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Erin Denay

Western Michigan University, erinsusden@gmail.com

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Developing Gifts In-Kind Support for Nonprofit Organizations: Case Study on Pretty

Lake Vacation Camp

Erin Denay

Western Michigan University

Lee Honors College

Advisor: Janice Maatman

Committee Member: William Derouin

Abstract

Nonprofit organizations often rely on in-kind donations from individuals, businesses, and organizations to help support their mission. In-kind support includes donated goods or services rather than a monetary donation. This honor's thesis is comprised of research and applied best practices in a case study on developing gift-in-kind support for local Kalamazoo nonprofit organization, Pretty Lake Vacation Camp. In coordination with Pretty Lake Development Staff, Farm Staff, and four local businesses and organizations, \$305 worth of in-kind donations were donated in time for the 2014 summer camp season for use on the camp farm. Various fundraising strategies and techniques were used to acquire these donations. The best results came from initiating contact with a persuasive, concise, and appealing email with an attached list of donations Pretty Lake was accepting and then following up a week later with another email or a phone call.

In-Kind Support Development for Pretty Lake Vacation Camp

Kalamazoo is full of inspiring nonprofit organizations with missions that positively impact community members that are often underserved. The importance of donations to nonprofit organizations such as these has proven vital, whether they be monetary donations, services, or goods. Tangible goods and services that are non-cash resources can be classified as in-kind donations or gifts-in-kind according to Community Toolbox (2014.) This type of donation is the focus of the research and project component outlined in this paper.

Purpose

The primary goal of this project was to research and analyze best practices for accumulating in-kind donations and then apply those practices to gather in-kind donations for a nonprofit organization in Kalamazoo. Due to my interests in nature-based education, underserved youth, and summer camps, I chose to collaborate with Pretty Lake Vacation Camp. After deciding to specifically focus on the garden component to their programming, I started my work. This project's objective was to successfully partner with community businesses and organizations to accumulate at least \$200 worth of in-kind donations for use in garden programming starting in the 2014 summer camp season. I successfully exceeded the \$200 goal with the help of community partners as well as my advisors, and was able to provide Pretty Lake with \$305 worth of in-kind donations. This practical application of research supplied a nonprofit in need with gardening supplies for their youth and gave me an important component of nonprofit work experience necessary to move forward in my nonprofit career.

Pretty Lake Vacation Camp

Pretty Lake Vacation Camp was established in 1916 to serve at-risk youth in the Kalamazoo Region. They have developed and and grown over the last 98 years, and they now provide a completely cost-free week-long summer camp experience to over 700 youth each summer (J. Doezeema, personal communication, February 12, 2014). With a mission as inspiring as theirs, it's clear why they have been supported by generous members of the community throughout the years. Currently, they are working on The Pretty Amazing Campaign, which is a \$2.3 million fundraising effort to improve camp facilities, continue annual operational support of the camp, and raise endowment funds all to continue and increase the quality of experience they provide to Kalamazoo youth in need (S. Jones, personal communication, February 12, 2014). With ambitious fundraising goals for much needed improvements and staffing, they certainly appreciate the benefit of donations when it comes to their programming. The money that does not get spent on tools and resources for programming and camper needs can be directed towards paying qualified staff members to provide valuable programs.

Pretty Lake's program contains a variety of exciting programming to keep campers busy the entire week. They can play games, make crafts, go swimming, try kayaking, go to a dance class, attempt the high-ropes course, enjoy campfires, and even head out to the camp farm to try their hand at gardening. In 2008, Pretty Lake established their "Farm." It contains 2.5 acres of gardens, small farm animals, and outdoor and indoor classrooms. In a typical day, anywhere from 20-30 campers will come to the Farm. They participate in soil building, planting, tending, harvesting and eating fresh produce. Many of the youth that attend Pretty Lake have never really been outside their backyards and neighborhoods, so Jenny sees all kinds of exciting reactions to

the opportunity to grow and eat food from the farm. They have science and outdoor play lessons based on animal survival and adaptations, climate change, water cycles, food webs, basic gardening and more (J. Doezeema, personal communication, March 26, 2014). According to my research, this kind of background information was vital to include in my appeal to businesses for in-kind donations. Donors want to hear a story and understand why and how their donation will be used in a credible, charitable way. Most of all, donors like to give to *people* with a compelling story (Waters, 2013). Pretty Lake has a reputable history and staff and with the 700 youth they serve each summer, their story is simple to tell. Once the donors took time to understand their mission, it was easy to get them on board, particularly if they already were aware of Pretty Lake prior to my contacting them.

