

6 STEPS

FOR A SUCCESSFUL YEAR-END GIVING CAMPAIGN

Year-end giving can be a potential gold mine for your land trust if you can dedicate some time to organize a focused six-week, multi-channel campaign. The following tips can help you upgrade an existing effort or create a new one. Download a companion calendar to keep you on track at www.lta.org/savingland/yearendcalendar.

1. Set a goal, create a campaign theme, think multi-channel giving.

• **Set a realistic goal.** Because end-of-year gifts are above and beyond regular donations, you won't hear back from everyone. But the spirit of the season is in your favor. We know that Americans make charitable donations around the holidays. Set specific monetary and donor (number of people) goals.

• **Compile 10 compelling stories with photos.** Write stories of two to three paragraphs about the impact your organization is making on your community. Talk about the benefits of land conservation, i.e., clean air, safe food, recreation and better health. Photos of happy people having happy times are the most effective. These stories will be the basis for your letters and email solicitations (10 in all, see calendar).

• **Think multi-channel.** Using multiple channels—email, direct mail, phone calls, Facebook and Twitter—will bring in more money than relying on one channel alone.

Coordinate any direct mail with an online campaign that reinforces the message by using your website, e-newsletter and social media. Mention your website donation page in the direct mail piece and vice versa. If you can't afford to do a direct mail piece, mention the campaign on your website, on social media and in any newsletters that go out before December 31.

2. Clean up your lists.

• **Segment your mailing list.** Copy your existing mailing list, including lapsed members, and make a new list titled "2013 End-of-Year Mailing." Color-code everyone who has already pledged and set that list aside as you won't be soliciting them for end-of-year gifts. Go through the rest of the mailing list, and with a different color mark everyone who has given more than \$250 in the past three years. Call these people DONORS, take them off the year-end mailing list and put them in a special DONOR list. These people need to be solicited in person (discussed below).

• **Personalize your email list.** Look at your email list and determine how many first and last names are associated with your email addresses so that you can personalize any solicitation. See if you can add more names to the personalized list. If you don't have a name, use "Dear Friend," but try to keep these to a minimum. If you need advice about which email broadcast tool to use, Idealware has done the research for you (see Resources).

• **Clean up your lists.** Look for duplicates but make sure you copy information into the appropriate record before deleting any addresses. Purge the hard bounces (emails rejected by the recipient's mail server) from your email list.

3. Take online gifts. Create a "Donate Now" button.

• **Make sure your website can receive online gifts.** Use Donate Now, Network for Good, PayPal or other service. Idealware has a great blog post about various online donation services (see Resources). Test your donation page before starting your campaign. Also in the Resources box is a link to Network for Good's post about getting the most out of your donation page.

• **Put a "Donate Now" button on your home page.** Can visitors easily find where to click to donate? Make the button red or green and make it big so it's easy to see.

- **But remember...**Not everyone wants to donate online. Nearly 80% of all donations are still checks, so put your organization's address on all correspondence and prominently on your website. Include a reply envelope in your direct mail piece.

4. Create compelling letters and set up a weekly countdown.

- **Write your first appeal letter today.** Include one story, a compelling quote and some amazing statistics from this year. Longer letters—two to four pages—work better according to fundraising authorities. If you send a direct mail piece, plan a day for volunteers or staff to personalize the letters to create a connection with the potential donor.

- **Draw them in.** Show your donors why your work is important to them and why they should care. Ask them to contribute in the first line of the second or third paragraph. Tell them what land conservation has done for the community in the past year and what your plans are for the coming year. Show how their gifts can make a difference. Use a photo that illustrates an important project completed this year. Tell your supporters that the tax deductibility deadline is near and ask them again to make a gift in the last paragraph. Create a deadline.

- **Show the progress of your appeal.** Your website's home page is the best place to keep a daily record of your campaign's progress using a thermometer or other graphic. Telling potential donors how well you are doing will be especially helpful if you make a second email or direct mail push to ask people to help you to get over the top. Make sure you publish your list of all year-end donations soon after the end of the appeal. You can post on your website, or in the next issue of your newsletter. Organize your list based on giving levels, not alphabetically.

5. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

- **Write a thank-you letter now.** Everyone who gives a gift, whether by check or online, should receive a paper thank-you letter. Assign a volunteer to send out thank-you letters once a week during the last six weeks of the year. Online donors should receive an immediate thank you from the system to confirm the gift went through.

- **Tweet about it.** Once they have made a donation, make it easy for donors to tweet about it or post to their

Facebook page through links on your "Thank You" page, which could encourage their friends to donate.

- **Send handwritten thank-you cards to the DONOR list and make appointments.** Send thank-you cards during Thanksgiving week and divide up the personal contacts among board members and key committee chairs. Start making appointments the Monday after Thanksgiving to discuss the year-end campaign with these, your most invested friends, and ask them to make a year-end gift. Your most important donors should not get a letter or an e-blast. They need to be contacted in person.

6. Don't take Christmas week off!

- **Make sure your office is open between Christmas and New Year's.** If no one is in your office, answering the phone and opening the mail—and making bank deposits—you will miss out! Email gifts will come in at the very last minute, so automating thank-you letters is a good idea. The IRS permits mailed gifts that are postmarked by December 31 to be considered in that tax year. Make sure you communicate this to your accountant and date the thank-you letter appropriately. See IRS Publication 526 for more information on delivery issues for donations.

- **Celebrate!** If you are conducting the fundraising campaign entirely with online and social media tools, publicize the results the week after New Year's. Send a note or newsletter to your entire list. This may attract some additional donations at the start of the new year. Take a few days to recover, and start the year knowing that you've got a good cushion for 2014 from your year-end fundraising efforts. 🍀

DONNA ANN HARRIS IS THE PRINCIPAL OF HERITAGE CONSULTING, INC., A PHILADELPHIA-BASED CONSULTING FIRM THAT WORKS NATIONWIDE IN THREE PRACTICE AREAS: DOWNTOWN AND COMMERCIAL DISTRICT REVITALIZATION, HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. CONTACT HER AT DONNA@HERITAGECONSULTINGINC.COM.

Resources

www.idealware.org/articles/fgt_email_newsletter_tools.php
www.idealware.org/articles/few-good-online-donations-tools
<http://tinyurl.com/k6a2Ujp> (about online donation page)

Go to www.lta.org/savingland/yearendcalendar to download a companion calendar with more detailed instructions for a year-end campaign.