

Annual Giving: Strategies to Increase Giving and Quality of Solicitation

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PART I

What strategies are you taking to increase gift levels and raise sights for current unrestricted gifts?

Stonehill College: Lisa Richards reports that their phonathon callers ask for increased annual gifts. She told us that this year was the first time they asked for a three-year annual fund pledge. They also focused on increased giving, especially with volunteers, during Reunion years.

Catholic University: The director of annual giving, Mark Roberts, advises us that CUA is launching a leadership annual giving society in FY2011. The mission statement is: “The John Keane Society will inspire alumni, parents, and friends to make annual investments in The Catholic University of America. Members of the Keane Society lead by example and contribute to the highest priorities of the University’s strategic plan to promote excellence in undergraduate education and campus life, strengthen our graduate and professional programs, and advance our reputation as the national university of the Catholic Church in the United States.”

According to Roberts, alumni, parents, and friends who contribute more than \$1,000 in current-use gifts in a single fiscal year are considered members of the Keane Society. Gifts may be unrestricted to support the University’s greatest priorities, or designated to a school or department, athletics, campus ministry, the libraries, or another program. Matching gifts and soft credit count toward membership.

Widener University: Christen Conaway, the Director of the Widener Fund, tells us that increased giving has become one of Widener’s greatest challenges. She reports that they have a lot of alumni who generously give \$25, \$50 or \$100 year after year, but rarely increase their gifts, and sometimes even reduce them. One of their first goals, she states, is to make sure that they limit the number of donors who reduce their gifts as much as possible. She states that they use ask amounts that include the donor’s last gift amount, along with two increased ask amounts. Widener’s phonathon program also focuses on increased gifts amounts from donors.

Conaway reported that last year they also made calls to higher level donors that decreased their gifts. Some of these donors made a second gift in response to the call. This year fortunately, all but a few of Widener’s higher level alumni donors, according to Conaway, have renewed; if they hadn’t Conaway planned to call them as well.

Widener has also seen increased success by personalizing direct mail, email, and phone solicitations for particular segments in a way they haven’t in the past. They have more alumni volunteers signing letters to their peers, and have written letters to particular segments of the alumni base that focus on their unique personal experiences.

Conaway reports that educating the University's alumni has also been an invaluable tool. For example, for years many alumni were unaware that so few of their peers gave back to the university. As more has been done to educate alumni on the importance of their participation, many of them have stepped up to the plate and either renewed, increased their earlier support, or made a first time commitment.

Lastly, Conaway tells us that their most successful effort has involved personalized outreach to encourage them to get more engaged in the university. They have found that by reaching out to and getting to know our alumni, they are more willing to "step up" and support Widener. This has been particularly successful with recent graduates who, now that they feel they are "special," have begun making larger commitments.

Dartmouth College: Sylvia Racca, who serves as the Executive Director of The Dartmouth College Fund, took steps to hire staff who will solicit for gifts of \$50,000 through the Dartmouth College Fund Fellows Program. She advised us that they are creating a stewardship program for gifts at this level. They are not yet certain of its outcome as it is still a work in progress.

McQuaid Jesuit: Pamela White, Director of Development, reports: "[In] April/May we have focused on a direct mail piece, followed by a personal phone call and a follow up e-mail to lybunts, lapsed and sybunts. Our last push in June includes parent and alumni e-newsletters, email blasts, a post card and telephone calls."

Union College: Kate Potvin, Senior Director of Annual Giving tells us that Union created a effort focused on increasing the amount of unrestricted support by the Board of Trustees through an educational and personal solicitation campaign. They educated the Board about the importance of unrestricted giving and shared peer benchmarking data that showed the high amounts of unrestricted support by Boards at other institutions. Additionally, Potvin states that they challenged the board to double the amount of their unrestricted support in FY10. Through personal outreach conducted by members of the Board of Trustees as well as College Relations staff, Trustees increased their total amount of unrestricted support from 10% to 27% in one fiscal year.

Further, Union has produced a \$2K - \$200K unrestricted gift pyramid to track individuals (including trustees) who have given or can give at higher gift levels. They track progress on a weekly and monthly basis, including a month-by-month calendar of when gifts are expected. Continuous follow-up occurred with all development officers, including the VP, DOD and Director of Principal Gifts in order to ensure timely receipt of gifts. The number of gifts at the \$10K+ unrestricted levels has doubled from 10 donors to 20 donors.

Finally, a young alumni campaign, "Generation U," was developed that focused on educating all young alumni on the importance of unrestricted giving and utilized young alumni volunteers to solicit their peers for gifts at the different young alumni leadership gift levels. A Generation U alumni and student volunteer board works out strategies for engagement, events and fundraising. From their young alumni, they found that the donor number increased by 28% and the dollar number increased by 32%.

