Six Degrees of Major Gift Fundraising

Cultivating the Connection Potential of Your Organization's Staff, Volunteers, and Board Members

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Six Degrees—An Introduction

We live in a connected world. Making the most of one's network connections can mean a key introduction can lead to fulfilling personal and professional goals. The game 'six degrees of separation from Kevin Bacon' might seem frivolous but it does serve to illustrate that our connections to people of influence are closer than we might think. Ask any successful veteran fundraiser and they will tell you that if they can "get in the door," when they leave, they will have a committed donor. The key is getting in the door – securing time with the potential major donor. A rainmaker appreciates the power of an introduction and what that introduction can mean when it comes to achieving fundraising success. It seems pretty obvious, yet most organizations do not identify and strategically work with their connections to develop new donors. More donors exponentially increase the likelihood and volume of contributions, which in turn fuels your ability to fund your mission. This white paper examines ways to leverage the six degrees among organization advocates. Additionally, this white paper will give you guidance on how to cultivate the connection potential of your organization's staff, volunteers, and board members.

Connectedness and the Art of Major Gift Fundraising

Put another way, identifying people who know the people we want to know, is a powerful first step in developing a new relationship that may result in contributions to our nonprofit organization's programs and mission. The person we know is the conduit to many new relationships. We need to put in place an attitude of philanthropy, supported by a process of identifying and encouraging new connections to individuals to whom we can introduce our organization and its mission. From there, we can work with them to gauge interest in becoming a supporter of our organization. Sure, we can always buy a list and begin to market to that list – but that is a long process with limited results. However, an introduction from a trusted person, with whom the prospective donor already has a relationship, can fast track our connection with a prospective donor. Consider for a moment all the advocates of your nonprofit organization: board members, staff and leadership, and volunteers. All of those individuals have a variety of networks that they are plugged into: work places, worship communities, associations, clubs, friends, and family. Among the hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of people that make up the networks of your organization's advocates; there are probably numerous potential donors for your nonprofit organization. The key is to determine which of those people are likely to have an affinity for your organization and are likely to want to connect and contribute.

Keys to Success

It takes some work, but it is relatively easy to identify the individuals that would be likely donors. What's not so easy, in many cases, and far more complicated is making your internal advocates comfortable in making the initial introduction and inviting participation in the form of a donation. With a little planning and preparation, you can promote a culture of philanthropy and relationship building among your team by implementing the following keys to success:

- ✓ Identify and Remove Barriers
- ✓ Generate New Supporters and Elevate Existing Supporters
- ✓ Develop a System and Track Your Cultivation Process

Keys to Success—Identifying Barriers

We all have trepidations about engaging our personal network, especially when asking for money. So it should come as no surprise that others in the organization, whether volunteer, staff or board member, are also reluctant to approach others.

Recognize that there are barriers. These barriers take the form of spoken barriers (things we are willing to admit) and unspoken barriers (things which we may not be willing to admit).

Spoken Barriers

The spoken barriers vary from individual to individual and from organization to organization. The common spoken barriers are:

- Underdeveloped Fundraising Skills
- Intimidated by Fundraising Goals
- Not Knowing How or When to Ask for a Gift

Underdeveloped fundraising skills

We are asking members of our organization to be champions for our cause. But not everyone is experienced in fundraising. Lack of experience is worrisome to these individuals – whether they are the newest hire or our most senior employee. We're asking them to do something outside of their comfort zone.

Intimidated by fundraising goals

When our team knows that our goal is raising, let's say, a million dollars from major donors, it may seem like an unattainable goal. However, we know that a large goal can be comprised of many smaller gifts. It's important to explain how the goal can be divided and the numbers behind a successful campaign. But even when the individual gift amounts are smaller, whether $100, $1,000 or $10,000; we all tend to speculate that an amount is too much of a stretch, too much to ask.

