

The First Fundraising Letter in a Campaign

(Or how to start your campaign with a successful fundraising effort)

By Steve Grubbs

Raising money for a campaign is not a guarantee of victory, but it can go a long way toward that end. Frequently local and legislative candidates assume that it is more difficult for them to raise money than it is for an incumbent. That's not always the case. In fact, I was able to raise more money during my first challenger race than in my first reelection campaign.

Whether you are a challenger or incumbent, every candidate needs "seed" money to pay for literature, yard signs, and phone bills. The best place to get the beginning money that will "leverage" all the later money is from the candidates' friends, family and acquaintances.

The first fundraising that a candidate should do is to this group because they will contribute despite party affiliation. A simple fundraising letter to family and friends can bring in enough money to get started. First, a candidate need to compile a list of potential donors. This can be done by compiling names from the rolodex, Christmas card list, church or service club directory, employees at the place of employment and any other list that might be available. In addition, be sure to include all of the professionals that you deal with such as dentists, insurance agents, doctors and lawyers (and don't forget your former teachers or students). I once helped a policeman who was running for mayor. He regularly patrolled the local grocery stores at night and was very popular. He attained the grocery store employee lists and did pretty well garnering their financial support.

Compiling a list is not difficult, but a candidate must be bold. Many candidates are self-conscious about asking those closest to them to contribute. Keep in mind however, that these people will be offended if you don't include them and if your closest friends won't contribute, then how can you expect complete strangers to give.

After a list is compiled, a fundraising piece needs to be developed. This should consist of 1) a well written fundraising letter, 2) a hand-addressed outside envelope, 3) a return envelope tucked inside the first envelope and 4) a reply piece for givers to provide you vital information, (like how much money they intend to send)

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Writing an effective fundraising piece is almost an artform; so if you don't have someone who is experienced at this type of work, follow these rules: First the letter should answer some basic questions like what are you running for? Why are you running? How much money do you need in total? How much money do you need specifically from the person reading the letter? What is the money needed for? What is your deadline for paying your bills? What benefit is there for your reader in seeing that you are elected (better schools, lower taxes, etc.)?

By answering these questions in a cohesive and compelling letter, you will get beyond the reasons your reader may think of not to contribute.

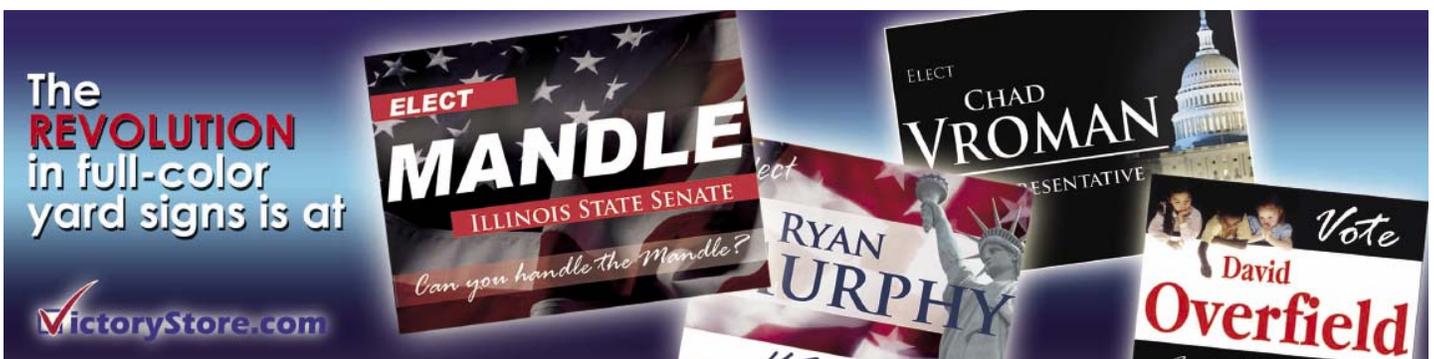
Personalize the letter as much as possible. If you have a laser printer and a simple mailmerge program, then you can create a personal salutation and even have personal references throughout your letter. In fact, you should assess which of your letter recipients are in the high donor category and which are in the low donor category. Always ask the high donors for a specific amount at the hundreds or thousands level. You may choose to send your grandmother in Oklahoma a letter asking for \$50 or \$25, but it never hurts to ask for too much and get a little less. Remember that the suggested amount will generally define the level of giving.

See that the letter is not visually threatening to your reader. By this I mean that the letter should have short paragraphs, with underlining of important passages and spaces between paragraphs. In addition, forget the conventional wisdom and don't be afraid to send a two, three or even four page letter.

Finally, I suggest that you pull aside some of the direct mail that comes into your mailbox and study their techniques. You may learn some tips and writing styles from the professionals that sent it to you.

One concept used in the spring or early summer is to draw an analogy between planting a seed and giving a candidate "seed money." To drive home the point and make it more memorable, you will want to include a small packet of seeds in the envelope. Not only will the seeds make your letter more noticeable to your reader, but all the time the flowers are sprouting and growing, this person will be thinking of your campaign and may likely give a second or third time.

