Organizing Toolbox 2002

Grassroots fundraising: Asking individuals for donations to VOP

The Fall Fundraising Campaign is a good time to remember that the great work of the Virginia Organizing Project takes money. Effective community organizing requires us to be systematic and deliberate and we apply that strategy to raising money as well. The one-to-one relationship building that underlies our method of organizing is also the most effective way to raise money for our work.

Before beginning to raise money for an organization like the Virginia Organizing Project, it helps to think about why we are raising money, where money to non-profits comes from and the most effective ways of raising grassroots funds. We need to answer these questions:

- **Why do you support the Virginia Organizing Project with time and money?**

  Think of some examples of how VOP is important and doing the best work of its kind. "VOP shows people that change is possible and shares the skills needed to make those changes…" Believing in the work of the organization is probably the most important factor in being a successful fundraiser.

- **What are the goals for grassroots fundraising?**

  Fundraising doesn't just raise money. It also builds a donor base, involves people in the work of the organization, provides VOP with more financial stability, generates interest and visibility and helps other people learn how to be grassroots fundraisers.

- **What does VOP need money for?**

  Building a strong statewide citizens organization in Virginia requires money for staff salaries and benefits, workshops and training sessions, phone/fax/email/ web site, transportation, publications, equipment, supplies, utilities and insurance.

  VOP needs money to do the work of changing the balance of power in Virginia so everyone has a voice in our democracy. Traditionally decisions have been made largely by those with wealth. It will take a lot of resources on our part to shift that balance.

- **Why do people give money to non-profits?**

  "People give because they are asked and being asked reminds them what they care about," says Kim Klein, editor of the Grassroots Fundraising Journal.

Churches are particularly successful at raising grassroots money because they ask often.

- **Where does VOP get its money?**

  VOP gets its money from two main sources: private foundation grants and grassroots sources – individuals and faith communities.

How does VOP raise grassroots money?

1. Asking individuals (and churches, temples and mosques) for donations — This is the most effective way of raising grassroots money.
2. Direct mail appeals — We send three letters per year asking for donations.
3. Fundraising parties — Supporters invite friends to their house to hear about VOP and make a donation. This is a fun way to spread the word about our work and raise money.
4. Chapter and affiliate dues — We receive group, instead of individual, membership dues.
5. Workshop registrations — These are charged on a sliding scale — with most participants not covering the cost of materials, food and lodging.
6. Contracted services — Occasionally our staff receives a fee for training sessions with other organizations.
7. In-kind donations — We only pay for equipment and supplies if we cannot find someone to donate them. Not spending cash is a great way to raise money.
8. Sales — We sell ads in the news magazine, Kroger and Giant grocery certificates, books and T-shirts.
9. Events — Events are the least effective means of raising money for the amount of time expended. VOP rarely holds fundraising events for this reason.

Asking individuals for donations is the most effective way to raise grassroots money

Things to say when asking for a donation:

- Introduce yourself (unless you already know the person).
- Explain that you're volunteering to raise money for VOP.
- Tell the person some of VOP's accomplishments and what you are working on.
- Ask clearly and specifically for what you want: "Would you consider a $50 donation to VOP? Would you like to pledge $10 per month to VOP?" Ask the question!.
- Let the person respond and listen carefully.
- Thank him/her if s/he agrees to give and explain what they need to do: you can mail a check to VOP in this envelope, or fill in the credit card information.
- Ask a follow up question if s/he says no, depending on what they said: Could you give next month? Could you give $25? Do you know someone else who might want to make a donation to VOP?.

Things to do when asking:

- Be prepared — Know who you are asking and what you are asking for; practice helps.
- Ask in person — Face to face is best, next most effective is a phone call.
- Have materials and information ready — Be prepared with donation envelope, brochure, newsmagazine, etc.
- Be persistent — Ask a follow up question, but know when to graciously accept a "no".
- Be friendly and polite.

Why are people afraid to ask for donations? How can we overcome these barriers?

