

# The Procrastinator's Guide to Year-End Giving - Part I

By Donna Ann Harris, CMSM, Heritage Consulting Inc. | From *Main Street Story of the Week* | December 4, 2013 |



Procrastinators, unite! Main Street programs can still plan and execute a quality year-end fundraising campaign, even now, after many of your holiday events are over. Over the next two weeks we will provide you with the advice you need to ask your friends and supporters for gifts to support your Main Street program. It is truly worth the effort to go after these donations — according to [Network for Good](#), thirty percent of all donations happen in December and ten percent of all giving happens the last three days of the year.

This post provides the best practices and tips for you to create five compelling emails or e-newsletters for your year-end fundraising campaign. For this campaign to work, your office will need to be open the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve so that you are able to send out each of the five messages and process the donations you receive. This campaign should coordinate with any other year-end public relations that you normally do, including any December newsletter, press releases or stories you pitch to local media outlets.

## Your Email List

This last minute fundraising campaign needs some advance planning. To start, you will need to a high quality email list from your e-newsletter, Facebook fan page or Twitter feed. Make sure these lists are up to date and if you can personalize the mailings, even better. Add any new email

addresses from raffle tickets, signup sheets from events, and other sources to your existing email lists (if you have the person's permission to add their name to your solicitation list). Don't forget to purge the hard and soft bounces from your newsletter list that did not go through — you want the best list you can get.

## **Create a Goal**

You need to create an ambitious but achievable goal for this campaign. As a guide, review your other fundraising successes from this past year, especially your annual membership appeal and yearly fundraising events, and pick a goal that makes sense for your community, the local economy, and your organization. Tell your friends and supporters about the goal in these emails, especially if you are close to achieving it.

## **Your 'Donate Now' button**

Make sure your online donation page works flawlessly and that it is easily accessible from your web site's home page. Test it by asking someone who is not overly familiar to your organization to make a donation and give honest feedback. Is the 'Donate Now' button obvious? Do you really need all the information you are collecting from your donors? Can you make the page simpler? Do donors get a thank you email immediately? Were there any glitches? You have time now to fix any of these problems before you send out your end of year donation emails.

## **Your Email Message**

Create five short interesting stories to use in each of the e-blasts during your last week of the year campaign. You should also repost each of these stories from your email/e-newsletter to Facebook and Twitter, so you will get the maximum impact while only having to write the stories once.

For each email, create a different short message about your impact downtown. Use a compelling quote and some great statistics from this year, but make it about people you've helped—a property owner who restored a building, new business owner in town, local shoppers, or how you worked with a partner organization (just be sure to get their permission first). Use a high quality photo, handsome graphic or colorful chart that shows your impact on downtown in these email messages/e-newsletter.

Ask your supporters to make their donation in the first line of the second paragraph, and again at the end of your message. Explaining that your supporter's gift goes toward general operating expenses is unappealing. Instead, your last week of the year campaign should focus on general programs that meet your mission, such as your summer band concerts, the flower beds or new trees you planted, how you maintain a sparkling downtown, your seasonal banners, or the other beloved annual events such as the farmers market. If at all possible, ask for unrestricted gifts, rather than gifts aimed at specific projects.

For the final two emails to be sent on December 30 and 31, change the tone of your message. Stress urgency and reinforce the tax deadline for donations. These final two emails will be the

ones that shake loose the most donations based on research from Network for Good, so save your most compelling stories for last.

Start to write these email messages today — they don't have to be long, about 250 to 400 words will do.

## **Using Traditional PR to Reinforce Your Campaign**

As you plan this last week of the year campaign, consider how you can use your traditional public relations tools to reinforce your relevance leading up to this campaign. Does the community know what your Main Street program accomplished this year? Do you prepare a year in review report or other retrospective about your work? You can use much of those statistics and stories for one or more of your five emails to supporters.

Hang a banner on your building, write a press release, and tell people about your campaign during your regular December e-newsletter and on your Facebook page or Twitter feed. Be sure to give your supporters some notice about your end of year campaign, because there will be a barrage of emails to them during the last week of the year.

## **Consider Offering a Challenge Gift**

One of the most effective tools in fundraising is the challenge gift. We all are familiar with them from public radio, where an individual or small group pledges to match any gift given during a specific time period of a fundraising campaign up to a fixed amount. This permits your supporter to double (or even triple!) the value of their gift. Perhaps a few Board Members would be willing to pool their year-end gifts and create a challenge gift that you can advertise in your email messages for the campaign.

## **Keep the Office Open during the Week of Christmas**

Now that you have written your email messages, get ready to send them out. Our research on end of year fundraising suggests that one of your five emails/e-newsletters should go out on each of the following days: 12/24, 12/26, 12/27, 12/30 and 12/31 this year. Sending so many emails may sound excessive, but research has shown that more emails result in more donations. Repost each email/e-newsletter to your Facebook page or Twitter feed the same day, and make sure the post includes a link to your Donate Now button on your home page.

Please stay tuned for next week's post in which we will discuss timing of these five emails/e-newsletters, email subject lines and how to recognize the gifts received.

**[Click here to learn more about year-end gift campaigns](#)**

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