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**Raising Funds – and Friends – for Libraries**  
**By David E. Weaver, Development Director**  
**Ohioana Library**

With the serious decline of government support for libraries in recent years, raising money from private sources has never been more important. Even in those fortunate communities where tax dollars may cover most if not all of the critical funding for salaries, benefits, and other key operating expenses, there is still a need for additional resources to provide for the kind of programming and services our patrons have come to rely on, from summer reading programs for children to help with job searches for the unemployed.

How do you raise these dollars and from whom? Most libraries do not have staff dedicated to the job of fund-raising. Yet the fact is, most libraries can (and many already have) develop a simple and effective program to find and secure these vitally needed funds.

Here are five ways that any library can use to raise money:

*Friends of the Libraries*

The simplest way for a library to begin is to organize a Friends group, reaching out to those in the community who use the library on a regular basis. A small initial band of enthusiastic patrons is usually the first to be recruited to serve as a Friends Board. Others join the Friends by paying membership dues that can include different levels and benefits. Join at \$25, for example, and you'll receive a quarterly newsletter. Join at \$100, and the library will recognize you with a nameplate in a new book added to its collection. Friends groups often are the source of key volunteers for library events and programs, from hosting an author visit to holding periodic book sales.

*Major Donor Clubs*

Once an organization has developed a good base of members, it might consider adding a major donor club to encourage and recognize contributions at a higher level. For example, at the Ohioana Library, we created The Martha Kinney Cooper Society. Named for the First Lady who founded Ohioana in 1929, the Cooper Society recognizes individuals who give \$1,000 or more annually. The support these donors have provided has helped Ohioana in many ways, from enhancing our collection to producing the Ohioana Book Festival. As a way of thanking Society members, we have done several small events exclusively for them, such as an afternoon tea party with author Julie Salamon and an evening reception with Pulitzer Prize winning critic Michael Dirda. Society members are invited to be our guests at special events, such as the Ohioana Awards luncheon at the Ohio Statehouse.

An important thing to remember is that the definition of a major gift is different for every organization. For the President's Club at a university, a major gift may be \$10,000 or more. For Ohioana, it's \$1,000. For your library it might be \$500. The important thing is to set a level that you feel is appropriate to your organization and your members.

*Grants*

Foundations can be a source of support for library programming and activities. For example, last year the Grandview Heights Public Library (GHPL) presented a special program that combined music and poetry to remember victims of the Holocaust on the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II. The person who was putting the program together researched several foundations to identify potential funders. Working with GHPL staff, she contacted the Columbus Jewish Foundation (CJF). The CJF provided a mini-grant of \$1,000 to support the presentation.

A major key to securing grants is to do what GHPL did: identify a foundation that has an interest in the kind of program or project you're doing. Don't do a shotgun approach where you send a dozen proposals out to as many foundations as you can in hopes that you'll get lucky with one of them – target those funders who are most likely to support your program and focus your efforts there.

## Special Events



Kent State Library Science student Terry Lambert works  
Choose to Read Ohio table at 2010 Ohioana Book Festival

Americans are a social people – we love to get together for a good time or a good cause. Special events can bring people together AND at the same time raise a great deal of money for your library.

There are many kinds of events, large and small. Some may be simple and easy to put together, others are huge undertakings that require months of planning and scores of volunteers. As with every other type of fund-raising, the first priority is to come up with an event that is appropriate in size and scope for you and your organization.

The Ohioana Book Festival, for example, is a huge event that involves our entire staff, a planning committee of more than a dozen members, nearly 40 partnering organizations, and more than 50 volunteers for the day of the event. The festival involves nearly 90 authors and draws an audience of more than 3,000 people. The Festival generates more than \$65,000 in revenue and nets after expenses of about \$25,000 to support Ohioana (the event itself is free and open to the public).



Ohio author Dan Chaon (center) poses with Amelia Bedelia and Hedgehog  
at 2010 Ohioana Book Festival

Because our mission in part is to promote Ohio authors and literature, the Ohioana Book Festival is both a fund-raising event AND a program event. Some events are purely fund-raising. For example, during the years I worked for WOSU, we held an annual golf outing. Of course, golf has nothing to do with the mission of public broadcasting, but it was a fun event that raised \$15,000 a year for WOSU's programs.



R.L. Stine talks with fans at 2009 Ohioana Book Festival

## Sponsorships

Another important benefit of special events is they can help you attract corporate support. Companies that may not give money outright for operating purposes may buy a table to your event or an ad in your program.

They may also want to sponsor a library project or special program because it helps promote their image and visibility in the community.

As you develop a friends or advisory board, remember to recruit people who represent major companies or the business community. It makes getting their companies and business involved a lot easier!

I realize that I've outlined the most basic of premises. Fortunately, many libraries throughout Ohio have comprehensive books on every one of these methods of fund-raising and many more. As I began my own career in fund-raising, it was my own library system – the Columbus Metropolitan Library – that I went to as a source for ideas and inspiration. New and better books are coming out and being added to collections each year, many dealing with the use of technologies – like Facebook and Twitter – that didn't even exist when I started in the field.

Remember this, most of all – regardless of technology and methodology, whether you're sending an e-blast or an old-fashioned snail mail letter – more than raising funds, you are raising friends. Your goal is not a single gift, but a long-term partnership. Successful fund-raising is about building relationships. And there is no organization that has, or can have, a better relationship with its friends and patrons than the library.

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