- Fear of rejection – Don't take "no" personally. People have valid reasons for not giving at that moment that almost always have nothing to do with you.
- It feels like begging – Fundraising gives people an opportunity to support something they believe in. It's in their self interest to give, as it is for each of us who donate to causes we support.
- Low-income people can't give – 85 percent of donations are given by families with incomes under $60,000. Poor people give away a higher percentage of their incomes than the upper-middle class or wealthy. Low-income people also have more self-interest in supporting VOP.
- It's hard to ask – Remind yourself why VOP is important and of everything you contribute to VOP's success. Ask people you're most comfortable asking first so you can practice. For some people that's family and friends, for others it's strangers.

- I can't ask my friends – Friends share our values and wish us success, and want to be included in our work. Make it clear that you hope for "yes," but that "no" is OK, too.
- If I ask them, they'll ask me – You are only obligated to a donor to use their money ethically and to thank them. You may respond "yes" or "no" to any requests that are made of you.

We need to be donors to our own organization before we can ask others to donate. The amount of each donation is not as important as having staff, board members, chapter and affiliate members all being donors. Donations of time and energy are valuable, but they don't pay the phone bill. We are more confident when asking others to donate if we have made the commitment ourselves.

Getting endorsements of your campaigns

Two of the most important aspects of organizing an issue campaign are getting the word out and gathering support. Asking for and securing endorsements of your campaign is a good first step that can accomplish both.

An endorsement is one way groups or individuals can voice their approval of and support for a campaign. Endorsements are effective, at the beginning and throughout the campaign, because they serve to educate the group or individual endorsing your campaign about your issue, while simultaneously showing the target of your campaign that you have a broad base of support.

The goal of this article is to help guide you through the process of obtaining endorsements for the issue campaigns you are working on.

Who should we ask to endorse the campaign?

Everyone! The more support you can garner for the issue, the better. Of course, you must have a method to determine whom you will ask and when. Making a list of possible endorsers is very helpful. Groups and individuals that have a direct interest in the issue or connection to your organization are usually a good place to start. This may include people or groups that have worked on similar issues before and, therefore, might have some helpful suggestions.

For example, if you are working on changing an education policy you could start by asking groups that work on education issues. Those would include parent-teacher organizations, teachers associations, and youth services boards, just to name a few.

The same is true for specific individuals that have a definite interest in the issue you are working on. For instance, the group that worked on the Harvard living wage campaign got individual endorsements from at least 70 faculty members at the university, state and national legislators, famous individuals who have worked on similar issues, and even celebrity alumni (http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~pslm/livingwage/portal.html).

Next you might want to ask individuals or groups that have worked with your group on past campaigns, even if they do not seem to be directly tied to the issue you are working on this time. This will bring a more diverse base of support to your campaign and foster cooperation between your organization and that person or group. Now you can move to asking other groups, such as community or civic organizations, religious groups or congregations, unions and special interest groups. These types of organizations are likely to have good networks and can get the information about your campaign out to a lot of people. You can never have too many endorsements. It never hurts to ask. So, be creative with whom you ask to endorse!

How do we contact these individuals and groups?

Take a look at the lists of possible endorsers that you have created. There will be some individuals and groups on the list — the ones you already have close connections with — that you can simply call up and ask to endorse your campaign without a problem. However, it is likely that most of the names on the list will want and need more information and background on your campaign. Sending them a letter and a packet of information is a good way to provide this.

Break your big list into smaller ones of about 20 names each. This seems to be the most manageable number for tracking purposes. Send each group or individual a packet containing an introduction letter, information explaining your campaign — usually in the form of a flier or a sample letter of endorsement — and information on your organization in general (such as a brochure and a newsletter).

Once you have sent out the packets, wait about a week and then follow up your mailings with a phone call. Through this call you should be able to tell how interested the person or group is in endorsing your campaign. If they are interested — especially in the case of groups — it is important to find out their process for making endorsements.

Many groups have an established process for endorsing campaigns, and it is necessary to figure out how you start this process. Some groups and individuals will tell you that they will endorse and that they do not need any more information. However, in most cases it is beneficial, if not necessary, to set up a meeting to talk about the endorsement.

