A Practical Guide to Donor Screening

By David Allen, Development for Conservation

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Screening and Rating has two essential purposes. It is designed:

- to identify new potential major gift prospects, and
- to update major gift prospect information about current members.

Screening

Screening is a formal review of an organization's entire membership list for the purpose of identifying CAPACITY to give. In most cases, participants are asked to attend a meeting that lasts no longer than 90 minutes, including approximately 10 minutes allowed for giving participants instructions on how to complete the screening process.

Participants are asked to review a list of local members up to a maximum of 2,000 names. Information other than names and cities is not provided in order to minimize the time involved in screening each list.

ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED IS KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

Participants should screen those they know personally and those of whom they have direct personal knowledge, such as knowledge of a specific gift to another organization or campaign. They should review the list quickly and should not expect to know or have opinions on a large number of members. Participants should base their estimates upon what they believe a person is capable of *committing to give* even if the period of the gift stretches over several years. Opinions should be based on POTENTIAL and CAPACITY, not on what they think the member is INCLINED to do. It will be the job of the cultivation efforts to raise the inclination level. The capacity ratings are NOT used as justification for asking for gifts of any magnitude.

Rating

The resulting qualified names are then presented for a second review, completed by Board members and development committee members who may not be Board members. Assigned ratings are based on INCLINATION. In general the rating exercise will determine four groups:



- Those ready to be asked for a major gift,
- Those whom someone knows and whose giving is considered "possible to likely" but, who may need significant cultivation before making a major gift commitment,
- Those whom no-one connected to organizational fundraising knows personally,
- And those whom someone knows to be unlikely to make a major gift.

When complete, Screening and Rating should yield a Capacity/Inclination Matrix that can determine current solicitations, and guide strategic cultivation efforts.

Instructions

For ORGANIZATION's initial donor screening, we will use a simplified model; we can always come back through with a more sophisticated screen at a later time.

- 1. Scan each name on each page looking for names you either know personally or recognize.
- 2. For those you recognize, <u>place a star (*)</u> beside those who could make a \$10,000 giving decision. The decision might actually be paid out as a pledge over a period of several years, but the idea that they have the net worth or income level capable of supporting such a decision is the criteria that will separate about 10% from the rest.
- 3. For those you know personally, those you have "access" to, <u>circle their names</u> and place your initials inside the circle. "Access" means that if you send them an email or leave them a voice message, they will respond.
- 4. If a donor has moved, recently divorced, or passed away, please so indicate that we might update our records.

Again, just to reiterate: This is a qualitative exercise designed to reduce our total list to a more manageable size for more intensive cultivation effort. The stars will not be used as justification for asking the donors for any specific amounts, and the circles will not be consequently "assigned" to you for further action. All information will be kept strictly confidential, and the screening pages themselves will be destroyed.



DAVID ALLEN

I am a non-profit organizational development consultant. I work with organization boards to help their members learn how to be better leaders and advocates.

My background includes 30 years working in membership fundraising, major donor development, communications, and marketing. I worked for about half that time for Nature Conservancy (TNC) chapters in Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin. In addition to my duties for the individual chapters, I served TNC as an internal fundraising consultant and major donor development trainer.



In 2000, I served as the vice-president of operations for the Wisconsin-based, international conservation organization Sand County Foundation, a position I held through mid-2009.

Gathering Waters Conservancy, a land trust service agency based in Wisconsin, called me in 2002 to ask whether I would be interested in teaching a seminar for Wisconsin land trusts on major donor development. From 2002, then, through 2009, I consulted on a nights and weekends basis with just a few clients each year.

In March of 2009, I launched my consulting business full-time using the name **Development for Conservation**.

Also in 2009, I partnered with Peter McKeever, and more recently with Nancy Moore, to form what is now known as **Conservation Consulting Group**. Together we help land trusts prepare for accreditation by providing assessment, planning, and leadership coaching services.

I consider myself a strategic thinker, problem solver, facilitator, educator, and program developer who brings a particular passion for conservation and the environment.

Practice Competencies

Fundraising

- Development Audit
- Staff/Board Training and Development
- Major Gift Coaching
- Capital Campaigns

Organizational Development

- Strategy Development
- Practice & Process Assessment
- Problem Solving Facilitation
- Marketing



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