Not knowing how or when to ask for a gift

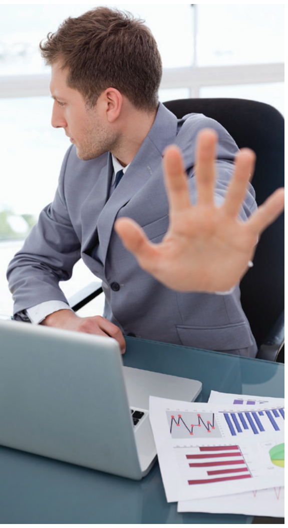
Professional fundraisers, with years of experience and training, have developed a skill for knowing when and how to ask for a gift. But this can be a real challenge for the rest of our team. They may know who to ask – but the how, what, and when can be a struggle for beginners.

Identifying Barriers

Unspoken Barriers

While the acknowledged barriers will have to be addressed, don't forget that your team is probably harboring a few unspoken reservations about approaching their contacts. As with the spoken barriers, the unspoken barriers are pretty common from individual to individual and from organization to organization. The three most common unspoken barriers are:

- Fear of Rejection
- Fear of 'Quid Pro Quo'
- 'Not my job' attitude



Fear of Rejection

This is such a powerful obstacle, because, let's face it – no one likes to be rejected. Fear of rejection is so powerful that it can prevent us from certain accomplishments in our professional and personal life. We're all familiar with setting safe goals and avoiding risks. Everyone prefers to feel accepted and comfortable – and even though rejection is inevitable, people don't naturally gravitate toward a lot of activities (like asking for money) where rejection is a likely reaction.

Fear of 'Quid Pro Quo'

It happens all the time. Someone buys a poinsettia from your child's fundraiser and a month later they're coming by your office first with the cookie order form for their child's fundraiser. So it's reasonable to assume that one of the things your board member, volunteer or staff member might be afraid of is if they ask say 10 people for donations, will those 10 people ask them for donations in return?

'Not my job' attitude

This may be the most frustrating and disappointing barrier you come across. While the other barriers are difficult, with a willing team player, they can be overcome. When you run into a 'not my job' attitude, quite possible it can't be overcome. They may point to other barriers in order to give a more palatable objection, but at the core they may be thinking, 'this isn't what I signed up for – this is not what I want to do."

When we've surveyed attendees of our webcasts on this subject, other barriers that are shared often (but less frequently than the ones above) Include:

- donor identification fatigue after a campaign;
- lack of training in asking;
- lack of time to identify and cultivate new prospects;
- no prospect research department,
- not enough time to build a strong major donor program.

Work as a Team to Address Barriers and Empower Individuals

It's no surprise that members of your team will have reluctance; that's human nature. How you address the barriers will be the key to gaining access to a new network of donors and supporters of your organization.

Culture of Philanthropy

Don't lose sight of the why when you look to empower and inspire your team. Simply put - the why is the mission of your organization. It is always important to keep the mission of the organization front and center when engaging members of the team – that's the essence of building and promoting a culture of philanthropy. The emotion and dedication to the mission must be strong enough to trump the fear of asking for money to support the mission.

Address Barriers as a Team

But you must also address the barriers harbored by your team and give them the practical tools and emotional encouragement to overcome their fears. The degree to which you can do this, is the degree to which you will welcome additional donors to your family of supporters. Once you've identified the particular barriers of each team member, work together as a team to empower them with the confidence, information, and tools necessary to overcome the particular barriers with which they struggle. The most effective way to do this is by grouping people by concern and skillset that needs to be developed, rather than grouping people by functional role (board member, staff and leadership, volunteers). When you group according to barrier, rather then role, it shows the commitment of the organization to the culture of philanthropy and fosters a team atmosphere. It's an action that speaks louder than words. It demonstrates to each individual that they are not alone in struggling with the barrier. It demonstrates that the organization will grow stronger as the team works together to find resolutions for their common barriers.

Resolving Common Spoken Barriers

These are the common spoken barriers we identified earlier:

- Underdeveloped Fundraising Skills
- Intimidated by Fundraising Goals
- Not Knowing How or When to Ask for a Gift

Let's offer up some resolutions to those issues.

Keys to Success—Removing Barriers

Resolutions for 'Underdeveloped Fundraising Skills'

Always be Training

Develop training sessions for all members of your team. Make fundraising training a part of the process for on-boarding new members of the team. No matter what the individual's role will be in your organization, educate them as if they are going to be fundraising for you – because they ultimately will!

