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Introduction

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Fundraising can seem like an impossible task for many National Wildlife Refuge Support (“Friends”)¹ Group members. Most groups are made up of volunteers who care deeply about their refuges, but who feel overwhelmed by the idea of raising the funds they need to make their organizations succeed in the long run. Despite this common concern and living on shoestring budgets, Friends groups around the country report extraordinary successes. Yet, we all want to do more and that takes money.

The purpose of this book is to provide a framework that will help your group become successful fundraisers. **Raising funds is really all about making friends.** It is your friends who will become your most ardent supporters—and they will show their support through their financial contributions. If you position your group to make and keep lots of friends, you will find yourself succeeding at raising funds.

This book is not intended to be a detailed “how to” guide on fundraising—there are some excellent books and videos listed in the resource section. Instead, the stories and concepts presented in this book are meant to help you assess your group’s approach to “friendmaking” and organizational management, both of which are key to raising funds.

Building Your Nest Egg: *Nature’s Model*

A bird building its nest provides a wonderful analogy for Friends groups who likewise want to “build their nest eggs.” Let’s consider for a moment what it takes for a bird to build her nest and fill it with eggs:

First, she has a ***Plan***:

She knows what she’s building—she has a design in mind and knows what the finished product will look like.

The nest is made up of a ***variety of materials***:

Often we find a mixture of building materials including grass, mud, feathers, yarn, etc.

The materials are ***intertwined*** and the nest is ***solid***:

The materials are woven or fused together to create a strong foundation. The nest won’t easily fall apart and is well secured to its supporting branches or eaves.

1. “Friends” is used throughout this book as a general term for a grassroots group whose primary mission is to support a National Wildlife Refuge (e.g., Friends groups, Cooperating and Interpretive Associations, Audubon Refuge Keepers, and others).

The eggs are laid after a period of ***courtship***:

The male and female bird build a relationship that leads to promulgation of their species.

The eggs and young are ***tended with care***:

The eggs and chicks are kept warm and well fed, and the nest is fiercely protected.

Putting Nature's Model to Work:

Likewise, Friends groups must have a vision and process in mind to build their own "nest eggs." Here are some of the key points:

Your group needs a ***plan***:

For the bird, the nest is not the goal in and of itself. Similarly for your group, raising money is not the goal, it's what you do with the money that's important. You'll need to clearly understand and communicate why you need funds, what you hope to achieve, and what success will look like (i.e., the finished product).

Your funds must come from a ***variety of sources***:

By diversifying your sources of funds, you build stability for your group. Consider following the rule that no more than thirty percent (30%) of funds should come from one source (e.g., individual, foundation, corporation). If any one source dries up, you'll still have many others from which to draw, and you won't have to worry about your group dissolving because your primary source of funds has disappeared.

The organization must be ***solid***, which can come through carefully ***coordinating and integrating*** your activities:

Consider that the "nesting materials" for your organization include such things as a good management structure, programs, relationships, volunteers, and public relations. All these "materials" come together to create an organization that has credibility, visibility and strength. As a result, the organization will attract more members and donors, each of whom will bring new talents and opportunities to the group. Together, this mix of people, plans, funds, and management, creates a solid organization worthy of ongoing support.

Relationships are critical to success:

Fundraising is "friend" raising. The more friends you have (members, community partners, legislators, businesses, etc.), the more resources you'll have to support your goals. Your friends bring their talents, funds and their own relationships to the group. They help to expand your sphere of influence and can gain support for your group from places you'd never imagine.

Finally, you'll want to *tend the organization with care*:

Donors want to know that they are giving to a group that can successfully accomplish its goals and not squander their money. Sound financial practices, planning and careful implementation of programs, attention to details, nurturing relationships—are all important steps in showing your members and donors that the organization is worthy of their continued support.

The following sections build on this model and offer basic tools that you can use to develop your fundraising strategies. Remember, positioning your group to succeed at fundraising will take time. It's a process of planning, organizational development, and relationship building. The stories and discussion that follow will help you get started. If you want more detailed information on a particular subject, the resource section lists a number of excellent books and videos that your group will find helpful.

