



THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE RESOURCES

CORPORATE SUPPORT: ALL ABOUT THEM

By Will Maitland Weiss

Corporate America—and, mindful of global economics, Corporate Earth—has considerable resources. And—cynics are wrong—considerable philanthropic interests. Be aware: these interests lie in the hearts and minds of individual employees at the company. The mission of the Corporation itself is to make money for its owners/shareholders and to produce widgets or sell insurance or whatever it is that they do. Even though they may have a “Corporate Foundation”—with its own [narrower] mission to promote literacy, or [broader] to support children, healthcare, and the arts, or whatever—that “Foundation” operates within the Corporation and its interests.

The key is to connect with one or more of the Corporation’s employees. You need a champion.

If you are the Metropolitan Museum or Opera, Columbia or NYU, or New York-Presbyterian Hospital, you have corporate CEOs on your Board of Directors, and will attract others. The CEOs will call you. They want the prestige of affiliation with your internationally-famous institution; they want the networking opportunity with their peers among trustees and patrons; they want the opportunity to contribute to international philanthropy at so significant a level.

Fine. Then there’s all the other, not-quite-so-prestigious non-profits. Hopeless? Not at all! Forget the CEO, who you can’t attract. Focus on the hundreds, even thousands of not-quite-so-prestigious executives who also populate each corporate. Many of whom make very comfortable salaries (they can’t write you a check for \$100,000, but they can certainly write one for \$1,000). Many of whom are looking to complement their job satisfaction with intangible, feel-good, give-back-to-the-community satisfaction. Many of whom will enjoy the social networking which the involvement with your organization can provide—and some of whom will even have professional incentives: their Corporation will (a) admire and support their non-profit volunteer and/or Board service, and (b) will have staff who help them find volunteer/Board opportunities. (Yes! You want to get your organization known to these staff!)

You need a champion. Whether s/he’s a manager, a VP, or whatever else, s/he can help get your proposal to the attention of the corporate giving office. S/he may be

eligible for “matching gift” support (she/he gives you \$1,000 and the company automatically also gives you \$1,000; it is not quite that simple—but almost). S/he may be able to introduce you to other departments, divisions of the Corporation, which may be able to consider an ad in a journal, a table at a benefit, and/or other support—having more to do with corporate marketing than philanthropy. S/he can lead you to other volunteers and other donors (even other Board members) from that corporation or others in the field. And of course s/he will expand your mail list with her/his own personal contacts.

Even without a champion—while you pursue yours—you can still start the process of applying for support. Know it’s a long shot—but such is all of fundraising. And as you try to wedge your foot in the door, invite, invite, invite them to what you have to offer.

- **FIGURE OUT WHO’S WHO (AND WHAT’S WHAT).** Sometimes there is the Corporate Foundation. Sometimes a corporate philanthropy or giving office; sometimes a department of community service or public affairs. There are also going to be all kinds of marketing departments. There may be an events department. There may even be interest within HR for the kind of “training” (creativity, role-playing, public-speaking) which artists may be uniquely qualified to provide. They may be looking for entertainment opportunities for summer interns. And so on, and so on... Go to their site; get the annual report and other print materials.
- **PLAY BY THE RULES.** Is there a clear fit with their (Corporate Foundation, if there is one) mission? And/or with their business interests? Which you will need to be able to clearly articulate. How do they want to be contacted, when, where? Get it right or don’t bother.
- **HOW MUCH? FOR WHAT?** The content of a letter of inquiry or proposal is the same as to a Foundation [see Letter of Inquiry], but it is even more imperative that you spell out How Much You Are Asking For and For What. **Soon.** And **clearly.** Assume this sentence is all they will read before you either make it to the Consideration pile or the wastebasket.
- **WHAT’S IN IT FOR THEM: THE COMPANY.** Recognition. Which is sort of the euphemism for advertising, publicity. On banners, on direct mail brochures. In curtain speeches, programs. Real advertising. Be creative!! And make it clear.
- **WHAT’S IN IT FOR THEM: THE EMPLOYEES.** There may well be a **hunger for volunteer opportunities.** This no longer means little-old-ladies to come stuff envelopes over tea and cookies—it means what can you come up with after work hours, on weekends (and if it is over wine and chips, so much the better). Be creative... but not too creative. If you say you want ten guys to show up

for four hours on a Saturday afternoon, you better have a fulfilling (and highly organized) experience for them. They can paint the walls of the theatre black, but most likely this will be a tie-in with kid-nurturing, mentoring, educational programming.

- **WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM: THE CLIENTS.** Free stuff, discount stuff. Access. Tickets, of course. Also parties, receptions—opportunities for them to entertain employees and/or clients. Creative! Clear! And make it clear that you are eager to meet and discuss with them what their needs are and how you can accommodate.

Four more corporate tips:

- (1) Look at the **financial and other “white-collar” service industries** (insurance, real estate, etc.). It is not just that Wall Street (etc.) generates a lot of \$\$ and therefore capacity for philanthropy. These are the companies that are interested in expanding their own “mail lists”: they will be interested in who is on your board, who are your patrons; networking with your audience can be great for their business. These are also the companies with lots of well-paid, well-educated, well-motivated, well-intentioned employees.
- (2) For New York organizations, look at ***Crain's Business Week*** lists. Every year, they update their lists of Largest Publicly-Held Corporations (these tend to be the most philanthropic, because they tend to have lots of money, employees, and interest in their community). Ditto Largest Privately-Held (lots of \$\$ capacity; even more dependent upon getting an inside champion). Biggest law firms. Biggest real estate companies. Banks. Insurance providers. Biggest employers. (**CCR** suspects that other major cities have their own versions of *Crain's* as well.)
- (3) Look at smaller companies, too. The most obvious partnerships here are with **restaurants, health clubs, stores, etc. in the neighborhood** to which you bring potential (for them!) customers—where you perform. Obvious, win/win mutual interest. Beware the Starbucks or other chains, just because approval for a deal (discount for your patrons, ad in your program, etc.) may have to come from far away and through a swamp of bureaucracy.
- (4) When you get Corporate Executive Jane's attention, and she has seen a show, and she's met some artists and patrons, and learned a little about your glorious plans, and is excited that she can help make these dreams a reality... when you are asking her to consider joining your Board, do it in a **professional manner**. (Yes, **CCR** can help with this.) She is interested because you are Art, not her Business, but she wants to know what you expect of her: role, responsibilities, how much give-or-get, meetings

when/where/with whom. Make it clear. And make it finite (e.g., Board term limits; a beginning, middle, and end/goal to the plans and process). When she really falls in love with you, it can be forever. But start with something a bit more business-like.