Meetings can take many forms. Religious congregations, for example, seem to each have their own way of making endorsements. Sometimes you will meet individually with a minister, priest, rabbi or imam. Other congregations have you meet with the chair of a committee or with a full committee that handles endorsements. Either way, it is important to go into your meetings with more copies of the information you sent in the packet and also to make sure that you are prepared to answer any questions they might have about the issue and the campaign. Present your campaign to the group or individual, letting them know what your goals are and how they can be involved.

What form can the endorsement take?

Endorsements can take any number of forms. Two types that have been successful in most campaigns are letters to the target and signing onto an endorsement list. Endorsing groups and individuals can make their public statement of support by writing a letter to the target of your campaign, letting the target know how they feel. It is useful to create a sample letter that people can either sign their name to or use as a base for their own letter. This will also help you concisely summarize your campaign and make it easy to understand. The endorser could also send a copy of this letter to the editor of the local paper to gain some media attention.

Having the endorsing person or organization sign onto a list of endorsers is also very helpful, and the longer this list is, the better. You can then use this list in a number of ways, from printing it in local newspapers, to sending it to the target of the campaign, to

showing it to other groups or individuals you ask to endorse your campaign. A list that contains a diverse and broad range of individuals and organizations shows the target that your position is widely and deeply felt by all kinds of people, and in turn gives your organization and your campaign more power and credibility. No matter what form the endorsement takes, it is essential to always have specific actions that the group or individual can do to aid to the campaign.

What happens after the endorsement?

Let endorsing groups and organizations know that an endorsement is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of involvement. They can do many other things such as: pass the information on, write letters to the editor, and get other people to take action in the campaign in some way. Keep endorsers involved throughout the duration of your campaign. It is also important to have a steady flow of endorsements throughout the entire campaign. A large number of them at the beginning is good, but you must also continue to seek them and get more people involved during the whole campaign.

Follow up

Once you receive confirmation of an endorsement from an individual or a group, make sure that you send them a thank you note of some sort. Also, make sure to keep them involved in the rest of the campaign. The people who endorse will likely also be the people who will come to a turnout event or offer meeting spaces or resources for example. Finally, keep all of your lists of endorsers for future campaigns that they might want to be involved in. Have fun and good luck!

How to Organize a Living Wage Campaign

What is a living wage?

A living wage is an hourly wage sufficient to support bare-bones living expenses for a worker and the worker's family.

Many full-time workers in Virginia and throughout the country are not paid enough to make ends meet. For example, the minimum wage is $5.15 per hour. Working 52 weeks a year, a full-time minimum-wage worker earns $10,712. Yet a single adult needs an annual average of $16,549 ($7.96 an hour) without employer-paid health benefits and $14,196 ($7.00 an hour) with health benefits to cover bare-bones living expenses, according to a 2001 study published in Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies that Work for All of Us. One out of four workers in the United States earns less than $8.00 an hour.

The typical minimum wage worker is not a teenager living at home with parents, but an adult woman. Two-thirds of minimum wage workers are over the age of 20. Almost half are over the age of 25.

Families need more earnings than single adults to support themselves. Two working adults with two children, for example, need an annual average of $35,637 without employer-paid health benefits and $30,812 with health benefits. The minimum living expense budget used in the Raise the Floor study covers only housing, health care, food and household supplies, child care, utilities, transportation and taxes. Other expenses many people take for granted, like birthday presents, books, vacations, movies, piano lessons, charitable contributions, or saving for college expenses or retirement are not included.

For a family of four to earn enough to meet basic expenses, each wage-earner in a two-wage earner family would need to make at least $8.56 per hour working full-time 52 weeks a year. If one adult stays home to take care of young children, thus saving on child care expenses, the other adult would need to make $28,087, or $13.50 an hour without health benefits. With health benefits, the family would need at least $22,262, or $10.70 an hour. A single parent with one child needs to make $28,796 without health care benefits or $23,179 with benefits. That's $13.84 per hour, or $11.14 per hour, respectively.

The Virginia Organizing Project believes that any person working full time should not have to live in poverty. There is dignity in working to support oneself and one's family. Employers need to understand that if a job is worth doing, then it should provide the worker a sufficient wage to pay for the necessities of life.

Why don't all full-time workers make a living wage?

