

Five Steps to Mission-Driven Fundraising

1. Define your mission.

As a college, university or independent school, the chances are good that you already have a mission, outlined clearly on your website or on other marketing or campaign materials. Become acquainted with it, if you aren't already. Make sure that it's as clear as it can possibly be and that it succinctly communicates the objectives of your institution. More importantly, make sure that you believe in it. Your mission has to be real to you before you can make it real for your audience. What makes your cause (mission) worthy of support?

2. Illustrate your mission with real-life examples.

A mission is more than just words on paper (or on screen). It's a living, breathing entity. Make it real for your audience. They'll be more likely to support your institution if they can see/hear/read that you do what you say you're going to do. In other words, show; don't tell. In your fundraising materials, include three to five examples. If your mission is to educate future leaders, provide examples, stories about successful alumni in leadership roles. What is your institution doing that donors can get behind?

3. Show them the money.

Donors want to know where their money is going, especially in a sluggish economy. They want their donations to have an immediate, measurable impact. Acknowledge this fact, and outline where the money will go and what it will do to enhance and support your mission. Use specific examples, such as a new leadership program or initiative. What kinds of things will a donor's money make happen?

4. Keep it simple.

A wordy, high-concept mission will be difficult to build a fundraising platform around. Distill the mission down to its core and simplify the language. Be direct. Use specific examples. If potential donors don't understand your mission or what their money will support, they'll move on to other causes. Make it as clear and easy as possible for donors to understand your cause and support it.

5. Always refer back to the mission.

Repeat, repeat, repeat. If you're claiming that your students change the world, show your donors how. Then show them again. All of your fundraising materials should be tied to your mission: defining it, supporting it, making it real. A well-illustrated mission—one that's clearly making a difference in the world—will motivate donors to take action.