Role-playing

The most effective fundraising training involves role-playing. Practice makes perfect, and engaging in a fundraising discussion is no exception. Role-playing gives participant a chance to see what it feels like to be in the situation, engage in the conversation, and think on one's feet. Let your inexperienced team members work with experienced veterans on how to keep the conversation comfortable no matter what the outcome is.

Develop and Share Educational and Marketing Materials

Mark sure all the information you have about your organization is shared with your employees, volunteers and board members. Give the team a guided tour of your website; not only will it better educate them on the organization, they will be able to refer to it in future discussions with potential donors.

Resolutions for 'Intimidating Fundraising Goal'

Develop Realistic Goals

Between the intelligence you can gather on prospective donors, past experience and common sense, you can develop realistic goals and stretch goals. Communicate with your team on how the goals were set and schedule timely updates. Communication is key. Don't let too much time pass between campaign checkpoints. Adjust goals according; if they are accomplished quickly, be sure to adjust up and continue to motivate your team. You are instilling confidence to help your team accomplish their goals.

Small Gifts Today can Lead to Major Gifts in the Future

The experienced fundraiser knows that rarely has there been a major gift that wasn't preceded by smaller gifts. We need to coach our team to make "the ask" whether it's $100, $1000 or $10,000. It's OK and likely that the donor will say something like, "I'm not able to give $1000, but I can give $500." That first time $500 gift may result in a much larger second gift down the line, as well as third, fourth and fifth gifts. Educating our team on donor behavior over time and what the potential is for the organization can make "the ask" a little less daunting.

Define "Giving Levels" with Monetary and Tangible Value

It's easier for your team to ask for money if they can quantify the benefit the donation will bring to constituents ($10 will feed a child for a week, $40 will feed a child for a month, $100 will feed an entire family for a month, etc.). Not only will it make it easier for your team of fundraisers – it's information donors welcome as well.

Resolutions for "How" and "When" Do I Ask?

This is part of the training and role-playing that you will develop. Use your Moves Management system to know when the right time is (not too early and not too late) and ask for the gifts based on what's important to the donor in terms of giving levels. Equipped with information on the prospect, the organization, giving levels, and moves management, your team will become increasingly confident on how and when to ask for a gift.

Resolving Common Unspoken Barriers

These are the common unspoken barriers we identified earlier:

- Fear of Rejection
- Quid Pro Quo
- Not My Job!

Because unspoken barriers are unspoken for a reason (people don't want to fess up), your training should address these barriers and offer resolution.

Fear of Rejection

A passionate belief in the organization (your culture of philanthropy) and a commitment to the needs of your constituents is the best way to overcome fear of rejection. Acknowledge that we can't win every time. There will be people who will not give. In fact, provide your team with data (e.g. only one out of three people asked to give, will respond with a gift) that shows that rejection is part of the process. Often times, just prepping your team so they know how to respond to "no" will soften the blow of rejection, and allow them to exit gracefully without taking it personally, and ready to move to the next ask.

Quid Pro Quo

Again the need to ask (the individual's passion for the cause) has to be greater than the fear of being asked to give in return. Experience shows that the likelihood of a 'return' major gift 'ask' is slim.

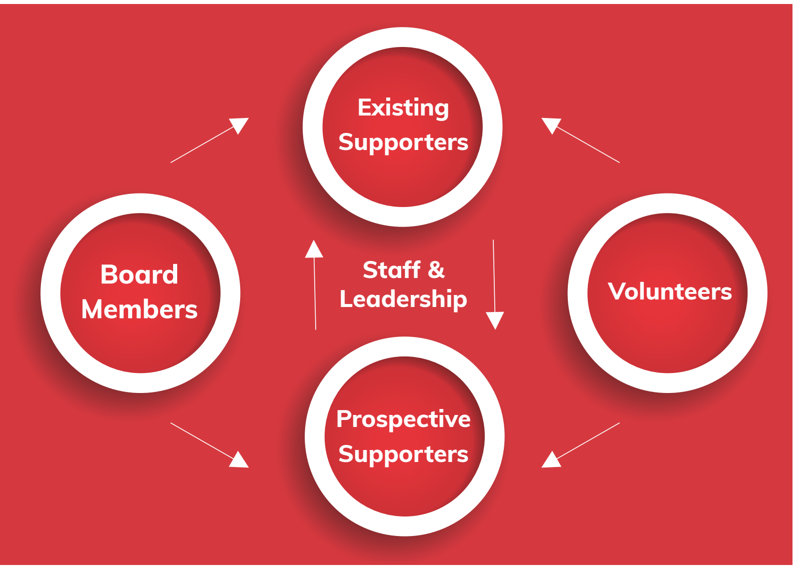
Not My Job!