That's what we'd like to know. Corporate profits have increased by 64 percent and worker productivity increased 74.2 percent since 1968. However, hourly wages decreased by 3 percent in the same time period.

Making sure that all workers earn a living wage not only benefits low-income workers and their families, it benefits the entire economy. Studies show that workers who are able to meet their basic living expenses are more stable and productive than workers under financial stress. If workers are hungry because they gave the last of their food to their children for breakfast, then these workers are less likely to be able to focus on getting their jobs done. If workers are worried about where they will find another place to live every time they face a rent increase, then they are less able to improve the quality and efficiency of the work they are doing. Companies that pay living wages are just as profitable, if not more so, that those that do not. They also experience less turnover in their workforce and lower recruitment and training costs as a result.

Workers who can pay for their own family living expenses rely less on government and private social service programs to fill the gaps. Taxpayers subsidize employers who do not pay living wages to their workers through public housing subsidies, childcare subsidies, food stamps, Medicaid and a host of other emergency services. Non-profit organizations are stretched to the limit to provide food banks, homeless shelters, fuel assistance, child care and health care services to full-time working families unable to cover all of these necessities themselves.

Work paid for with tax dollars needs to pay a living wage

Private employers who do not pay a living wage impose the costs of not providing for basic necessities for their workers onto other taxpayers. One would expect that public employers, such as local governments, school districts and public universities, who pay their workers with public tax revenues, would at least pay their own workers a living wage. However, this often isn't the case.

Public employees — school cafeteria workers, teacher's aides, data entry personnel, clerks, custodians, parking attendants, groundskeepers — are just some of the types of workers paid less than a living wage with our tax dollars in many Virginia communities. In many localities, workers making less than a living wage are directly on the payroll of local governments, school districts and public universities. In other cases, governments, school districts and public universities sign contracts with private companies to provide some of these workers. This process is called "contracting out," and the workers who perform public services under government contracts with private companies are called "contract workers."

Local governments, school boards and public universities often sign contracts with private companies who do not pay their workers a living wage for the work they perform that is paid for with our tax dollars. Private companies make a profit from these contracts, or they wouldn't even bid on them. However, when the private profit comes at the

expense of paying a living wage to the workers, taxpayers shoulder the burden of paying for public services for basic living expenses these workers need but cannot afford.

What taxpayers can do to make sure that public workers are paid a living wage

Alexandria was the first city in Virginia to pass a living wage ordinance, which covers all city employees and contract workers. The Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee, a VOP affiliate, organized a coalition of community groups, churches and unions in Alexandria to approach the city council with a living wage ordinance. They built strong public support to see the measure through. Then a coalition in Charlottesville convinced the city council first to raise all of its direct employees to a living wage, and then to pass an ordinance covering city contract workers. Pressure from employees, students and community groups moved the University of Virginia to raise the lowest wages for direct employees from $6.15 to $8.65 an hour, and efforts are underway to cover the University's contract workers.

Successful living wage campaigns have a ripple effect. Albemarle County, just outside Charlottesville, raised its direct employees to a living wage shortly after Charlottesville did. The Albemarle County School Board is now working to raise all of its employees to a living wage, even in the face of difficult cuts in state revenue to local school districts.

Students, faculty, staff and community members successfully organized to raise the wages of 290 low-wage workers at the College of William and Mary; nearby James City County raised all of its direct employees to a living wage as well.

In Richmond, the school board and the city raised their direct employees to a living wage, and the Richmond Living Wage Coalition is now working to get contract workers to a living wage as well. Students at James Madison University in Harrisonburg and Virginia Tech in Blacksburg are beginning efforts to raise all workers to a living wage at those institutions, too.

Basic steps to organizing a living wage campaign

1. Do a little research first.
    1. Ask local government officials (town, city, county, school district) how much workers are paid in all job categories. Find out what contract workers are paid.
    2. If your community has a public university or community college, ask the chief financial officer how much the lowest wage direct employees and contract workers get paid.
    3. Find out what local private employers pay their hourly workers in various job categories.
    4. Calculate a living wage for the local area you live in. (See accompanying article in this issue, or use an average figure from Raise the Floor.)
    5. Compare your local living wage figure to the lowest wages paid by your local government, school district, colleges, private employers, etc. If your

living wage figure is higher than what employers are paying, start a campaign.

