

*This chapter identifies features of a fundraising appeal that elicited extraordinary giving by tapping into individual commitment during a campaign to preserve a California community's highly valued coastal property.*

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## Green giving: Engagement, values, activism, and community life

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IN A PREVIOUS STUDY, I observed that fundraising texts engage potential donors by creating social roles and status for the benefactors and by providing values through which they can define themselves. Fundraising documents particularly appeal to the emotions of shame and pride—by representing a social rupture in the need situation (something shameful) and social healing in the act of charity (something one could be proud of). Fundraising, I argued, could increase the psychic and identity rewards of giving by engaging the gift-givers with the work and activity of the charitable organization, and it could reach beyond the limited budget people usually allocate to psychic goods by establishing charitable gifts as part of the costs of their way of life and part of the meanings, activities, and communities within which they live their lives (Bazerman, 1997).

In other words, fundraising documents could provide a variety of psychic rewards in exchange for the potential gift—reinforcing

givers' sense of social power, allowing them to assert their personal values into a wider sphere or attach themselves to admirable public values, or giving them the opportunity to empathize with social ruptures and perceive themselves proudly as social healers, particularly in relation to the ruptures and healings of their own lives. However, the amount people allotted to such psychic rewards seemed limited to, on average, 2 percent to 3 percent of income (Kelly, 1997). Only when people seemed to see the giving as part of their more general activities, commitments, and communities—like when giving to their religious congregation—would it be more substantial, because it came to be seen as part of the general expenses of their way of life.

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### *Environmentalism in Santa Barbara and community awareness*

To explore these ideas more concretely, this chapter examines fundraising in Santa Barbara for environmental causes—causes associated strongly with community values, historical ruptures and healing in the region, continuing activism in the region, and the community's way of life.

Santa Barbara has historically had a sense of itself as an aesthetic and environmentally planned community. The city has been a major tourist destination and home to a substantial population of the wealthy and famous since at least 1875. When oil development came around the turn of the century, strong community opposition to unrestrained development led to resistance and regulation (Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen, 1997). In the late 1920s, after an earthquake leveled most of the city, the downtown was rebuilt according to a well-coordinated aesthetic plan that became the basis of strictly regulated development. The quality of life (largely expressed through issues of architecture, development, public amenities, and environment) has remained a public priority that has engaged the newspaper, the city council, and community organizations.

This communal sense was ruptured by the government leases for oil drilling off the coast and the almost-immediate oil spill in 1969 (Easton, 1972), which galvanized the community to activism. During this crisis three organizations were founded that remain cornerstones of Santa Barbara environmentalism: Get Oil Out (or GOO), which monitors and responds to threats arising from oil development and pollution; the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), which monitors and responds to other environmental threats and land development throughout the region; and the Community Environmental Council (CEC), which engages in positive community development activities, such as recycling, hazardous waste collection, demonstration organic gardens, land use studies, and most recently a community indicators project.

These groups have provided state and national leadership in the environmental movement. They were, for example, early and significant players in the creation of Earth Day and in initiating recycling. The people who were active in the events of 1969 remain active in the town, region, and nation. Further, although the University of California at Santa Barbara was not as fully engaged in the 1969 oil spill as it might have been, it soon established the first environmental studies program, which to this day offers a vibrant undergraduate major. In recent years UCSB has established a professional school of environmental science and management, which offers graduate degrees. Santa Barbara itself is also home to an important national environmental policy center and several other environmental groups, organizations, and foundations. I give these details to indicate how deeply environmentalism is now embedded in the community's activities, values, and way of life.

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***The Community Environmental Council's capital campaign***

To examine the kinds of appeals that have worked for environmental causes in the region, I interviewed Roe Anne White, current development director at CEC, and Sally Walker, who was paid

consultant on a major capital campaign for the CEC about five years ago and on the 1996 effort to raise funds to acquire the largest remaining undeveloped coastal property in the city for use as a park and preserve—the area locally known as the Wilcox property, although it is now officially the Douglas Family Preserve. As a volunteer and officer of the local chapter of the Audubon Society, Walker has raised more modest pay-as-you-go funds for that organization. She has also worked as a fundraiser for a number of regional human service and cultural organizations. White has previously worked with private schools and arts fundraising in Los Angeles.

