

low one of the examples in structuring new guides. A brief handout given to the writers showed contrasting pairs of good and bad sentences in an attempt to illustrate a friendly, informal writing style. Since that time quality has been improved by the formation of an Editorial Board. The Editorial Board provides assistance to writers and assures a uniform standard of quality in the publications.

All of these changes helped to create a series of guides that are readable and useful while reinforcing the image of the library as helpful. This is not to

say that the job is complete, however. Each year, as guides are considered for revision, new ways are found to improve their helpfulness to readers. Those of us who write guides have found that, by reading guides prepared by various staff members, we have enhanced our abilities to improve on texts written in the past. Writing library guides is an art that will improve with practice.

Library guides prepared by the University of Houston-University Park Libraries are available through the LOEX Clearinghouse. ■ ■

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## Fund raising by direct mail

By Eileen A. Curtis

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### *Some suggestions on increasing the effectiveness of your fund raising efforts.*

**T**he use of direct mail to raise funds has proven successful for many organizations. Librarians around the country have used various forms of direct mail to make patrons aware of upcoming elections that will affect funding, to introduce new services, and to raise additional funds.

Direct mail is an approach to fund raising that must be carefully planned. A successful program is based upon many components, only one of which is the actual letter sent to a prospective donor. The use of direct mail to raise funds should be considered a part of ongoing fund-raising efforts. Dramatic results should not be expected immediately from a mailing, but averaged over a course of at least three years as the donor base expands.

To receive a greater response to your appeal prospective donors must first be made aware of the reasons for giving to the library over other organi-

zations requesting money. Donors must be informed of the activities of the library and the benefits that people receive before they will consider giving. Any fund raising campaign should be preceded by publicity on the organization telling why money is being raised. A donor that is informed on the activities of the library is more inclined to give when he/she receives a request through the mail than one who is unaware of the reasons behind the gift solicitation.

The average age of a donor is declining as more discretionary income is available to younger people. The main source of donations has been from people over the age of forty. These donors usually make larger and more frequent gifts to organizations. The library has a broad base of donors due to the diversified ages of the patrons. Donors can be segmented into groups by age, zip code area, pro-

gram interest and/or prior giving level. You may want to ask your library patrons to fill out a brief questionnaire giving basic statistics such as age, marital status, family size, reading interests, frequency of visits, etc. Use this information to develop the materials targeted toward specific groups.

Once the donor group has been identified you

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## *The first two paragraphs are the most important.*

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can design your direct mail piece. One basic piece can be developed and then adapted to fit the donor profile.

The four main components of a direct mail piece are:

- the letter requesting the donation;
- the mailing envelope;
- the response card; and
- a brochure about the library.

**The letter.** The letter seeking a donation must be creative. When writing the letter, keep in mind:

- to whom you are writing;
- what needs/special interests of the donor will be met when giving to the library;
- why the library is requesting money;
- and specifically how the donor can help.

The first two paragraphs of the letter are the most important. In the opening paragraph state who you are and why you are writing. The second paragraph should focus on familiarizing the donor with the organization.

The next paragraph should give some history of the library, what program the funds are being solicited for, and specifically how they will be used.

The fourth paragraph should tell the donors how they can help. Ask for a specific amount and repeat this request several times in the letter. You may wish to give the donor a choice on the level of contribution (\$10-\$75-\$200). Libraries have tested sending two different letters to different groups of donors, one asking for a specific amount and the other with an option on the level of participation. Remember to record the results to determine which received the largest dollar response if you try this method.

The content of any fund-raising letter should be changed as the organization grows and objectives change. The dollar amount requested will also vary depending on the needs of the project or program. Donors want to know that their dollars aided in the completion of projects. Use examples of completed projects in your letter to illustrate how dollars donated in the past helped the library.

The letter should be signed by the director, a board member, or a peer of the donor. Letters sent to business owners would receive a better response if signed by a local businessman who supports library programs. A letter sent to alumni might generate more funds if it were signed by the alumni association president.

After the signature, the donor will most likely read the postscript (P.S.) to a letter. The purpose of the letter should be briefly restated in the P.S. As a test of the effectiveness of your P.S., you may wish to offer an alternative way to donate. Tabulate the responses to this option to determine if the method should be used again.

**The mailing envelope.** The envelope that contains the request for funds is the first thing the donor will see. It is necessary to make the envelope appear to be a personal letter to ensure that it is not part of the 10% of bulk mail that is thrown away unopened. The envelope should be a standard #10 business envelope. If possible, run the envelope through your library's postage meter using the bulk rate charge. A bulk rate indicia printed on the envelope may be a time saver, but it may also reduce the chances of having the envelope opened.

