Who Should You Solicit First?

When an organization sets out to raise significant funds, be it for a unique one-time initiative or a broad comprehensive campaign, it is the fundraiser's responsibility to determine who is to be solicited first. As raising major gifts is a significant undertaking, we must prepare thoughtfully and be well organized.

Raising major gifts takes a terrific amount of grit and determination and it demands a good deal of time. It is not something that can be dispatched with a letter or a phone call. It is almost always done face-to-face, personally interacting with a donor to guide them to a gift commitment.

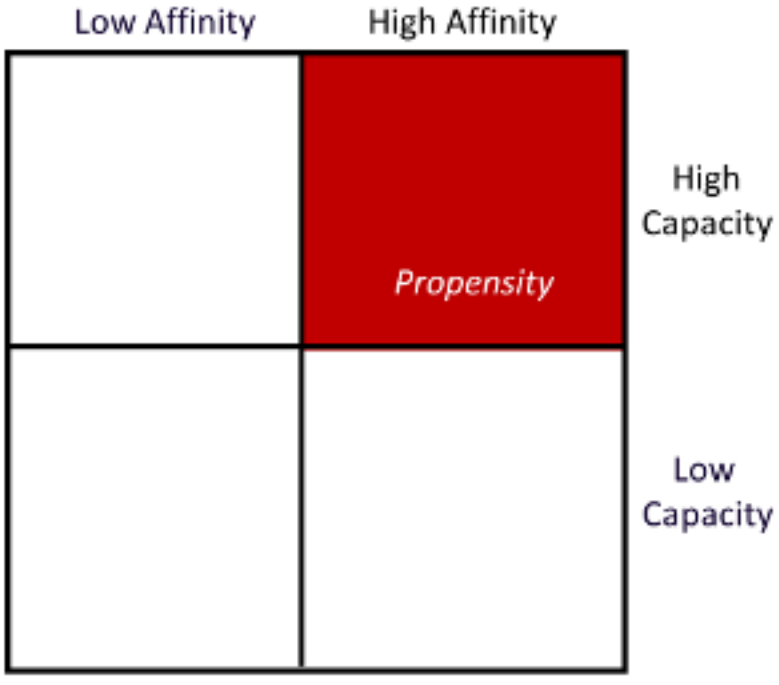
Make the Time

Time is the most precious resource we have to utilize. Allocating enough time to raise major gifts must be an agreed upon priority. The raising of funds competes with many other priorities and pressures that can distract and preoccupy an organization's leaders. When you have agreement about the importance of pursuing funds for your cause, you need to define how much time will be allocated to accomplish it.

Use your time strategically and effectively. You can accomplish this by identifying your most likely donors and then prioritizing those within this targeted group. This enables you to maximize your time and concentrate your efforts upon the greatest philanthropic opportunities among this set. This approach enables you to reach your desired outcome as efficiently as possible.

So, Then Who?

A quadrant graph can be a helpful illustration. The upper righthand quadrant indicates where the highest capacity and highest affinity meet. That group of prospective donors are those you should focus upon at the outset. These are the ones that you believe have significant financial capacity for support and those who have a stronger attachment, loyalty and affection for your organization.



This is the pool of people to focus upon first. Then prioritize those within this list of prospects again, based upon those you believe have the greatest capacity along with the highest capacity. Once that is accomplished you have an organized and defined pool of prospects to pursue. It is from within this group that you will likely receive larger gifts, and the largest gifts for your organization.

Propensity

Propensity is defined as an often-intense natural inclination or preference. Prospects who possess propensity for our organization are more likely to be responsive than those who are less so.

Assess the generosity of the prospects with whom you are engaging. Do they support other organizations? How large have their gifts been? Until we begin to engage with donors and have conversations about major support for our organizations, we don't know how they will respond; even those with both high capacity and high affinity. Their philanthropic outlook and propensity might be developed towards our organization. Consider the following. Do they support other organizations? Do they readily support campaigns with significant gifts commitments? Have they made major gifts in the past to your organization?

There are many motivations and circumstances that come into play for a prospect. Were they raised in a home where philanthropic support was modeled? That would be a positive signal if it were so. Are they building their business and reinvesting resources to grow it, thus making less available for charitable work? Are they preoccupied with the demands of a growing family which limits their ability to develop philanthropy as a priority? These are factors that you come to understand by engaging with them face-to-face and gaining firsthand insights into their personal and professional lives and their worldview.

Then there exists the reality of timing. It might be a good time for the donors to support you. It may not be good timing due to financial pressures or family pressures that are demanding their resources. It could be that they have outstanding philanthropic commitments with other organizations that currently they are in the process of fulfilling.

While donors control the timing of their gift commitments, we can influence them with the compelling case we represent and the nature of the relationship that the organization enjoys with them. Also, we can be creative with giving opportunities and financial strategies to help them have the philanthropic impact they desire. Consider gift commitments that are pledges, stock gifts, IRS's, property, monthly giving, or some combination of such options.

The pursuit of major gifts is like a marathon. Though long and exhausting, competitors accept these realities to achieve their goal