Before the capital campaign of 1991, CEC did not attempt systematic fundraising and development. From its inception, it had successfully supported itself largely on major grants and contracts from the government and private foundations, in recent years producing a half a million dollars a year. It also raised around \$20,000 a year from annual membership fees of \$20 to \$25 and had an annual major gift of \$50,000. But in 1991 CEC's board determined that approximately \$750,000 was needed to pay off the mortgage for the organization's center, make repairs and improvements, equip a downtown recycling center, and expand some programs. Sally Walker began to professionalize fundraising at the organization and oversaw that goal's accomplishment in two and a half years.

One of Walker's first tasks was to help CEC's staff understand that fundraising was an "institutionwide commitment" to a public relations mindset. "The program staff needed to come to think of their work in terms of projects that could then be communicated to a potential funder," Walker says. To identify givers, she also needed to organize the records and establish a database that would track donor histories, keep track of and provide reminders for renewals and pledges, monitor cash flow and goal achievements, and provide names for future appeals (the cleaning up and development of the mailing list remains a continuing task). She beefed up membership benefits and designed fundraising literature for the capital campaign that had a distinctive look, different

from earlier appeals from the organization. Finally, she also needed to develop volunteers because “all capital campaigns are volunteer-intensive.”

Now I will focus on volunteers and the roles they served, because this issue seems to contain several interesting implications for the social relations involved in gift giving. Sally Walker particularly was concerned to “increase involvement from very prominent and qualified individuals.” These qualified individuals served on committees that drew on their particular talents and professional networks and established a strong alliance between CEC fundraising and aspects of the volunteers’ lives. Most impressive was the site development committee, including such people as a painting contractor, a developer, a landscape architect, and an owner of a home improvement center. They took charge of renovations, got bids, selected contractors, and oversaw some aspects of the work. In short, they provided highly professional contributions of specialized “expertise that no one on the staff or board had,” said Walker. Further, by using their own professional connections they negotiated discounts and in-kind contributions, including ecologically appropriate technology such as outdoor lighting powered by solar panels. The members of this committee were enacting their own personal and professional commitments to environmentally sound construction and were able to enter into collaborations with suppliers who were interested in supporting green development and green construction trades.

Similarly, the “Burn the Mortgage” effort, essentially a major gifts committee, was headed by a vice president of a major investment brokerage. Because of his professional experience he was very comfortable in talking to people about money and giving. He was also able to enact his commitment to the town and the environment through his professional identity and skills.

One of the significant changes that occurred at this time was that the board, which had previously thought of itself as a group of activists, began to think of itself as potential givers and fundraisers. A couple of board members speaking to others then

on the board—about a dozen people in all—were able to raise over \$70,000 among themselves. Similar amounts were raised from prior board members.

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### *Regularizing fundraising at the Community Environmental Council*

Roe Anne White became permanent development director after the capital campaign met its goals in 1994. She continues to work with the board to build their fundraising potential through personal contacts, people to whom they might send relevant news articles with personal notes and whom they might invite to CEC receptions and lectures. The most promising contacts are invited to lunch at the headquarters with the director.

These initiatives illustrate what White characterizes as a standard principle of fundraising: “People give to people; they don’t give to organizations.” Information about the organization and its programs is provided in a series of brochures, newsletters, and pamphlets, which are distributed regularly and are available on a rack in the entryway to the center. These serve to provide supplementary information and keep donors aware of the organization’s activities. Other materials are directly part of activities, such as a widely distributed pamphlet on nonpolluting means of pest control. As far as fundraising goes, however, the documents seem secondary to the personal contact. During the personal contact, White and the organization officers can speak directly to the interests and concerns of the gift-givers. About the values that drive environmental concern, she notes,

What I have found with the environment is that while many people are concerned with the environment, few open their pocketbooks to it as readily as one might expect. It is more challenging to raise money for an environmental organization than the other nonprofits I have worked for. For example, while the donor base is limited at an independent school, those involved are more likely to give because the gift directly benefits their children or grandchildren. It is clear that many Santa Barbarans care about

the environment, but CEC's work, although addressing important environmental issues, does not have high visibility (like the Wilcox property or the current Oak issue).