Be sure your outside envelope is hand addressed and has an actual stamp and not an ink indicia. Even bulk mail should have a "stick-on" stamp and not simply a postal permit number printed on the envelope. The first mail that people throw away is the letter that has a label and lacks a real stamp.



Also, you should consider using a colored envelope so that your letter stands out from the fifteen white envelopes stuffed in the mailbox.

Never forget the third element of your letter, the return envelope. The convenience it provides will increase your response rate. The return address on this envelope should be that of the individual asking for the money. If that's you, then the return envelope will go back to your house, but if it's the local banker asking for money on your behalf, then make sure the envelope is addressed back to the banker.

You may also want to investigate using Business Reply Envelopes that pay for the postage of those who chose to give to you. Your local post office can explain the costs and restrictions involved with this. The theory is that even though it may cost a little more, if it convinces just one or two people to send a check that might not otherwise have a cut, then it will recover the cost. In the alternative you may just want to pre-stamp the return envelopes for your close at friends and associates that you expect to give.

The reply piece is the fourth element of your direct mail package. It should contain all the right disclaimers required by your elate law. In addition, you will want to use it to suggest a certain contribution amount and provide space for vital information like the contributor's name and address. This will help your record keeping and allow one last mental suggestion to your reader before they make their decision to give.

This simple fundraising letter will not by any means solve all your fund raising problems, but it will get you started. I've never seen a campaign where it didn't raise enough for the first brochure and still pay for a few yard signs.

About the Author: Steve Grubbs was elected to the Iowa House of Representatives at age 25. He served three terms and then served as Chairman of the Republican Party of Iowa. Since then, Steve has started two companies, Victory Enterprises, Inc. and VictoryStore.com. Victory Enterprises is a Republican consulting firm and VictoryStore.com is a campaign supply store.



First Fundraising Appeal to Friends and the Party Faithful

February 2, 2000

«FirstName» «LastName»

«Address»

«City», «StateOrProvince» «PostalCode»

«Dear»

In early December I received a call from several of Iowa's political leaders urging me to seek the office of State Representative for House District #90. State Representative Chuck Larson was very persuasive in our meeting. After prayerful consideration and family discussions I have decided to accept this challenge before me.

Being actively involved in civic and political issues since the early eighties, I have sought to create effective change in Republican Party platforms. I have worked for local candidates with the hope of giving Iowans a choice. My family and I now feel that the time has come for me to offer myself as a servant in the public arena. I am hopeful that I can bring some of those common sense ideas straight from the people to the Iowa House of Representatives.

As you may know, I have also been actively involved in creating change in my community. Through working with the school district on various advisory and curriculum committees I feel we have made some progress, but our victory is faint. My hope is to bring education to the forefront of issues. I believe there are workable solutions available that will enhance our children's learning achievements and test scores without creating a hardship for taxpayers. I would like to see Iowa schools return to emphasizing academics rather than attitudes and social agendas. State tax laws should allow parents the freedom to choose whether their children will be home schooled, attend a private or public school without being penalized. It is my goal to see Iowa schools once again setting the standard for education, not measuring up to it.

Another area of interest is the tax burden on the residents of Iowa. We are taxing our best natural resources right out of this state...our people. Young families must be able to do more than survive financially; they must be allowed to prosper. Senior citizens should receive the social security due them without once again being taxed on that income. Finally, I refuse to believe it is too late to save the family farm. We need to find ways to help market crops and livestock without creating yet another government-subsidized program.

As you can see, I am excited at the possibility of serving the people of this great state. But before I can serve I must conduct a very aggressive campaign. My opponent is quite set in his political career. He has been in office for fourteen long years. Due to the peculiar layout of

this large district and the cost to campaign the territory, he has been unopposed in several elections. This is one more reason I feel strongly that I must step forward and offer the voters of Warren and Marion Counties a choice.

To be successful in this endeavor it will take a very strong and dedicated grass roots organization. I believe the voters of this district will step forward with my family in a united volunteer effort. As you may have guessed my children are already hard at work designing flyers, building winning strategies of their own, and decorating the campaign headquarters. All four have volunteered to help knock on doors, place yard signs and of course, participate in any upcoming parades.

With thousands of brochures to purchase, hundreds of yard signs to order, scores of radio ads to place, and two counties to cover, I will need help. I am turning to the people who have known me the longest, who know me best, and humbly inviting you to get involved in my campaign and help make a difference.

Your early contribution, made payable to “ Scott for State Representative” will give our race a tremendous boost right out of the starting block.

Your gift of \$25, \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500 or \$1,000 will help me raise the vital “early seed money” I need to successfully launch this campaign.

Our goal is to raise \$5,000 by President’s Day, February 21st, and I humbly ask for your support in helping us rise to this great challenge.

There is an envelope and a reply card enclosed that I hope you will use to return your personal check and help me in my journey to restore common sense to the Iowa Statehouse.

Thanks in advance for your encouragement, generous support, and prayers. Lowell and I are both grateful for your friendship and wish you blessings in the new millennium!

Sincerely yours,

Mary Scott