

For the smaller charity, outsourcing is often the simplest option to increase fundraising reach, particularly in more specialist fields such as major gift fundraising. At *enhance herts*, we were in the scoping stage of a £1m capital campaign, and had the option to increase our in-house major gift fundraising capacity or to use an external resource. As this was a new development, both to set up a sizeable capital campaign and to start fundraising from grant-makers and high net worth individuals, I decided to bring in an external agency, initially for a specified time-period. This reduced the financial risk, while enabling the fundraising programme to punch above its weight. After researching the marketplace, I settled on Midas Charity Appeals as the best provider due to their strong local knowledge, past track record, personal recommendations from charity colleagues and their price. Following a meeting with then owner of Midas, Ian Kerr, and Midas consultant, Catherine Farrell, the deal was done, and the work could begin.

The initial target for Midas was to help raise £250,000, twenty-five per cent of the overall project total. Major-gift fundraising is a mixture of art and science, and so the brief allowed some fluidity in how the target would be reached, on the assumption that undertaking the right kind of activities would result in success in the mid-term.

There were a number of challenges to overcome, and the first task for Catherine was to use Midas' experience and knowledge base to overcome these. The charity had only been fundraising actively for less than a year. It did not have a trustee board with any connections or appetite to get involved in major donor fundraising. There was no real public profile for the charity, although the appeal's cause - cancer research at the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre - was well-known locally. Lastly, the volunteer fundraising committee were better suited to coordinate community-based fundraising activities than to network with 'the great and the good'.

These barriers were all overcome through a combination of systematically following up fundraising leads and maximising on good fortune. This began with Catherine conducting a series of in-depth interviews with fundraising committee members to develop a web of prospects available to the appeal. This turned up some useful information, and some dead ends. While this was taking place, a local wealthy dignitary visited one of the hospitals served by the charity and showed interest in getting involved in its charitable activities. He was also MD for a large financial institution in Canary Wharf and had a wide sphere of influence.

One of the strengths of the working relationship with Midas was setting up regular informal update sessions to share information and test options. These were what made the charity-agency relationship work, as they developed the chemistry between both parties and overcame the challenge of remote-working. Key to this was freedom to share information freely and to make connections that otherwise would not have been made. Through one of these sessions, we discovered that Catherine had met the wealthy dignitary previously in a fundraising context and could help us get an audience. So began a long series of events and meetings to enable the appeal to become more embedded in Hertfordshire's wealth and influence networks, raising tens of thousands as a result.

Among the challenges facing the charity-agency relationship was managing internal expectations of delivery. From the charity's and hospital's management there were concerns of reputation management, and perceived risks from engaging with influential people. From the volunteer committee there was a general misunderstanding of the time-scales involved in raising large sums and concern about the initial imbalance of paying fees with no guarantee of return. They had more experience of commercial transactions, where the risk of non-delivery lies more in favour of the customer.

Both issues were resolved through communication/education strategies and Midas helped inform these in order to ensure success. Ultimately, over-delivery of the initial

target helped resolve the tension with the fundraising committee. In a more commercial context, over-delivery would have resulted in increased return for the agency to compensate for their greater share of risk. The front-loaded contract paid off as the charity naturally could allocate all the additional income towards the appeal target.

In the end, more than £500,000 was raised, doubling initial expectations. This amount was achieved through a combination of good fundraising practice and happy coincidence. A fundraising committee member knew a local bishop and invited him to be patron for the appeal. This bishop was active in a variety of fundraising appeals and had excellent contacts through his place in the House of Lords. Through Catherine's background knowledge and connections to the bishop, she was able engineer a meeting with the bishop and a trustee of a major grant-making trust, which resulted in a grant of more than £400,000. This process took nearly a year from start to finish, but was handled excellently and was the cornerstone to the appeal being successful and meeting its overall target.

In summary, the experience of working with an agency was very successful. It worked on a number of levels - financial, interpersonal, and reputational. For a small charity, the financial commitment to hire a fundraising consultancy represents a risk, but the skills base and approach offered by Midas ensured that the opportunity costs paid off. Without their input, we may have reached similar end-points, but it would have taken much, much longer and consumed much more energy, meaning that the charity's other appeals would have been jeopardized.

Dan Fletcher  
August 29 2008

Since August 2008, Dan is Head of Partnerships and Fundraising at The King's Fund. This role is a new one, established to create and implement a fundraising strategy for the King's Fund to embellish its other main income streams. He was formerly Head of Fundraising Development at enhance herts, the charity supporting hospitals in East Hertfordshire, 2004 to 2008, where he set up the fundraising department from scratch, bringing in more than £5m in three years. Before that he was Head of Fundraising and Business Partnerships at Foyer Federation and Director of Fundraising for the Peace Hospice in Watford.