Sometimes the 'Not My Job' attitude is remedied by seeing others on the team rallying to the cause. Sometimes the insecurities and avoidance to risk is so strong that it may seem like you will never overcome the attitude (something to think about when hiring future employees). Use common sense: a team member may be so good at doing something else that you don't want to risk losing them by pushing them too hard. Be patient and work with them to get creative and find ways that the Not My Job-types can contribute to the process. As you implement and continue to develop the culture of philanthropy within your organization, the message should come through loud and clear that fundraising is everybody's job.

Keys to Success—Generate New Supporters & Elevate Existing Supporters

Generate New Supporters and Elevate Existing Supporters

A picture is worth a thousand words so let's begin with an illustration of the relationships you will be looking to leverage by acting out the Six Degrees of Separation at any organization:



You begin with your staff and leadership, volunteers and board members. The individuals in these three groups potentially have relationships with both existing supporters and prospective supporters.

Identify who among your staff and leadership, volunteers and board members has the strongest ties to the existing supporters. That person becomes the main contact no matter what their role is within the organization (front desk, board member, volunteer, etc.).

Next take a look at the list of prospective supporters and identify those within the organization with connections and strong ties to them.

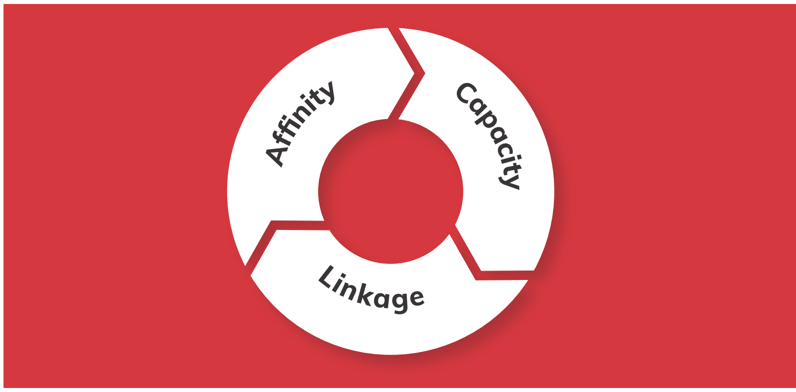
Emphasize how important relationships are and how a friend introducing a supporter to the organization can fast track the connection between the supporter and the organization and bring additional dollars in to support the mission of the nonprofit. Celebrate and communicate how everyone working together helps create the strongest bond between your organization and supporters.

Capacity, Linkage, and Affinity

Everyone is charged with the responsibility to identify realistic supporters for your organization according to capacity (ability to contribute time, talent and treasure), linkage (connection to someone within the organization), and affinity (they have a favorable, passionate disposition to the mission). It is important to note that all three characteristics need to be present.

Start educating your network about what your organization does (mission); whom it benefits (constituents); and how they can help as a supporter (donations, services, etc.).

Further identify those that seem to have a personal affiliation towards a given cause, event, campaign, or activity shared with your organization.



Generate New Supporters & Elevate Existing Supporters

Beyond a Name

Remember: it's more than a name. It's capacity, linkage, and affinity. Let's illustrate in another way what we mean by that.

It's not uncommon for a nonprofit leadership team to ask board members to bring the organization five new names who have the capacity to give.

While those people may have the capacity to give, they are unlikely to give or otherwise support the organization without the linkage (a strong personal connection with someone within the organization) or the affinity (a positive disposition toward the mission).

Identifying A More Qualified Potential Supporter

A more effective approach is to leverage all the people in your organization (not just board members) and ask them "Who in your network might be interested in supporting our mission?" and do they fit the capacity, linkage and affinity model?