2. Build organizational support for living wages in your community.

   Contact other community groups, religious congregations, unions and student groups in the area and ask for support in establishing a living wage for the employer you've targeted. Ask these groups to endorse the campaign and make commitments to generate letters to the editor, phone calls, e-mails and petitions throughout the campaign.

3. Develop a strategy.
    1. Decide which employer to start with

       getting the local government or school board to establish a living wage for its own employees is usually easier to start with than a private employer. The rationale is that taxpayer dollars should not pay poverty wages, and as taxpayers, we all have a say in the matter. Public workers are our employees.

       Be strategic in your decision about which employer to start with. For example, if the school board employees 100 workers below a living wage, and the county government only 15 workers below a living wage, more workers would benefit if the school board raised their wages first. However, it might be easier to get the county government to do it first because fewer workers affected means lower over-all costs in moving their wages up.

       You may find that all direct public employees are paid a living wage, but that contract workers are not. Then it makes sense to work on an ordinance for contract workers.

    2. Identify who has the power to make the decision to enact a living wage.

       For example, if you want to raise the wages of direct city employees, and wage levels are set by the city council in an annual budget process, then you need to get the city council to vote favorably on it. If the city council has seven members, you need to get at least four council members to vote in favor of establishing a living wage.

4. Take action and keep the pressure on.
    1. Develop a one-page flyer that clearly states your first goal and asks people to take specific action. For example, include the names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and fax numbers of all city council members on the flyer, asking people to contact or visit them and voice their support for a living wage.

2. Keep a steady stream of letters to the editor, phone calls, e-mails, etc. going in to your decision-makers. Two letters a week for 10 weeks is better than 20 letters the first week and nothing the next several weeks.
3. Turn out people from a broad spectrum of your community to speak in favor of a living wage in public forums – for example, public comment periods at city council meetings. Schedule rallies, media events and other activities to show public support for a living wage in your community. Publicly praise employers in your community who already pay all their workers a living wage; ask top management to speak out about the benefits of paying a living wage from an employer's point of view.
4. Wait until you have built broad community support for a living wage before asking a decision-making body, like the city council, to vote on it. Hold individual meetings with council members to get their support before a vote is taken.
5. Be patient but persistent. If the idea of a living wage is totally new in your community, it could take many months to build enough public support to convince local officials to take the first step. Don't give up, but pace yourselves as well. A steady flow of letters, calls, public events, and media coverage is needed. Be creative and have fun.

Helpful resources: http://www.livingwagecampaign. org; ttp://www.raisethefloor.org.

How to research land/property records

At some point in your organizing, you may need to know how to research land and property records. Whether you're looking for who owns a certain piece of property, who has owned it in the past, how much it was bought and sold for, how it was paid for, or when these transactions occurred, you can find all this information and more in land and property records.

This type of research may seem complicated initially, but once you learn the basics, you will be able to find records any time you need them. Hopefully this Organizing Toolbox will help you gain a general understanding and offer you some hints for where and how to efficiently find the information you are searching for in land and property records.

Where to start

The first step to finding your desired land record is knowing where to look.

Some people use land records to do genealogical or historical research. If you are doing genealogical research or looking for very old land records dated before the Civil War, check with the Library of Virginia, which holds most of the existing pre-1865 records in the state.

If you have web access, the site: www.lva.lib.va.us/collect/localrecs/locrecs-listing.htm will give you a listing of the records that they have available for each locality. You can also call the Library of Virginia at (804) 692-3500.

Otherwise, the majority of your research can most likely be done at the local level. In Virginia, every locality's Clerk of the Circuit Court should oversee the records for that jurisdiction (or at least direct you to where they are kept).

To get started, simply call the Circuit Court Clerk and ask where the land records are stored. For a listing of each jurisdiction's Circuit Court Clerk, their office hours and phone numbers, go to www.courts.state.va.us/courts/ courts.html. Once you learn where the records are held, find some paper and something to write with and head over to the records room to get started. Also, remember that all these records are public unless they can prove otherwise.