RIIT: Marisa Psailia, the Executive Director of 'The Fund for RIIT', tells us that they took the following steps to increase gift levels and raise sights for unrestricted gifts:

- **UPGRADE ASKS:** Telefund upgrades are part of every solicitation and targeted asks are used in mail appeals.
- **TARGETING ALUMNI EMPLOYED AT MATCHING GIFT COMPANIES:** We have found that targeting this group through the Telefund generates greater results and is an incentive for alumni to get involved with a gift. Special monthly reminders are also sent to those whose gift/pledge qualifies for a company match. Forms and/or information materials are included with pledge reminders. Personal gifts plus the match count towards membership in our leadership donor society. Additionally, we have begun holding gatherings for alumni employed by matching gift companies – reminding them about their company’s matching gift program and encouraging them to make a gift. Monthly events are planned for the coming year.
- **SEGMENTING ALUMNI WITH AN ANNUAL TARGET GIFT EVALUATION OF \$500+:** Alumni identified as having the capability to give \$500+ annually have been identified through a wealth screening. If assigned prospects, they are personally solicited by their staff manager. If unassigned, our leadership giving staff personally solicits as many as possible and encourages giving at \$1,000 or more. This group is also segmented in Telefund and mail appeals.
- **TARGETING DONORS FOR A SECOND GIFT:** Current year donors \$500-\$999 are targeted and solicited by mail and personal follow-up to increase their giving to the leadership gift level.
- **TARGETING ALUMNI WITH HIGH CREDIT CARD LIKELIHOOD:** Alumni more likely to make a gift by credit card are identified and put into a separate calling pool in Telefund – more than half of gifts from this group are on credit card.

PART II

How are you ensuring that each alumnus receives a quality verbal solicitation with the rapid increase of cell phones, reduced landline numbers, and the volatility and limited effectiveness of email and social networking vehicles?

Stonehill College: Lisa Richards advises us that their Phonathon has done very well, despite reduced landline numbers. Many people provide a phone number and do not indicate if it is home/cell, etc., so that number is used to call them even if it is a cell. Many donors only have a cell and prefer to be called that way.

Stonehill’s annual fund times their email blasts so that they are as effective as possible. They are finding that when they are trying to reach a certain goal, or close to year end and fiscal year end, people respond well to the chance to make a gift online.

Finally, their volunteers help reach out to as many alumni as possible. They found that if the volunteers call from home or send an email from their own personal email address, it helps increase the contact rate.

Catholic University: Mark Roberts devised a strategy designed to increase membership in the Keane Society by creating four regional donor networks, or “Leadership Networks,” in Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. The goal is to deepen relationships with donors who are already known in strategic regions, as well as to identify and engage new donors through focused, word-of-mouth networking.

A staff member will manage a volunteer committee in each Network. The committee is responsible for soliciting alumni, parents, and friends for gifts of \$1,000 or more through peer-to-peer networking, personal visits, and university-sponsored events.

Widener University: Christen Conaway tells us that Widener faces an increasingly difficult fundraising climate, as are most institutions. Again, they found that by engaging alumni on a more personal level, many of them are more willing to pick up the phone and call a peer, or shoot them a personal email.

Conaway thinks that as the telephone goes by the wayside, it is more important than ever to make sure that contacts with donors, verbal or nonverbal, are more meaningful. For Widener that means making thank you calls once a month. While it might sound silly and time consuming, Conaway believes it is vital for donors to feel they are special and that their support is appreciated.

Finally, Conaway reports that they have seen some interesting trends this year in which includes alumni who are willing to talk to students on the phone, but unwilling to pledge. However, a few weeks later these same donors make a gift via the mail. She is not sure if other schools are seeing similar trends, but thinks it’s interesting to note that alumni while giving over the phone may be less likely, it doesn’t necessarily mean that donors are less likely to give at all.

Dartmouth College: Sylvia Racca reports that they are, ironically, doing it the old fashioned way – with volunteers. They have the cell phone numbers, email addresses, instant message addresses. Dartmouth continues to focus their efforts on having peer-to-peer QVSs (Quality Verbal Solicitations).

Union College: Kate Potvin advises us that have increased personal visit and travel requirements for Annual Fund staff in an effort to increase personal outreach and solicitations among alumni and parents. This fiscal year, AF staff personally reached out to almost 700 individuals nationwide to solicit them for unrestricted support. In addition, AF staff began working with advancement research to create prospect portfolios to target alumni who have higher giving capacities but currently are not supporting the College.