Often it's difficult to identify contacts off the top of one's head. It may help to list some categories of connections, for example, neighborhood, education, clubs, friends, worship, etc. Then start listing names under those headings.

Social media accounts like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are handy repositories of connections. Set aside a few minutes each day to look at social media and ascertain potential contacts (friend of a friend concept). LinkedIn's search feature will not only allow you to search by name, but will also show you who in your network has a connection to the name you're searching.

You need a system and a process to ensure that your plans are executed and results are tracked. It's the best way to ensure the success of your Six Degrees of Major Gift Fundraising program.

Develop a System and Track Your Cultivation Process

Develop a System

- ***Establish a solicitation process for board members, staff, and volunteers.*** It may be appropriate to have two solicitation processes – one for prospective donors and one for current donors.
- Based on the list of contacts, ***establish reasonable giving levels and fundraising goals.*** Make sure they fit the capacity, linkage, and affinity model. Assign a main contact from the internal team.
- ***Integrate your solicitation process*** into an electronic customer relationship management (CRM) tool.
- ***Document your process*** so there is consistency from campaign to campaign. The consistency will also help your organization-wide fundraising team to become more proficient and familiar with the process.

Track Cultivation Process

An electronic constituent relationship management (CRM) system will allow you to efficiently: track relationships and affiliations; record and track points of contact; and keep notes and information on donors and prospective donors that are accessible organization wide. Some examples of valuable information that CRM can store for you include prospect/donor event attendance, volunteer hours, campaign involvement, donations – any interaction with your organization.

An electronic CRM solution will also equip your new processes with the ability for reporting, analytics and dashboards. While there are a variety of reports used for donor and major gift tracking. Here are a few reporting and dashboard ***must haves***:

- Staff activity
- Highest current donor giving reports
- Historical donation averages by year and quarter
- Current Year or Fiscal Year goals and current dollars raised

Keep in mind that relationship tracking is as important as relationship building – and there are tools within a CRM that can provide you visual representations of the relationships and connections that already exist within your database.

Reporting, dashboards, relationship tracking – these are all tools within a CRM that will positively impact your prospect identification and major gift solicitation process, but those tools are useless without the investment of time and effort to populate your database with collected data and research.

The relationship between your organization and its CRM database is codependent. Organizations rely on their databases for accurate, up to date and consistent data and those databases rely on their organizations to input and provide that information.

All activity should be logged into the CRM solution in a timely manner. Internal team members involved in the major gift fundraising process should be trained on the CRM. The failure of most CRM systems has little to do with the failings of the system itself but rather with the lack of adoption by the internal team.

If you are uncertain about how to select and implement technology, turn to experts with the tools, and knowledge of both the tools and the workings of a nonprofit organization to help you be more efficient, provide helpful information to encourage your 'culture of philanthropy,' and assist you in being attentive to your donors.

Why AccuFund

AccuFund CRM's team specializes in Salesforce and the Nonprofit Success Pack (NPSP), providing a variety of fundraising and database related services exclusively to 501c3 nonprofit organizations. Our team works to understand your organization's needs, goals, and priorities and uses a combination of Salesforce's NPSP out of the box features, as well as customizing the database as needed.

Our goal is to provide effective, top of the line services so that your organization can maximize the Salesforce platform for day to day administrative activities, donation management, acknowledgements, constituent management and more.

AccuFund CRM services include needs assessment, data migration services, development/customization, training, and support to help your organization optimize and adopt the Salesforce platform.

AccuFund CRM's Approach to Optimizing your Salesforce Tool:

- Build a powerful cloud-based database of constituents, donation management, fundraising events, automated reports, and business processes.
- Create efficiencies through lesser known Salesforce tools, customization, or automation.
- Integrate third party applications to meet your unique needs, wants, and goals.
- Create custom security rules to ensure correct viewing and usage of your data by staff.

Our team provides training that is highly interactive, gives hands-on exercises that improve end user mastery of the system, and tailor the training to the real-life scenarios that face your organization.

Popular Enhancements AccuFund CRM has Provided for Clients:

- Implement custom donor goal calculations.
- Automate acknowledgements and receipting.
- Custom reporting and dashboards for accurate fundraising metrics.
- Assess system functionality.
- Data migration/cleansing – other items for those already familiar with Salesforce.
- Structure database from the ground up.
- Incorporate organizational branding throughout communications.
- Educate about lesser-known Salesforce features or tips.

