

- This article is featured in the 2011 Summer issue of FundLine -  
The official newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter  
of the Association of Fundraising Professionals

**Education Corner**

**Do You Have Enough Donors for Your Campaign?**

By Jennifer Filla, Aspire Research Group

As fundraisers we are all part of a campaign at one time or another. Whether you need \$1 million for a new program or \$5 billion for a comprehensive campaign, you will need to find and prioritize your prospects. And leadership always asks lots of tough questions such as:

- Do we have enough donors to support our campaign?
- How many donors will need to come from outside our donor database?
- Which donor prospects should we focus on first?

Like many of you, I have been around the development table when the campaign is nearing an end and the pressure is on to find those last few donors who can bring in the final dollars, which by that time are usually needed for a specific program or to meet a matching gift – a difficult and stressful task. These kinds of scenarios might be avoided by involving the prospect researcher in the planning stage - and of course discipline in executing your campaign plan and a bit of good luck never hurt!

**The Prospect Research Gift Pyramid**

Once there is an idea about what the campaign goal is going to be, research can begin creating the gift pyramid. But the prospect researcher’s gift pyramid should contain at least one extra column: the number of prospects identified.

*Gift Pyramid for \$5 Million Goal*

Gift Range	No. Gifts Required	# Prospects Required	# Prospects Identified	Subtotal	Cumulative Total	Cumulative Percentage
\$500,000	1	4	2	\$500,000	\$500,000	10%
\$250,000	2	8	6	\$500,000	\$1,000,000	20%
\$143,000	5	20	15	\$715,000	\$1,715,000	34%
\$107,000	5	20	10	\$535,000	\$2,250,000	45%
\$72,000	5	20	18	\$360,000	\$2,610,000	52%
\$50,000	10	40	42	\$500,000	\$3,110,000	62%
\$36,000	12	48	37	\$432,000	\$3,542,000	71%
\$15,000	12	48	45	\$180,000	\$3,722,000	74%
\$7,000	15	60	100	\$105,000	\$3,827,000	77%
Under \$7,000	335	1340	1500	\$1,173,000	\$5,000,000	100%

(Note: I started with Blackbaud’s Gift Range Calculator, found at [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com) under Nonprofit Resources. It is assuming four prospects to reach one gift. Your ratio may be higher or lower.)

Directly underneath the gift pyramid or in a separate report should be the name of each prospect identified from your database that represents the number in the gift pyramid.

Gift Amount: \$500,000			
Name	Gift Amount	Staff Assigned	Solicitor Assigned
Wanda Wealthy	\$500,000	Bat Man	Wonder Woman
Mindy Money	\$500,000	Bat Man	

That was easy, wasn't it? Now you know exactly who you should approach for all the gifts you need to complete the campaign. Prospect research really is like planting magical beans, isn't it? Except when the prospects identified column is less than the prospects required column.

### ***Finding Your Best Donor Prospects***

If fundraising were really that easy it would be automated and many of us would be out of a job! Identifying the donor prospects to populate your pyramid is anything but black-and-white. There are a number of common stumbling blocks, including:

- A dirty database full of duplicate records, incomplete/inaccurate information, or inconsistent data entry
- Limited donor information, such as fewer than five years or recording only gifts
- The need to maintain unrestricted annual fund gifts through the campaign
- Inadequate infrastructure such as no staff to maintain data, staff who need more training, or database functions that are too limited

If these are big problems for you, fixing them will need to be part of the campaign planning. Why? The donor prospects who will lead your campaign to victory are in your database!

Usually we already know our very best prospects. They are our biggest donors and closest friends, often our trustees and former trustees. Finding new major gift prospects is typically done through a combination of wealth screening and data mining.

### ***Rating Your Prospects***

Whether you rely upon the ratings provided by an outside vendor or methodically combine vendor ratings to create your own in-house rating, having some kind of rating system will make your (fundraising) life easier and help you identify and track prospects throughout your campaign. Sounds good, right? It is!

The best major gift prospects have wealth and give it away, preferably to your organization. Wealth screenings take your donor data and match individuals to indicators of wealth (items like real estate, stock, and giving), returning both the wealth information and a rating to you.

Data mining looks at the information inside your database to find patterns that suggest likelihood to give to your organization. There are vendors that offer sophisticated, statistical data modeling solutions. You can also mine your own data. If you are a small shop you might choose to use vendor ratings only. A larger shop expecting many campaigns in the future might want to consider having a staff member trained in data analytics.

Combining wealth with likelihood to give to your organization provides powerful insight into your donor pool. It is the best way to fill your campaign pyramid with strong prospects. And you will likely find yourself applying the information to other areas like your annual fund. Now, that *is* good.

### ***Yikes! We Don't Have Enough Prospects!***

But what if the result of all that powerful insight leads you to discover that don't have a name for everyone in that "number of prospects required" column? This does not mean your campaign won't be successful. If your required vs. identified numbers are severely unbalanced, campaign leadership has the opportunity to review the goal against the existing prospect list and make informed decisions – long before it is a public affair.

If there are just a few gaps, it means the campaign team needs to be diligent at sourcing prospects from outside the donor database. Leadership donors give to their personal limits because of their passion for your organization's mission. That passion can be guided into identifying new prospects.

Peer screening can be used effectively on an existing donor pool but works really well at identifying new prospects too. Prospect research staff can help identify the key networkers in your database as well as provide a list of key philanthropists the organization would love to reach. Between the networkers' own ideas and a provided idea list, some seriously good prospects can be found. Organizing peer screening meetings in the quiet phase of a campaign ensures there is time to connect, cultivate, and ask these new friends.

***The Prospect Research Advantage***

Involving prospect research in the planning of your campaign provides you with three main benefits:

1. Leadership has the data it needs to make informed, strategic decisions
2. The process and planning for prospecting that will be needed throughout the campaign gets a solid test run, long before it becomes critical
3. New prospects to the organization can be identified earlier, leaving more time to connect, cultivate, and solicit them

Whether you are planning a campaign or already have a campaign underway, prospect research gives you the information advantage over other organizations that are not using it. You know your needs, your prospects and how to cover the gaps. With prospect research, you reach your fundraising goals!

If you like what you just read and want to learn more, hear Jennifer speak on September 28. Check out the upcoming events listing for more details.

***About Jennifer Filla*** - *A long time ago in a far-away career, Jen got hooked on research as a legal secretary. Now she operates Aspire Research Group out of Florida providing prospect research services to organizations across the country. She is currently president of the Association of Professional Researchers for Advancement (APRA), Florida chapter, and a trustee of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), Suncoast Chapter. You can find her at [www.AspireResearchGroup.com](http://www.AspireResearchGroup.com).*

~~~~~  
Association of Fundraising Professionals  
Greater Philadelphia Chapter  
T: 215-473-2261  
F: 215-477-1109  
4520 City Avenue, Suite 301, Philadelphia, PA 19131  
E: [chapter@afpgpc.org](mailto:chapter@afpgpc.org)  
W: [www.afpgpc.org](http://www.afpgpc.org)

*Educating Fundraising Professionals since 1968*