



THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE RESOURCES

YOUR NEXT MILLION

[IN CONTRIBUTED INCOME]

By Will Maitland Weiss

It is not going to come from the Government. Pardon the political subjectivity, but the federal government is more interested in giving to Halliburton than to you. New York State and—even more so—New York City recognize that the non-profit arts are one of our major industries, major employers, major attractions for tourists and new residents. But they have millions of citizen-constituents with much greater needs: education, fire, police, infrastructure, poverty, social services, healthcare, etc., etc., etc. If you live here, you need the State and City to pay for this other stuff first, too. The Government moves at a glacial pace, they are the least likely donor ever to consider *new* gifts. Plus Government agencies only give once a year, and you probably just missed the deadline.

(Even so, you are going to start making Government contacts. Start small; for example, in New York City, that means the City Council before the Mayor, Governor, Senators. Someone represents the block on which you have your office and/or perform and/or otherwise serve people. They will care that you enrich the lives of kids in their/your 'hood—note: they will almost always care most about your educational services; that you brighten the lives and/or provoke stimulating discourse among their/your general public; that you engage their/your local artists... there will be something that's a them/you win/win. They might control/be able to leverage \$100, or nothing. But they also might be a cog in appropriating you more/real money, and/or bringing you to the attention of those who can. Call them, meet them, invite them. But don't expect from them your "**NEXT MILLION.**")

It is not going to come from the Corporate sector. Corporate gifts are most dependent upon contacts and next most dependent upon you having a high profile among tens of thousands (better: hundreds of thousands) of the demographic likeliest to buy their goods and/or services.

(There is still a corporate strategy worth pursuing: you want to get mid-level executives involved in your organization, perhaps first as volunteers, ultimately, giving someone the opportunity to give back to her/his community by joining your board. This will lead to good things. But not your "**NEXT MILLION.**")

It is not going to come from the Foundation world. They exist to fulfill their individual mission, be it curing a disease, promoting world peace, or supporting arts education. Will they possibly find interest in your project? Yes. But it's unlikely this interest will translate into huge sums of \$\$\$.

(Start looking for contacts in this sector, too; and start writing your letters-of inquiry. Do the research on which Foundation's mission is closest to what you do, *and* which gives to similar organizations in your town/region/state, *and* which accepts unsolicited proposals. Invite the giving officers and Foundation trustees to everything you've got. You'll score eventually. But not your "**NEXT MILLION.**")

Enough negativity! **YOUR NEXT MILLION IS GOING TO COME FROM PEOPLE, FROM INDIVIDUALS.** Starting with from, and through, and because of people you already know. And sure, it may not be a Million; it may be \$100,000, it may be \$10,000—knock off or add zeroes as appropriate to your current budget. The concept is the same.

Here's how it works (***and it does work!!***):

- **AUDIENCE.** You are a performing arts organization; you are a performing artist. Someone has seen you perform; new (as well as repeat) someones will see you perform. You must capture their names/addresses (and phone numbers and e-mail, and keep track of what it was they came to see). You are going to ask them **all** for support. And whenever you get new ones, you will ask them for support as well. If you haven't any audience yet—if no one knows your work—then this is where you have to start. **The process: first, experience work; then, give.**
- **DONORS.** Have you already received contributions, of whatever size? You are going to ask these people for money again. It may be counter-intuitive, but the person most likely to give to you is she/he who has already given (and already given the most, and the most recently/often). There is a limit to this—CCR recommends three or four solicitations a year, but *not* a dozen—but remember: the donor has demonstrated that she/he knows you, likes you, appreciates what you do.
- **COMPANY.** Everyone knows someone. Even artists. All of your company members, colleagues, artist friends will tell you (a) that they don't know anybody, and (b) that they can't possibly ask anyone they know for money. Wrong! Everybody knows other people, and some of those people can and will fall in love with your art, and some of *those* people (= who love the art) will, in fact, be pleased to give something to support it/be a part of making it happen. And some of *those* people (= who actually give) will give more than you expect.

