

# A Baker's Dozen of Fundraising Tips for Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

**1) Don't be afraid to ask virtually anyone for money.** Even people who don't have a lot of money can help – lots of small donations eventually add up. Don't forget to ask members of your congregation, friends, local elected officials, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, local businesspeople, and even strangers. Let's face it – if you can ask people with limited time to volunteer their time (which you already do), then you can certainly ask people to donate money. After all, people can't make more time, but they can make more money!

**2) Ask different people for different amounts of money.** Try to target your requests. Don't ask a middle class friend to donate the same amount you would ask from Donald Trump.

**3) The more people you ask and the more ways you ask, the more money you will get.** Asking more people for more money in more ways won't guarantee you'll get it, but not asking will definitely guarantee that you won't get it. Don't be afraid to re-solicit people who previously said no.

**4) Diversify your funding sources.** The more diverse your funding, the more you will be able to weather government cut-backs, economic down-turns, or the changing whims of big foundations. Plus, the more “unrestricted funds” you raise, the more flexibility you will have in running your program. Try to get funding from a good mix of sources, including: individuals, elected officials, religious organizations, foundations, businesses, and government agencies.

**5) Diversify your funding methods.** Try to get funding from a good mix of methods, including: personal meetings, grants, direct mail, collections at services or events, e-mail requests, phone solicitations, dues, and special fundraising events.

**6) A piece of paper should always be followed by a personal, human contact.** If you send someone a letter or a printed invitation, you should follow-up with a personal meeting or phone call whenever possible. People like to contribute to other people, not to pieces of paper.

**7) Keep overhead costs to a minimum.** Don't spend a lot of money for fancy dinners or give-away premiums unless you are positive they will bring in a lot of money that you would not have gotten otherwise. For instance, if you charge people \$75 per head to come to dinner that costs you \$50 per head, but most of the people attending would have given you \$50 anyway without a dinner, you have actually *lost* \$25 per person. Always remember that the main purpose of fundraising events is to make money, not to have a fun social occasion. (If an event can be both, that's great, but actual cash profits must take first priority.)

**8) Create – and follow—a fundraising plan.** Create – and be sure to follow – a master fundraising plan specifying exactly what type of methods you will use, how much you intend to make from each effort, specific targets for people and entities and target amounts for each person and entity, as well as concrete deadlines for each task. For foundation and government grants, create a clear schedule for your program indicating when applications are due, when progress reports are due – as well as all forms, financial reports, etc, must be submitted with either.

**9) Get your paperwork, budgetary, and accounting house in order.** If you want to obtain significant grants from government agencies, foundations, or corporations, you generally need to following readily available: a letter from the IRS proving your non-profit status; a recent audit conducted by an independent certified public accountant (CPA); a list of your board of directors; and a total organizational budget for both last year and this year, as well as a specific budget for the project for which you are requesting funding.

**10) Carefully match your grant requests with the mission of your organization and program.** Foundations, corporations, and government agencies generally have very specific funding guidelines, often with very little flexibility. No matter how great your program is, don't waste your time and energy applying for funds for programs clearly outside your actual work. For a variety of reasons, it is counter-productive to try to warp the mission of your organization just to meet such funding guidelines. It is even worse to try to falsely convince funders that you work is within their funding guidelines when it really isn't.

**11) Carefully follow the specific directions of each application package.** Unfortunately, each grant application generally has entirely different required deadlines, forms, budget formats, narrative descriptions, and general delivery and formatting instructions. Follow each and every one of these directions precisely... any single deviation will likely ruin your chances of funding from that source.

**12) Make grant applications clear and concise.** Don't worry about including a lot of flowery, lengthy language in your applications, or going on and on about problems in your neighborhood. Your applications should have a very brief description of the problem, then focus very precisely on: how you intend to solve the problems; what specific steps you will take to solve the problem; a clear time-line for each step; what concrete, measurable goals you will set; how you will measure your success in meeting those goals; and exactly how much money it will take to carry out each function.

**13) Rapidly and profusely thank all donors ... and then ask them for more money.** The largest and most consistent contributions will come from people who have previously given you money.