Having a compelling need is a useful tool in fundraising. CEC has steadily addressed issues and problems for a quarter of a century, but it has had no urgent crisis to rally around since its founding after the oil spill in 1969. CEC also has a special fundraising challenge in that our work is so diverse. It ranges from community programs to research and technical assistance and is not explained with a few pat phrases. Additionally, although CEC has been in Santa Barbara for over twenty-eight years, it is a little-known organization. To enhance our fundraising effort, we need to articulate our mission more clearly, clarify the work CEC is doing, and get our name out into the community more effectively. Finally, with over five hundred nonprofits in Santa Barbara, there is a lot of competition for contributions in this community.

This is why building that sense of personal contact and ownership is important. Because most projects are carried out by staff there are only limited roles for volunteers, such as helping out with the gardens, doing office work, or getting involved in the art-from-scrap program. These volunteers are also not the same as the donors and are not likely to have the means for substantial contribution. Similarly, campaigns based on names gathered from various community events and programs have had low response rates. Nonetheless, a targeted appeal directed at twenty people who had been involved with CEC's garden program in the past did produce a 37 percent response rate, suggesting that commitments established earlier through activism and volunteerism may be reinvigorated and mobilized in other forms of commitment as people's life situations change. Part of the continuing analysis of the membership database is to locate those who have had continuing commitment through regular modest giving and may be now in a position to become major givers. Through such efforts the CEC now receives around \$200,000 annually in donations and has a target of twice that.

To strengthen the sense of identity and ownership on the part of givers, four large "donor walls" at CEC's headquarters recognize major donors. In the library meeting room, one plaque identifies

large givers to CEC's annual fund in the current year, distributed in four categories named after offshore islands. Another plaque identifies members of the Selma Rubin Society, named after a long-committed activist and founding board member who was the first to write the organization into her will. Members of this society have made planned gifts. These people are invited for an annual luncheon and receive letters from the director periodically to keep them updated and involved. This campaign is aimed at building endowment, which had been only \$300 and now is approaching \$100,000 in cash with \$665,000 in anticipated gifts.

The first of two plaques in the office hallway identifies the major givers in the 1991 capital campaign in five categories ranging from benefactor to friend. The other lists about twenty corporate gift-givers to the newly established Corporate Council in four categories from corporate patron to corporate fellows. Major corporate givers include local banks and newspapers as well as refuse and recycling companies, landscape and architectural organizations, hotels, and businesses in other industries with a direct interest in environment and town quality of life. A number of companies have chosen to locate in town because of the quality of life, and some have become members of the Corporate Council. Roe Anne White explains, "From our earliest days, one of CEC's roles has been to ensure that the quality of life we enjoy in Santa Barbara is sustained. I initiated CEC's Corporate Council last year so that we could provide a forum for the business and environmental communities to come together to discuss issues important to both groups, while at the same time providing support for CEC's community programs."

The founding of the Corporate Council dovetails with a new major initiative being led by CEC in collaboration with a variety of individuals representing a number of interests. The Santa Barbara South Coast Community Indicators Project is modeled on similar programs in other communities designed to assess the overall health of the community. The project publishes a periodic volume and has a Web site that together create a portrait of the quality of life in the region based on existing social, economic, and envi-



ronmental statistics. It provides a mechanism for various groups to monitor developments and engage in informed policy discussion both on particular issues and in a more holistic way. In creating this community portrait with the environment as a major component, CEC keeps environmental issues always on the policy table when any issue of community well-being arises and also makes clear to other community stakeholders their interest in maintaining and improving the environment.

Another new project, monitoring pollution in the watershed, also has potential impact on engaging targeted groups of people. The fundraising consequences of the watershed project are unclear because it is in its earliest development; however, it has already elicited one major gift from a regular CEC funder.

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### *The Wilcox property campaign*

The most spectacular fundraising effort in the region in recent years has been to raise the money for the acquisition of the Wilcox property. The effort suggests how much community identity and way of life are linked with environment and nature preservation and how extraordinary the gift giving can be if these associations are tapped so that people see giving as investing in their community.

A sixty-five-acre undeveloped property sitting on bluffs above a beach that is popular with local residents—though not frequented as much by tourists—had long been of concern to the adjoining suburban neighborhood. For a number of years it had been used as a nursery, but more recently it had been left fallow and open to community use for walking, dog running, ocean gazing, hang gliding, and other passive recreation. At least twice in the late 1980s bonds to purchase the land for a park failed the needed two-thirds majority by narrow margins. A number of plans for development had not been approved by the city and a lawsuit was filed by the owners, whose investment was being eaten up by the debt and the inability to use their property. In 1994, the county set aside \$1 million of

Coastal Resource Enhancement Funds (originally oil mitigation funds obtained in a settlement with the oil companies) as seed money for direct purchase of the land if a local group led by the Small Wilderness Area Preserve (SWAP) could obtain matching funds. It was thought that the ultimate purchase price would be in excess of \$5 million, and perhaps between \$7 and \$10 million.