**The response card.** While an appeal for funds relies heavily on the text of the letter, the response card provides the donor with the method to designate their gift. Response cards that are printed in a certificate or coupon format aid the donors in feeling that they are giving something special to the library.

**The return envelope.** A return envelope (postage paid) is a must. When a donor has written the check it is essential that sending it be as simple as possible. The size of the return envelope should coordinate with the response card.

**The brochure.** A brochure giving more information on the library is helpful, but not always necessary. If you feel that more background on the fund-raising project is required, then it should be included. The brochure should highlight the services the library performs and supplement the text of the letter.

Mailing lists can be developed, borrowed, and/or bought. Former and present donors, staff, board members, volunteers, and individuals affiliated with the library should be included on the mailing list. The first mailing done by a library may result in a minimum response. The primary purpose of an initial mailing is to build a donor mailing list base. Second and third mailings to the same list of donors may receive a greater response.

Lists of 500 or fewer names can be maintained on 3x5 cards in-house. The card may also provide a place to keep a brief donor profile. Lists of over 500 names are more easily managed on a computer. This provides more flexibility in changing addresses, etc.

When mailing your appeal for funds have one piece sent directly to the library or a staff member who will let you know when it has arrived. Librari-

ans have waited patiently to receive a response to their appeal only to find that it was lost in the mail or delivered three weeks later than they had originally anticipated.

January, February, August and October have proven to be the best months to mail a request for funds. It is beneficial to check with other organizations in your area to make certain that the same targeted group of people will not be receiving requests for funds at the same time.

All gifts should be acknowledged with a signed letter thanking the donors for their support. Telephone calls to donors that have not responded have proven successful in generating more funds. The donor feels that he/she has been singled out and is receiving special attention. The phone call reinforces the direct mail piece and provides the donor with one-on-one contact.

The areas noted are the basics necessary for a successful direct mail campaign. New ideas can be adapted to fit different situations and types of requests for funds. You may receive a few complaints about a direct mail effort, but don't be swayed by a few negative comments. Respond to people who have expressed concern over the mailing with an explanation of your purpose. Tabulate the results of your mailing effort in dollars before judging the mailing by a few negative replies.

### How to get ideas for direct mail materials

Get on the mailing lists of other charitable organizations to obtain their mailings requesting funds.

Give \$5 to diversified non-profit organizations to get their response materials and future mailings.

Read books on marketing to gain insights on why people spend money.

Talk to professionals in the direct mail field. Ask their assistance in preparing the piece or to critique your work.

Offer to exchange your materials with librarians from other states. Adapt these ideas to use for your own targeted donor group.

Ask volunteers, family members, etc., to pass along requests for funds that they have received through the mail. Ask them to comment on their reactions to the material; would they consider donating, and if so why.

### Postage rate increases

Before beginning any direct mail effort you should contact the local post office to obtain the necessary bulk rate permits, regulations, and rates. You will also want to keep abreast of any rate increases, as the cost of sending the letter is a major expense for a direct mail fund-raising campaign.

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## Academic library statistics collected

The ACRL Ad Hoc Task Force on Library Statistics was established in the late fall of 1982 "to define the statistical needs of academic libraries; to examine whether or how those needs are not currently being met; to suggest ways ACRL could aid academic librarians and the profession by generating and/or disseminating these statistics and the concomitant costs of each."

The Task Force addressed the above purpose by surveying agencies which now collect academic library statistics and by surveying the libraries on the ACRL 100 Library Project list. Actually 132 copies of a survey questionnaire were mailed, with 108 returns on schedule. The survey addressed a number of important questions including what statistics were most important.

The most significant response was that librarians wanted statistical information for the past year during the following year. Thus, the Task Force mailed out a statistics questionnaire to the ACRL

100 libraries on September 15 for return by October 15. Current plans are to have the resulting publication of 1983-84 statistics sent to the ACRL 100 libraries by early spring 1985. Additional copies will be made available at a nominal cost to other libraries.

If this test proves worthwhile, we hope to do the statistical survey of all academic libraries in the fall of 1985 and produce a publication by spring 1986 for the 1984-85 statistics.

The Task Force has also maintained constant communication with the ALA Office for Research and a representative of the Library Administration and Management Association of ALA.

Any questions regarding this activity should be addressed to George M. Bailey, 2129 Villa Maria Road, Claremont, CA 91711; (714) 621-8000, ext. 3723.—George M. Bailey, Chair, ACRL Task Force on Library Statistics. ■■