- **FRIENDS OF FRIENDS (AND FRIENDS OF FRIENDS OF FRIENDS...).** Everyone who buys a ticket, everyone who makes a gift, everyone who becomes aware of your organization because they are a friend of the assistant stage manager and get invited for free to the dress rehearsal... everyone of these is a **prospect** (sure: some might only be able to give you ten bucks; but what if you got 100 \$10 gifts? *hello?* could you use a \$1,000?). And—here’s the real point—everyone knows someone else. In fact, they know hundreds else, but start by trying to get six names, even just two names from everyone “on your list.” That is how the list grows; that is how the individual donor base grows. The only way.
- **BOARD.** Oh, yes: this is where the Board comes in. They *must* give personally and they *must* encourage gifts from others (they do not have to ask for those gifts, but they *must* introduce the others to your organization and vice versa). If those who are trusted (= “Trustees”) with the existence and sustainability of your organization, if the most-inside-of-the-insiders don’t give, no one else will give. If they do not give and/or do not get others to give, you must start by rebuilding your board. If you are building a board, you must build it on the bedrock of members’ belief in your organization. If they believe, they will give (according to their ability; as the organization grows, it can and will attract those who can and will give more).
- **NO ONE GIVES UNLESS/UNTIL THEY ARE ASKED.** So you are going to ask them. [*For details of how, see elsewhere.*] And you are going to ask them at least twice, and probably three or four times, each year. With every ask, you are giving them an opportunity. Repeat: you are giving something to them. And this is not about the free tote bag or \$5 off on the CD; you are giving them an opportunity to thank you, to express their appreciation for what you do, and, in fact, to be involved in what you do. If they could write/direct/choreograph/orchestrate/act/dance/sing/etc., as you and your colleagues do, maybe this would be less important to them. But they can’t (or at least don’t). You are offering them a connection to the arts they will not otherwise have. The more personal you make the ask, the more and larger the gifts you will get. Face-to-face is more powerful than a letter. (Often, human contact via telephone is more powerful than a letter. Why do you think there *are* all those phone campaigns? Because they work!)
- **BUT FIRST, CULTIVATION.** The most powerful “cultivation” you have is the personal experience of your work—why you want them to have seen/heard the art before you ask them to support it. What about when you don’t have a gig? Or they couldn’t make your performances? You are going to have other opportunities—throughout the year—where you get artists and board members and donors and prospective donors together. Sometimes, four people at a table for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Sometimes, 400 people at a gala benefit celebration. More likely, 40 people, or 20 people, or even a dozen people, at a reception/wine-and-cheese/cocktail party/intimate, informal gathering. Sometimes (but not usually), you ask them for support right then and there.

Always, you ask them for support afterwards. That can be a special, follow-up, it-was-nice-to-meet-you, thank-you-for-coming, would-you-consider... note. It can be adding those names/addresses to the list for the next direct mail solicitation. *[More details, elsewhere.]*

Imagine a tree and branches and twigs, imagine a drop of water feeding into a stream, river, ocean—imagine whatever metaphor you like. You will get **one** individual to cross over that line from experiencing the work to helping make it possible. Then, hopefully with her/his help and/or mail list, you will get **two**, get **six**, get **twenty**. These will lead you to **fifty** more, to a **hundred** more... to an individual donor base which sustains you while you pursue other avenues of income, and while you continue to grow and share your art with more individuals...

Other aspects of **INDIVIDUAL GIVING**:

- **PYRAMIDS**. How many donors/gifts of what size you might need/expect to raise, say, \$100,000 (or more, or less). How many prospects you might need to achieve that many donors/gifts.
- **CULTIVATION**. How to.
- **DIRECT MAIL**. How to.
- **TELE-CAMPAIGN**. (We know you hate the idea, but it works.) How to.
- **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**. If you have one, **CCR** can help motivate them, give them direction, engage them in productive roles and responsibilities. If you have not got one, **CCR** can help you go about rounding them up.