After a year of almost no additional funds being raised, the city council was talking of reallocating some of the funds for another land purchase (*Santa Barbara News-Press*, 1995–1996). At this point, developers, perhaps suspecting that the preservationists were vulnerable, announced that they intended to develop the land as a single mansion. However, on January 18, 1996, the Trust for Public Land was able to arrange a last-ditch option to purchase the land at a low price of \$3.5 million under the condition that the money be raised in six weeks—by February 29. Given the amount, the history, and the short deadline, this offer seemed almost certain to be an empty but politically useful gesture to clear the way for development.

SWAP and the trust needed to raise \$2.5 million in six weeks. The state Department of Parks and Recreation immediately offered a \$282,000 grant. Other state grants were sought but remained pending. Local politicians endorsed the effort. In the first four weeks over \$370,000 was raised in private donations, for the most part in smaller gifts but also including one \$100,000 donation. Much of it was collected at tables in front of local markets.

However, on February 14, with about two weeks remaining, an anonymous half-million-dollar gift gave the campaign an enormous boost and donations increased. As the deadline approached they were \$600,000 short, which was made up by a single gift from Michael Douglas, the prominent actor, who lives in the area.

Sally Walker described the extraordinary nature of the campaign:

The Wilcox property . . . transformed the community. To this day, people will talk about the Wilcox campaign. And it evoked such synergy and such unselfish participation and sharing so broadly among the community. There was such a spontaneity to it that I don't think our community has ever seen anything like that . . . I've lived here twenty-one years and I've never [seen such] a mobilization of this community around an issue, and

in such a positive, wholehearted sense. You are talking about in one and a half months going from about eight volunteers to about three thousand volunteers, going from virtually no donations to \$3 million in donations, and it just swept the community with such passion and fervor that was unprecedented in my professional career, unprecedented in the history of any of the organizations involved in making this happen.

Why was this? What made it happen? I think it was a combination of things. Consistent public information. . . . The media carried this constantly. This was a great service. They followed it so doggedly and so prominently. And people were writing letters to the editor daily. There were articles almost every day on the editorial page, in Barney Brantingham's column [Brantingham is a local columnist who has become a kind of insider's voice about town life], on the editorial page, and the front of the second section. TV stations were constantly after us for updated information.

An examination of the *Santa Barbara News-Press* (1995–1996) confirms the strong media support. Front-page articles appearing weekly during the early part of the campaign turned into almost every other day occurrences during the final two weeks, and they were accompanied by editorials and letters to the editor. Moreover, the stories regularly included a sidebar—a shaded box providing information on how to cooperate. Many of these stories seemed orchestrated to create excitement about the property and campaign—describing the beauty and value of the property, the community concern over the years, and the excitement generated by the campaign. Barney Brantingham not only devoted a number of columns to supporting the campaign but was also directly in contact with SWAP. The newspaper was deeply involved in “boosterism” on this issue, presenting the property and the campaign as matters of civic importance, pride, and part of Santa Barbara's way of life.

Similarly, the January 25, 1996, issue of the community events weekly, the *Santa Barbara Independent*, announced the possibility of the land purchase and the campaign to raise funds in a long cover-page feature story on “The Twenty Greatest Environmental Hits of Santa Barbara,” clearly setting the stage for a new mobilization in the tradition of the city rebuilding in the 1920s and the response to the oil spill in 1969. The local TV news also carried the story

regularly, and the cable company posted frequent announcements on the community bulletin board that accompanies its programming schedule scroll.

This kind of excitement supported by the media carried through in the community in neighborhood meetings run by SWAP, leafletting campaigns, individually arranged fundraising dinners in homes and in restaurants, apple juice sales at the entrance of the property (children sold the juice for \$5 a glass), and pledge tables at the organic markets, specialty foods stores, and the supermarkets. Small gifts generated by such activities provided somewhere in the range of \$1 million. Many of these smaller gifts actually reflected individuals “giving at their highest potential. People who really cared about this. We had a lot of small gifts but also a lot of gifts of \$1,000 or more. This really captured the public imagination,” says Walker.