AccuFund CRM Assists You with Out-of-the-Box Salesforce Nonprofit Success Pack Components:

- Donor & Relationship Management
- Donation Tracking
- Marketing Campaigns
- Reporting, Analytics & Forecasting
- Pledge Management
- Approvals & Workflow
- Email & Productivity
- Content Library & Document Management
- Honor/Memorial Tracking
- Membership Management

Why AccuFund

Accounting & Fundraising Integration

AccuFund also provides organizations with the all inclusive functionality to integrate your Salesforce database to our five-star rated fund accounting solution. The AccuFund Accounting Suite is another powerful, efficient, and user friendly solution that your organization can equip itself with, while giving yourselves the ability to:

- Unite accounting and fundraising operations.
- Eliminate duplicate entry into two databases.
- Decrease human key error with less data entry.
- Save time.

How does it work? Our product, the Connector, is a tool used to identify new donations entered into the Salesforce donor management database and then posts those donations as receipts in the fund accounting system–automatically.

This is a very exciting time for your organization. Equipped with the power and flexibility of Salesforce and AccuFund CRM's professional services, you can accomplish great things for your organization, your mission and your community.

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APPENDIX

Six Degrees – A Concept of Connectedness Dating Back Over Eighty Years

Six Degrees of Separation is the theory that everyone is six, or fewer, steps away (by way of introduction) from any other person in the world.

Hungarian writer, Frigyes Karinthy in his short story “Chains”, first introduced the notion in 1929. The concept is based on the idea that the number of acquaintances grows exponentially according to the number of links in a chain. Only a small number of links is required for the set of acquaintances to become the entire human population.

In the 1950s, Ithiel de Sola Pool (MIT) and Manfred Kochen (IBM) set out to prove the theory mathematically. After 20 years they were unable to solve the problem to their own satisfaction.

But in 1967, the American sociologist, Stanley Milgram devised a new way to test the theory, which he dubbed ‘the small world problem.’ He randomly selected people in the Midwest to send packages to a stranger located in Massachusetts. The senders knew the recipient’s name, occupation, and general location. They were instructed to send the package to a person they know on a first-name basis – someone they thought was most likely, out of all their friends, to know the target personally. That person would do the same, and so on, until the package was personally delivered to the target recipient.

Going into the exercise, it was estimated that this would take at least a hundred intermediaries to ultimately connect to the chosen recipient. In fact, it only took between five and seven intermediaries to get the package delivered. Milgram’s findings were published in Psychology Today and inspired the phrase “six degree of separation.” Although Milgram’s findings were discounted after it was discovered that he based his conclusion on a very small number of packages, six degrees of separation continued to intrigue scientists and amateurs alike.

Brett C. Tjaden published a computer game on the University of Virginia’s website based on the ‘small world problem’ and used the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) to document connections between different actors. Time Magazine called his site, The Oracle of Bacon at Virginia, one the “Ten Best Websites of 1996.”

Playwright John Guare popularized the phrase “Six Degrees of Separation” when he chose it as the title for his play of the same name. In 1993, the movie Six Degrees of Separation starring Will Smith, Stockard Channing, and Donald Sutherland was released. It was also written by John Guare and directed by Fred Schipisi.

In 2001, Duncan Watts, a professor at Columbia University, continued his own earlier research into the phenomenon and recreated Milgram’s experiment on the Internet. Watts used an email message as the “package” that needed to be delivered, and surprisingly, after reviewing the data collected by 48,000 senders and 19 targets (in 157 countries), Watts found that average number of intermediaries was indeed, six.

Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon

Most people have heard of Six Degrees of Separation through the game where the challenge is to see if you can connect any other actor to Kevin Bacon in six connections (degrees) or less. It originated from a quote from Bacon during a 1994 Premier magazine interview in which Bacon said he had worked with everybody in Hollywood (or someone who’s worked with them). The founders of the game, three Albright College students (Craig Fass, Brian Turtle, and Mike Ginelli) appeared on The Jon Stewart Show and The Howard Stern Show to explain the game and it quickly became embedded in popular culture.