After working with Jenny Doezeema, Pretty Lake's Farm Manager, we settled on a list of goods that would enable staff and campers to have a more successful Farm experience. The comprehensive list of desired goods can be found in Appendix I. All tools that I acquired would be directly used by campers as well as visiting youth during the school year to enhance learning objectives and/or improve the quality of work that can be done by youth on the Farm.

Throughout the growing season, food is sold at the Texas Township Farmers Market, donated to the local food bank and the Gospel Mission, and even sent home with campers. Having this foundational knowledge and background prepared me to convince community businesses and organizations that their in-kind donations were needed and would thoroughly be used and greatly appreciated.

Best Practices in Action

After completing my literature review and discussing Pretty Lake's needs, I began my work by meeting with individuals who could assist me in this process. Collaborating and connecting with influential people can remove many initial barriers when starting in-kind donation fundraising. Both of my advisors for this project have extensive backgrounds and experience in the Kalamazoo nonprofit field and are familiar with the type of businesses I would need to contact for donations. I set up meetings with them to discuss a list of potential donors. As described in The Community Toolbox, starting with a set of potential donors and completing worksheets for each organization proved to be extremely helpful (2014). I kept a binder with these sheets of information about potential donors. A sample of this worksheet with my own adjustments can be found in Appendix II. Completing them even helped me realize that one of my potential donors would not work for my purposes. The application Meijer had for requesting in-kind donations was quite extensive and more for an employee of Pretty Lake to complete than an outside volunteer.

After establishing a list of potential donors, I set to work on deciding how to contact them. Based on my research, the best method seemed to be starting with an email. Therefore, in all circumstances I started with an initial carefully worded email with an attached flyer from Pretty Lake that described the types of donations we were looking for. An example of this email can be found in Appendix III and Appendix I contains the flyer. In all circumstances that I received a response, email was our primary form of communication. Email solicitation worked for this situation because it was fast, free, and enabled me to include a visually appealing flyer

with more information in a non-intrusive way. Another reason I chose email solicitation was because it was simple for them to respond at a time that was convenient for them.

The next step in the solicitation process was to determine when I would solicit, and establish a timeline for this project. I ended up sending the initial email to all potential donors during the first week of April. Other important dates I established included the deadline to be done collecting donations, the date I would deliver all donations, and the date I would send my personal thank you notes. After I decided on the timeline I set to work sending emails, engaging with the potential donors, and tracking my results.

Outcomes and Analysis of Work

I successfully exceeded my goal of donation value to Pretty Lake. With the help of community businesses and partners, I was able to give \$305 worth of in-kind donations. Out of the eight organizations I contacted, four successfully contributed. A 50% respondent rate for the amount of donations I was aiming for worked out very well. Four potential donors did not respond to my inquiry. These were the People's Food Co-op, Wenke Greenhouses, Farm N Garden, and the Kalamazoo Garden Council. I followed up with a phone call to The People's Food Co-op and was unable to connect with someone that seemed able to answer my questions about potential donations. I was sure to be respectful in their round-about way of declining to participate, and I thanked them for their time. I sent another follow-up email to Wenke Greenhouses, Farm N Garden, and the Kalamazoo Garden Council, and after no response I decided to stop contacting them as I could not find a contact phone number for an individual responsible for donations. The chart below displays the successful donations.

Organization	Contact	Donations	Value
Wedel's Nursery	Terrie Schwartz	Strawberry Plants, Broccoli Plants, Potato Starters, 6 packets of assorted vegetable seeds	\$25
WMU Environmental & Sustainability Studies Department	Dr. Steven Kohler	6' cubic wheelbarrow with a no flat tire, 200' of never-kink hose	\$180
River Street Flowerland	Unknown	2 flats of assorted herb plants and perennial flowers	\$60
Master Gardeners	Linda Whitlock	4 hand trowels, 3 hand cultivators, 1 rake, 1 shovel	\$40

Responses and processes for each organization varied greatly. Wedel's Nursery responded to my email within two days and specified the exact donations they would like to make based on the flyer I included. My contact had me call her to set up a time to pick the donations up. When I arrived, she informed me the two of us would go around the store and pick out \$25 worth of the specific plants and seed packets they wanted to contribute. This proved to be an excellent opportunity to tell her more about the program and thank her again for their involvement. She expressed interest in continuing a small partnership each spring, so I connected her with Jenny at Pretty Lake.