Additionally, they collaborate with Alumni Relations to staff dozens of regional and campus events in an effort to create an increased Annual Fund presence and educate alumni about the importance of unrestricted support. To increase attendance at events, staff used email, LinkedIn, Facebook and other social media tools to advertise events. Targeted young alumni

events were developed and 100% donor participation was achieved at these events (gifts were separate from their registration fee).

They also recruited, trained and utilized 319 alumni volunteers to conduct 4,100 peer-to-peer solicitations throughout the fiscal year. Volunteers not only used email and phone for these solicitations, but attended events and used social networking tools to reach out to their peers. This has resulted in over \$1M in Annual Fund support.

Finally, they increased the effectiveness of the student calling program by creating targeted calling segments, better training and program processes. The number of specified pledges increased from 1,900 in FY09 to 2,500 in FY10, and giving increased by \$125,000. In addition to phone calls, students sent out email reminders and direct mail reminders.

RIT: Marisa Psailia tells us that while she would like all 100,000+ alumni to receive a personal solicitation – that’s just not possible. Connecting with potential donors requires integrating the message across communication channels and giving levels. This is especially true for the young alumni population (about 50% of RIT alumni graduated 1990 and after).

In recent focus groups and surveys, they learned that that young alumni give spontaneously, have a “what’s in it for me” mentality, like having an incentive for making a gift (e.g. t-shirt, magnet etc. or matching gift), prefer to hear from a fellow alumnus/a that they know and want events/activities exclusively for them. At RIT, annual donors can give to hundreds of different funds, not only unrestricted. Alumni know this, but want the university to tell them where the funds are needed most. More and more they are finding that it is not one but multiple outreach methods that are required to connect with alumni. Psailia describes her methodologies as follows:

- **TELEFUND:** Throughout the year, the Telefund student callers contact more than 20,000 alumni a year. Telefund operates year round, with seven shifts a week, including videophone calling for Deaf alumni and parents. In addition to a challenging daily calling routine, the Telefund makes calls for special fundraising efforts (e.g. a specific scholarship appeal for one of the colleges). The Telefund also sends regular pledge reminders at 30, 60 and 90 days by email and/or regular mail. Follow up calls are made by a student caller after a pledge has been open for 120 days. In addition we conduct “clean sweep” emails for outstanding prior fiscal year pledges to encourage year-end giving. While it is a challenge to keep up good addresses for recent grads who frequently move and do not have landlines, the Telefund is still an important way to connect with donors and prospects. Callers identify cell phone numbers and collect updated email addresses and clerical staff researches “lost” alumni. When contacting recent graduates we typically find that the information on file is that of their parents. At RIT, we ask every parent to share contact information and find that while most are not comfortable sharing a cell phone number or address we are getting email addresses. With these updated email addresses we hope to advertize our online alumni community and push for further biographical updates that way. With its personal contact, our Telefund is the single largest source of donors, securing about 40% of annual donors and more than half of alumni donors. And prospects enjoy hearing from a current student and even take the time to give us feedback via email.

- **DIRECT MAIL:** Direct mail solicitation has a regular cycle: an initial fall mailing (September/October) followed by a reminder (late November), a winter reminder mailing for past donors (January), a major spring mailing (March/April) followed by a reminder (May). A theme/message is selected each year and is communicated in various ways to constituents. This keeps our appeals on message, even though they may look different for the various constituencies. We also seek to personalize messages whenever possible with prior giving information, targeted asks, etc. We also ask for email addresses, cell and videophone numbers and track these in our database. Our appeals for alumni are segmented by year of graduation, giving level or affinity (e.g. athletics and Greek affiliation). We have learned from young alumni that they prefer direct mail pieces that are short and colorful and. And we continue to use direct mail for all constituencies because of its wide reach. Our annual direct mail schedule works out to roughly four contact points for each constituent.
- **E-MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS:** But with a growing young alumni base – most of which have always had a computer, are comfortable with technology and participate in social networking – RIT found that they also needed to complement phone and mail with regular e-communications including a giving Website, e-blasts, Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, they launched a new electronic peer-to-peer program using microsites for volunteer solicitors.
- **PERSONAL SOLICITATIONS:** In addition, personal outreach is very successful in cultivating the relationship (be it a student or recent alumni or a leadership donor). Finding ways to connect is key. Recently, they established a Recent Alumni Council and have developed a monthly series of events to help young graduates connect with each other and staff. We do as much research and preparation as possible to find out what prospects are interested in, whom they know, etc. For personal visits, email with phone follow-up works well. Also, inviting alumni for coffee or a short 15 minute visit at their home or office has been easier than getting a visit around a meal.