Once you're in the records room

One of the most important things to do when you start researching land records is to get to know the people who work as staff in the records room. Most records rooms consist mainly of walls of books (which contain the information you're looking for), and the key is finding which one to look in. The staff can make your research much easier by helping you get started, directing you to what you are looking for or at least pointing you in the right direction. The staff person can also explain to you the system they use in their specific records room.

You must start your research with a good idea of either the address or the name of the owner of the property you are researching. Most systems in records rooms (computerized or not) will ask you to search for the property by: owner, house number, street name, parcel ID, or another designation. The entry you find for the piece of property you are researching will likely contain information such as: date the record was last updated, sale date, sale type, the deed book number, the deed page, etc.

The key pieces of information here will be the deed book number and the deed page (often called book and page). The book number will tell you which of the books on the walls contains the record you are researching, and the page number will coincide with the pages in that book.

The most common type of information you will find will be a deed of some sort. Deeds will tell you the information you are searching for, such as: the names of the grantor (seller) and grantee (buyer), their addresses, a description of what is being sold, the amount of money paid, the location of the property, the property's boundaries and any limitations on the property being sold. You will also find any other documents connected to the property such as loan or regulatory agreements. Finally, the deed you find will also reference you to other deed books and pages for more information about the property.

Two other things are important to know about: grantor books and grantee books. Every records room should have these two types of books, which are categorized by the name of the buyer or the seller of the property. These books are also categorized by date and letter of the alphabet (A-G for 1990-Present, for example).

The last names are alphabetized down the left side of each page. Across the top you will find listings for: grantor, grantee, deed book, deed page, recorded date and property description. If you know the name of the individual or company who bought or sold the property you are researching, and the time the transaction occurred, these books are probably the best tools for finding the land record.

Make copies

Land records usually take up most of the space in these rooms, but most likely there are many other kinds of records stored there as well. Other sources of information you will find in most record rooms include: plat books (showing maps of pieces of property in the area), wills (held in books similar to deed books), documents about charters, documents for partnerships, marriage documents, financing statements and various judgments of the court. As with land records, the records room staff people will be able to inform you of how to research these documents.

Conclusion

This Organizing Toolbox provides you with a good start on how to do land record research. Once you begin researching records you will find it interesting, relatively easy and hopefully beneficial to your work. Good luck.

Tips on Talking with Your Legislators

Be personal.

Tell how your concerns about a piece of legislation relate to your personal situation, your neighbors or people you know. Also, let them know quickly if you live in his/her legislative district.

Let them know you are part of an organizational effort.

Effective groups can get a lot done and most legislators pay more attention to strong organizations than they do one or two individuals.

Do some homework.

Try to know the basics of the legislation you are talking about; think about what points you want to make; think about what arguments are probably going to be brought up against your point of view. Connect the talking points of your issue to your personal story.

Be focused.

Stay on the subject you're concerned about. Don't stray, and don't let the legislator change the subject. Be polite, but firm!

Don't be argumentative.

Even if it would make you feel good, little is gained by badgering a legislator or getting into a verbal fight. Persuasion is the key — firmly press home your points and your needs, reminding the legislator how it personally affects you.

Don't be defensive.

Legislators may make some critical remarks about your position or ask some tough questions. Give them solid information on your position to make your points more credible. Keep in mind that the legislative process often involves compromises, but you always have a right to be part of the process. Your situation and your needs are important. That attitude will keep you stating those needs and problems firmly, not defensively.

Don't stay too long, don't be rude or threatening, don't make an enemy.

You need to establish a long-term relationship with the legislator. Even if you disagree on an issue, you may find that he/she will work with you on another issue later.

Get a commitment.

The goal is to enlist the legislator's support, so be specific. "Will you vote for this bill in committee?" "Will you help us keep the stronger sections in the bill when it gets to the Senate floor?" Ask the question directly and try to get a direct answer!

Be optimistic and upbeat.

Legislators are quick to pick up the personal energy that goes with citizen lobbying efforts.

Follow up promptly.

Send a thank you note and anything else you promised to send.