Over \$1.1 million was provided by two major gifts, and several local foundations provided several other substantial grants. To seek this money, Sally Walker used a small edition showbook prepared by the Trust for Public Land. About thirty copies were made of this twelve-page collection of photographs, maps, and letters of support. The book displayed the natural beauty of the land and its importance to the community life. Walker comments, “We needed to show the beauty of this place to seek gifts from people who had never walked the property. It helped that it was on TV. . . . Photographs of the serenity and the beauty of this property were very important for Michael Douglas’s gift and the other major anonymous gift.”

Also very important to the major givers was the excitement and support expressed to that point through community fundraising. Walker says, “The reason that these two \$600,000 dollar gifts came was because it was clear to everyone that there was so much will in the community to make this happen.”

When asked to characterize the motivations of two major givers, Walker commented, “Very quickly this project came to mean more than just a piece of land, it came to mean. . . . it became a community identity issue. It was a ‘my God, what does this community stand for.’ It came to embody community spirit. It came to embody

a lot of things for people. It came to embody empowerment—about people feeling empowered to dramatically do something on their watch. . . . It was just waking up to this realization that all the great environmental victories in our community were won in the past by people on their watch, and what were we going to do on our watch.” And in describing the meaning of this campaign to the larger community she said,

What kind of community do we want to be—that is really what you want people to think about when you are doing environmental fundraising. . . . Who are we? What do we care about? What is important here? And that as individuals we have the ability to make a tremendous difference. And the Wilcox property made that clear. We have the ability to make a difference. That feeling and tone was carried and it sustained this project in a way that no one before had really seen. Maybe back in the past when some of the big environmental issues had come, but this involved a lot of fundraising. It didn’t involve lobbying a city body or a county body and winning it by going to city council and county board of supervisors meetings. This was won in the hearts and minds and homes and wallets of the city residents.

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### *Conclusions*

The Wilcox property campaign provides a striking example of how individuals and a community can be moved to extraordinary giving when the issue becomes one of maintaining and advancing a communal way of life: building on individual and community values and the psychic rewards for doing good, but moving beyond that to investing in the kind of community one wants to live in and the lifestyle one wants to share. Helping to create this kind of meaning for the campaign was the long history of community acts to protect the environment, create a way of life that recognizes the environment as a key element, and establish a tradition of action and commitment. This meaning was also fostered by the support of the forums of community life (newspapers, television, city government, politicians), which saw themselves as part of the community and potentially strong agents in continuing the tradition of

action. Individuals and activist groups carried through these meanings, traditions, and opportunities to engage wide public participation and to tap the resources of individuals in a position to make major gifts. All these forces worked together to create and mutually support a set of meanings that extended beyond the boundaries of normal gift giving.

There are elements of this kind of association between gift giving and way of life in the more usual fundraising efforts of the Community Environmental Council. In a few instances, CEC was able to draw on the participants' engagement with a way of life: when the board of directors was transformed from a group of community activists into a group that also was a source of giving and the center of a network of potential givers; when people who had earlier been garden volunteers gave gifts in order to allow their early work to continue; and when people in the building and architectural trades who were committed to environmentally sound development of those industries gave of their expertise, clout, and money in an energized and committed way. CEC's Corporate Council and the Community Indicators Project hold great promise for building an even stronger connection between community life and environmental causes.

Yet the CEC example also suggests that activism and engagement with a way of life does not always lead to financial support. Volunteers and activists who gave their time and attention did not necessarily give money. Only if they were engaged in activities that drew together their value commitments with the concept of investment in community life did substantial giving result. The emotional satisfactions of doing good and healing ruptures can be experienced as private acts of virtue, quite independent from one's community. Similarly, one's way of life can be seen primarily as a matter of individual choices and individual means. But when the way of life is seen as the consequence of community endeavors and, therefore, as a community responsibility, individuals can come to see that personal investment in a way of life means investing in communal projects.

Positive words about communal investment in communal life cannot in themselves create a communal culture and real projects

that build the communal life—particularly in a society so deeply committed to individual action, individual values, and individual advancement. But if we are aware of the great potential of unfolding events to draw people to have a personal stake in communal action, we can develop a rhetoric that makes the value of communal investment stronger and more visible. And the people who buy into the communal investment can receive very powerful psychic rewards indeed.

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