My contact at the WMU Environmental & Sustainability Studies Department was someone with whom I already had an existing professional relationship with. Dr. Kohler was my professor and the Director of my program, Environmental and Sustainability Studies. He was very willing to involve the department in giving essential resources to potential future students. This existing relationship and their potential gain from donating made them the top donor for this project. Dr. Kohler drove us to Lowe's where we picked out a large wheelbarrow and 200 feet of

hose, all worth \$180.

River Street Flowerland had a specific online form that functioned as an email to request any particular donations. They responded to my request with a brief phone call saying I was free to stop by anytime to pick up their donations. They did not specify what they would donate or who my contact was. When I arrived later in the week, I told one of the cashiers who I was and they came out with two flats filled with herb plants and perennial flowers. She was unable to provide me with a receipt since they were donations, though I asked her how much this would cost if I was going to buy it all, which totaled \$60.

My collaboration with Master Gardeners was different from my other donors. William Derouin, one of my advisors, set me up with his contact there. Since Master Gardeners is a not for profit organization, we set up a donation drive for their members at the Spring Gathering of Gardeners. My contact there worked with Jenny Doezema and myself to ensure the right type of donations would be collected. The day of the Spring Gathering of Gardeners was a cold, wintery one and due to the unexpected weather, a small amount of people showed up. From that small amount, however, we were able to still collect a dozen or so gently used or new tools for the garden.

After collecting all donations, I sent a personal thank you letter to each individual business. If appropriate, I addressed it to the main contact I worked with. A sample can be found in Appendix IV. This was an important step in the donation process since Pretty Lake could potentially request in-kind support from these organizations in the future. As I was representing Pretty Lake, I had to be sure to close all the loops on my contact with donors. After I sent my

thank you notes, I was assured from Pretty Lake Camp Staff that they sent them an “official” letter recognizing them for their donation and assigning a value for tax purposes.

Conclusion

After two months of in-kind support fundraising, I was happy to finally be able to present the donations to the staff at Pretty Lake. They were grateful I chose them and sent a letter to me later in the summer thanking me for volunteering. They included photos of the farm this summer and even some of the youth using some hand tools from my project. These can be found in Appendix V. After my research and experience, I have a solid foundation of knowledge when it comes to requesting in-kind donations on behalf of a nonprofit. Assorted donation acquisition photos from this project can be found in Appendix VI.

References

Brenner, J. (2013). Gifts-in-kind: What are they worth? *Journal of Accountancy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.journalofaccountancy.com/Issues/2013/Aug/20137726.htm>

This article was written from a financial reporting standpoint, and provided research on how policies on accepting gifts-in-kind are necessary to establish to ensure they are received ethically, legally, and financially for the right reasons. It was written for both businesses that are considering donating excess inventory as well as for nonprofit organizations looking for guidance on determining what their policies should reflect and contain for accepting gifts-in-kind. It was rather broad as to cover any kind of nonprofit, and it made some sound arguments for creating specific policies on accepting in-kind donations.

Ciconte, B. (2007). Developing fundraising policies and procedures: Best practices for accountability and transparency. *Association of Fundraising Professionals*. Retrieved from: <http://www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/9%20Developing%20Fundraising%20Policies%20and%20Procedures.pdf>.

Perhaps one of the most relevant scholarly resources for review was from an article titled: Developing Fundraising Policies and Procedures: Best Practices for Accountability and Transparency. It covered all aspects of fundraising and how to best be accountable and transparent to your donor base. There was a policy and procedures sample of accepting and soliciting gifts-in-kind for a nonprofit organization in the United States that It also included a sample donor recognition program and how to best utilize the partners that give to your

nonprofit. The article also touched on how to foster a relationship with a donor in order to best utilize their giving potential.

Donnor, U., Goering, E., & Steinberg, R. (2009). Persuasion in fundraising letters: An interdisciplinary study. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. Retrieved from: <http://nvs.sagepub.com/content/40/2/228>

This article focused on research involving persuasion techniques in fundraising letters. They reviewed and examined rational appeals, credibility appeals, and affective appeals in regards to their effectiveness in getting donors to contribute. Within their experimental focus was direct mail letter effectiveness. The language in these letters can be used to demonstrate any number of the above appeals. According to this research, credibility appeals are arguably the most important to focus on because of the desire of a potential donor to trust the organization before they donate goods or cash. Integrating the two other types of appeals is recommended, but in order to show the potential donor their donation will be used in accordance with the mission and the staff are trustworthy, demonstrating credibility is vital. People want to give to people they know and can trust. This research is best utilized when considering content and structure for a request for donation letter or email.

