundations to approach, writing a proposal and letters of inquiry, following-up with personal visits to foundation staff.
- Sale of *unusual items* such as posters, T-shirts with silk screened slogans and graphics, balloons, prints, buttons, plants, stamp albums, etc., can bring in more money than usual items, such as books.
- *Bake sales* are another fairly reliable, but financially small, way to bring in money. The idea is simple enough: several people volunteer to bake cookies, cakes, pies, candy, and other goods that have sufficient eye-appeal to sell. The food is set up in a busy area and at a time when the flow of hungry traffic is greatest, around lunch time. Prices can be set at about double the cost of the ingredients. Work this out in advance and set up index cards with prices and names of the items being sold. A neatly painted sign is helpful to draw attention. Always have literature next to the food. If done carefully, $50-100 can be raised each day.

  Selling the goods can be fun if you are careful not to put the burden of the baking or selling on one or a small number of people. Share recipes and

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kitchens to encourage those who are shy about their cooking. To avoid a situation where women do most of the cooking, try alternating days where women cook one day and the men the next.

Variations on bake sales might be to sell coffee and breakfast rolls in mornings, some sort of cool drink and sandwiches in the afternoon.

- *Film showings* are potentially excellent ways to raise money but, because of the overhead, can be financial flops if not done properly (see "Film Program" chapter).
- *Benefits* for your group by bands, theater groups, singers, poets, and other sympathetic performers can be potentially good money raisers (see the "Organizing a Benefit Concert" chapter).
- *Peace fairs* set up in a central location can bring in hundreds of dollars, if planned and executed carefully. Have one area where a central platform can be set up for the entertainment. Literature tables, concession stands, booths of hand-made articles to be sold, potted plants, and so forth should be set up.

  Other sympathetic community groups should be invited to put up their booths of literature, etc. This is particularly important as an additional attraction to potential fairgoers but also allows these other groups to spread the word of your fair around the community. Well-planned publicity (posters, leaflets, press releases, balloons) is essential.
- *Garage sales* (or yard-, lawn-, attic-sales) can bring in hundreds of dollars, especially if everyone in your group donates unwanted furniture, appliances, National Geographics, etc. Advertise in the classified section of the paper, put a sign in front of your house, post signs on telephone poles around the neighborhood. You must really slash prices or people won't come and things won't move. There must be real bargains. Always have literature on hand. Rummage sales or street fairs are other possibilities (see chapter on "Street Fairs").
- *"Peace work day"* can be a day that everyone in the group is committed to doing odd-jobs (together if possible) around the community. Mow lawns, wash cars, paint houses, sell flowers on street corners, etc. This sort of thing can be beneficial for group solidarity as well as bringing in money.
- *Giving up* smoking, drinking, movies, food, etc., for a particular period of time and then donating the money saved to the group can bring in considerable sums with some groups.

Follow Up

Many people have gone before you in the anxious search for funds. You can benefit from their experience, particularly from other social change activists. Some of their advice is available in writing:

The Grassroots Fundraising Book, Joan Flanagan, 1977, available from the Youth Project, 1000 Wisconsin, NW, Washington, DC 20007. An outline of steps for every fundraising activity you might be considering.

The Bread Game, ed. Herb Allen, 1975, available from Glide Publications, 330 Ellis Street, San Francisco, CA 94102. A how-to-do-it manual for those seeking funding from foundations.

The Grantsmanship News, 1031 South Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90015. A bi-monthly magazine full of articles that de-mystify the moneyed world, and articles on important organizational advice. It uses wonderful graphics, and there is a strong sense of humor running throughout (very important!).

The rest of your advice will come from talking, and being observant. Read and learn from the fund appeals that arrive in your mailbox. Pay close attention at the benefits you attend. Ask other activist fundraisers questions. Set up appointments with them. Corner them at parties. They won't give you the names of their donors, but they will give you ideas and the results of their own experience.

In some communities, supportive networks are beginning to form among political activist fundraisers. They meet to share experiences, to coordinate their calendars (so no two benefits are scheduled for the same night), and to be a true emotional support for each other. Here is a way to truly put nonviolent, noncompetitive values to work in a traditionally ruthless field.