

# FOUNDATIONS

Wyoming Library

*A publication of the Wyoming State Library*

*July, 2012*

## **Great tips on how to “make the ask” from Press Stephens**

With the start of the new fiscal year July 1, not only do Wyoming library foundations have \$3 million more available in matching funds, it’s also now less than a year until donations and written pledges have to be secured. Sound daunting? Here is one resource that can help.

[Fundraising Steps with Press Stephens](#) is a recorded webinar that lays out from start to finish what it takes to get major gifts from donors in your community. There’s also a companion [downloadable checklist](#) (MS Word document). Press Stephens is an experienced fundraiser, formerly with the Wyoming Community Foundation. Some of the highlights from this webinar:

In 2010, 75% of nonprofit fundraising was from individuals, not from corporate or foundation giving programs, so getting individual donors is key to your success. Not only that, but 80% of your goal must come from major gifts, and only 20% from smaller donors. In Stephens’ experience, in Wyoming’s smaller communities, the proportion is more like 90/10 or even 95/5.

What is a major gift? In Wyoming, Stephens said, it is as little as \$1000 and up. Within those, a critical element is securing leadership gifts – the gifts that form the pinnacle of your fundraising pyramid. Blackbaud has a good [fundraising pyramid calculator](#) you can use as a guideline. A leadership gift does not have to come from one single person – if you need a leadership gift of \$50,000, you might find 5 people who will give \$10,000 each as a group.

There are several steps he listed leading up to the all-important “ask,” many of which you may have already done. These steps include:

- Brainstorm the purpose of your fundraising task. Do you want to treat this final year’s push as a new campaign, or completion of an old one?
- Determine your specific dollar goal – you can find the amount of remaining matching funds available to you on the [Wyoming Libraries Endowment Status](#) spreadsheet on the Wyoming Library Association’s endowment page (<http://www.wyla.org/endowment/>).
- Build your case statement – this should NOT be your mission or vision, but an answer to the question, “Why should I give.” Think passion!
- The board must meet in a closed-door session to identify and rate major gift prospects. It’s a critical conversation, and one that cannot leave the room.
- Develop materials to distribute to donor prospects – not too complicated or expensive, but should express the case and inform them about the organization and its board.

All this is leading up to actually sitting down with the person and asking for money, often described as “the right person asks the right prospect for the right gift at the right time in the right way in the right place.” But what does all that mean?

As part of evaluating donor prospects, you should be identifying “leaders” and “team mates” who will go in groups of two to individual donors. These don’t even have to be board members – other donors (if they are willing) can be very effective. One will actually do the asking, while the other should be the one most animated and passionate about the library. Start with small talk, but make sure one person knows to bring the conversation back to the topic at hand. A packet should go out in advance, with a letter from one of people who will visit them clipped to the front and a note saying, “Please take a look, and I will call you to discuss.”

On the “right gift,” it is best to worry more about asking for too little than for too much. If you ask for more than they are comfortable with and they tell you that, it gives you room to ask for a smaller donation or a pledge over time. If you are asking for a leadership gift from them, show them where they fit into your entire fundraising plan. The “right place” is typically at their home, where they are likely to open up more and the meeting can end at any time (no trapped at a restaurant with the conversation going badly before the salad is even served.)

Part of asking in the “right way” is asking them first for what they think about the endowment and listening carefully. You may learn that you don’t have the time, prospect, place, etc. right and can decide whether to proceed with asking. If it’s not the right time, determine when you might come back. If and when you do ask for their gift, stop talking. Do not rephrase. You have asked a question, so allow them time to think and wait for the answer.

If the answer is yes, determine with them the plan to transfer the funds. Some may take out their checkbooks, others may need to transfer funds. You might offer to send them an invoice. If the answer is no, since you have identified more than one prospect for each needed gift, you can thank them for their time and work on the next ask.

Afterwards, follow up multiple times to thank them and to demonstrate to them that their gift is doing what it is intended to do.

A link to the webinar, and to the companion checklist may be found in the Wyoming State Library’s webinar archive ([will.state.wy.us/lido/webinararchive.html](http://will.state.wy.us/lido/webinararchive.html), scroll down to “Other Webinars.”)

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