

# Rural Fundraising

1. Know Your Niche - Be clear about what makes your organization unique when making your case for support. Rural organizations have a tendency to try and be too many things in order to meet the needs of their under-served rural community. Focus on being great at one or two things vs. being average at several. Know your core program/service and be able to articulate why it is important and fills a need in the community. Learn how to tell your story and do it often. Be willing to start small and adjust your growth expectations to fit the resources and "pace of change" in rural communities.
2. Build relationships with local media and municipal staff/elected officials - Working in a rural community gives you more direct access to media and local government, an advantage that urban organizations don't have. News articles raise your profile with potential donors and supplement grant applications. Commit the time to cultivate these relationships before you need them. Don't be afraid to write your own "news story" and send it to the local paper - they are often looking for content. Invite municipal staff and councillors to events, program launches, or a community open house. The more they know about what you do and how you meet a need in the community, the better able they are to support your cause. A letter of support on that grant application from your local municipality carries significant weight so don't overlook them as potential partners. Municipal staff often hear about grant opportunities that you may not know about or have access to. Make sure you are on their mind when these opportunities arise.



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3. Look beyond the locals - Reach out to a broader audience during your fundraising appeals. Avoid giving the locals "donor fatigue" by casting a wider net. Develop a fundraising plan that includes outreach to former locals who have a nostalgic tie to the community; friends and family who live outside the community and will be inclined to support your cause because it is important to someone they care about; seasonal residents (if they can afford a cottage they probably have money and a vested interest in the community); college or university students (they often have no money but have lots of TIME to invest in supporting your organization). Diversify your fundraising strategy beyond reliance on grants. Make sure you have an effective web presence - this doesn't have to cost money.
4. Build trust and respect - Expand your network of community contacts and participate in local initiatives. Avoid too narrow a focus on networking only with like-minded professionals. Be patient because this takes time, especially in smaller communities where there is a welcoming atmosphere but it takes time to be considered "one of them". Demonstrate your commitment by getting involved and following through on tasks or promises. Show that you are serious about sticking around and interested in other efforts to improve the community. Remember the golden rule of effective networking: Give something before you ask for something!
5. Look for opportunities to collaborate with other rural organizations - It is easy to become isolated in a rural community, especially when you are under-resourced and your energy is focussed on keeping the organization alive. Make the time to become familiar with other organizations in the area...they are probably struggling with similar issues (or may hold the solutions)! Develop joint funding proposals or events that offer donors a bigger bang for their buck. Be creative about sharing resources, especially staff/volunteers. Prepare to innovate! Best practices built on urban scenarios are not always viable in a rural setting. Don't overlook forging alliances with the local faith communities - they are also rural non-profit organizations, they have potential volunteers to support your initiatives, and may even have money to contribute.



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