

Making Your Fund-Raising Strategy Accessible

VALERIE MARCH

President, E.V. March Associates, Toronto

RATNA OMIDVAR

Executive Director, Skills for Change, Toronto

Look around folks! Most of Canada's major cities are not longer predominantly Anglo-Saxon and never will be again. Toronto is one of the most dramatic examples. The diversity of cultures and races has turned Toronto into one of the most vibrant and exciting cities on the continent. These dramatic changes offer both a challenge and an opportunity for the corporate and philanthropic communities. Fund-raising success in this changing world depends on making your fund-raising strategy, as well as your services, accessible to all members of your community regardless of their cultural or racial background.

The challenge for marketers and fund raisers is significant. Since over 40 per cent of recent immigrants to Canada speak neither English nor French,¹ new approaches to these growing markets are essential. Given recent federal government announcements regarding increased immigration, these numbers will only increase.

It is important for fund raisers to recognize that traditional strategies directed at "dominant culture" donors may be addressing a decreasing source for donations. It is true that new immigrant and refugees generally have lower incomes than the general population during their first few years in Canada. However, once these immigrants have established themselves, they tend to fare better than the average Canadian-born citizen with regard to assets and earning capacity (Statistics Canada, 1986 Census).

What does all of this mean for the fund raiser trying to reach a monetary goal in a fiercely competitive environment? Since traditional fund-raising approaches based on western assumptions are often inconsistent with the cultural values of an immigrant community, one of the challenges is to find an approach which is appropriate and effective for the community you are trying to reach. This is a basic principle of sound marketing. In the corporate world, those who have recognized profound demographic changes and adapted their marketing strategies accordingly, are on the cutting edge. In the philanthropic sector, United Way

of Greater Toronto is one example of an organization which is working hard in fund raising to reach a diverse community. [See also, "Philanthropy and the 'New Canada'," p. 18.

Yet, there is an even more powerful argument than money and demographics which should convince fund raisers to do things differently. All Canadians should have an equal opportunity supporting and participating in efforts to improve the wellbeing of their fellow citizens. Charity implies the conferring of a gift from the privileged to the needy. Is it not time to recognize that this traditional concept needs to be dusted off and adjusted to a new reality that calls for equality and participation by all? If we are committed to a community development approach in the delivery of services, is it not worth thinking about how such an approach can also fit into fund raising in a diverse community.

How does a fund raiser begin this process? We do not have a blueprint for success. What we do have are suggestions for questions that must be answered before you begin to plan and some strategies which have worked for others.

1. Does your organization or your cause provide services which help a significant number of people in a specific ethno-racial community? St. Stephen's Community House, a multicultural community centre in downtown Toronto, serves a large number of Chinese-speaking Canadians. It was natural to develop a fund-raising event which would be enthusiastically supported by the Chinese community—a Chinese banquet, timed to take place close to the Chinese New Year. (Organizations should never expect a community to support a special event which is not culturally appropriate.)

United Way of Greater Toronto has been clever in devising an event with special appeal for those from the Caribbean and East Indian communities. Member agencies of the United Way of Greater Toronto were serving a growing number of Caribbeans and East Indians. They needed to find a way to enable these communities to participate in fund raising, the results of which would ultimately support programs for their own communities. They chose to capitalize on the communities' passion for cricket and sponsored a cricket match which raised \$500,000 in 1989.

2. Does your organization have representatives of appropriate ethno-racial communities in leadership positions? Only by involving and developing leaders from ethno-racial communities will you know how to harness the energy of these lively groups. Leaders from ethno-racial communities on the board of United Way of Greater

Toronto have played a significant role in United Way's fund-raising strategies within their communities.

3. Can you truly say your fund-raising strategies are sensitive to the multicultural community you are trying to reach? This requires an investment up-front in research to discover the appropriateness of a particular strategy. What kind of research are we talking about? Finding out what is important, what is acceptable, and what is offensive, and pre-testing communication materials thoroughly with the right groups will be part of your task. You must also learn about celebration times, meanings of colours, fund-raising techniques accepted in a particular community, and how to identify resource people. Your fund-raising strategies will then be based on the results of this research. (For example, red is the colour of celebration in the East Indian community, white is the colour of mourning. Knowing these facts can save you from serious error in your fund-raising materials.)
4. Why will immigrant communities support your cause? Most newcomers look for ways to give back something to the country that has made it possible for so many of their dreams to come true, if not in their lifetime, then in those of their children. They are also well aware that there are many member of their community who are struggling. There is often a strong sense of responsibility and a desire to find ways to help. If your organization is working with a particular community, then you will be able to find support from that community's leadership, whether you are raising funds for a mainstream social service or an ethno-specific agency.
5. What is expected of you in return? Recognition expressed appropriately, acceptance as equals in all aspects of your organization including the informal social relationships, and continuing involvement in decision-making would be a good start. Donor recognition is nothing new to fund raisers, but you may have to think carefully about how that recognition should be given. All communities are the same in most respects and acceptance, credibility, and respect are powerful motivators, particularly for those who are struggling to adjust to a new country.

All of this may sound like a formidable task, especially if your contacts in these communities are limited. But we believe that if you make appropriate connections you will be welcomed. Where to find these contacts? Look inside your organization. If you are serving an immigrant community, the initial alliances may well be there and, like any other donor market, they need to be appropriately cultivated and nurtured.

It's hard to believe when you look in your mailbox every day and see yet another pile of letters asking for your dollars that there are some people who are never asked. In fact, not being asked is one of the major reasons why Canadians do not make donations.² The information on how frequently newcomers are asked to donate is not available. However, we suspect that it is not often and then when requests *are* made, they are too often in a language that is not understood, or with an inappropriate approach that just doesn't work.

FOOTNOTES

1. Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees. *After the Door has been Opened: Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: Report of the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees*. Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1988.
2. *Financial support for Non-Profit Organizations, 1984. A study of the Behaviour and Attitudes of Canadians*. Volume 1. The Canadian Gallup Poll Limited, November, 1984, p. 67.