KU Work Group for Community Health and Development. (2014). Chapter 46, Section 11:

Soliciting contributions and in-kind support. *Community Toolbox*. Lawrence, KS:

University of Kansas. Retrieved from: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/sustain/long-term-institutionalization/solicit-contributions/main>

The best practical application source was a resource called The Community Tool Box. It is a public service of the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. In chapter 48, there is an entire section titled Soliciting Contributions and In-kind Support. It reviews the basics of in-kind donations and their various purposes, then leads into when and how to successfully and effectively solicit in-kind donations. It had a review on the best methods of communication to use, the best timing situations, how to track results, how to follow-up, and more. They included planning tools and resources including a “prospect profile” template that I fully utilized in my work.

Walters, J. (2013). *Fundraising with businesses: 40 New (and improved!) strategies for nonprofits*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Nonprofit Authority

Another source that proved most useful in my project was a chapter in a book called Fundraising with Businesses: 40 New (and Improved!) Strategies for Nonprofits. Chapter five explained in detail the reasons why businesses decide to partner with nonprofits for fundraising purposes. This chapter laid out the foundation of partnerships. The nonprofit needs to be a cause the business loves and genuinely enjoys. The nonprofit should also have a significant amount of supportive people behind it already. They want to see there are others interested in the mission and work, and that it would be worthwhile for them to invest resources in the nonprofit as well. Another basis for a partnership is that the nonprofit work evokes emotion, and makes a real impact on their target demographic. Last, but not least, they argue that the nonprofit cause would ideally fit with the purpose of the business.

Appendix I.

Donation Flyer



Pretty Lake Camp
ADVENTURE CENTRE • FARM













GATHERING ROOTS

More than 1500 children visit the farm at Pretty Lake Camp each year to learn about food, community and sharing. The Gathering Roots program is a hands-on experience for kids to learn where their food comes from, and how local sustainable agriculture is rooted in community.

School students who help plant the garden learn the value of work on a farm and what it means to be stewards of the earth. These lessons connect back to their classroom studies in biology, ecology, environmental studies, social studies and economics, meeting state educational standards that are rooted in the real world. Summer campers connect with the land, learn while visiting the farm animals, helping maintain the garden, and seeing the hard work pay off in beautiful healthy vegetables.

The lesson continues as students discover that the food produced at the farm is shared with others. We partner with a generous crew of volunteers and are a master gardener volunteer site. The work adds up to an abundance of Pretty Lake Farm produce used in the meals served here, sold at local farmers markets, and donated to organizations that help families in need.

YOU CAN HELP...

Please consider investing in the youth of our community in a variety of ways:

Donate Goods: In-kind donations help us connect kids with their food. Please see the Gathering Roots program wish list.

The farm is only part of the adventure. You would not believe what we are up too! Go to www.prettylakecamp.org to learn more.

Thank you for making a difference in a child's life.

9123 Q Ave. Mattawan, MI 49071 • www.prettylakecamp.org • (269) 375-1950



Pretty Lake Camp
ADVENTURE CENTRE • FARM

WISH LIST











Gathering Roots youth program at Pretty Lake Camp is looking for new or gently used donations for our youth farm project and science field study lessons!

- Vegetable seeds
- Rolls of nylon netting or rope for trellis building
- Flower bulbs (All kinds to pretty up the place)
- Clean baby food jars with lids
- Small garden tools
- Tall muck boots (for K-7th grade pond studies)
- 1-5 gallon buckets with handles
- Watering cans
- 300-500 feet of hose
- Hand trowels
- 3 tine hand cultivators
- Spades
- Spading fork
- Young fruit trees
- Blueberry bushes
- Strawberry Roots
- 4 pitchforks with a straight handle
- Rolls of Row cover: (<http://www.johnnyseeds.com/p-8419-agribon-ag-19-row-cover-10-x-250.aspx>)
- 50' Rolls of plastic mulch

Appendix II.**Donor Prospect Worksheet****IN-KIND DONOR PROSPECT PROFILE WORKSHEET**

Name of Organization:_____

Contact Name:_____

Title:_____ Phone:_____

Relationship:_____

Known Giving Patterns:_____

Areas of Possible Interest:_____

Suggested Donations:_____

Suggested Person to Ask:_____

Method of Contact:_____

Contacted?_____ Results:_____

Appendix III.**Sample Email to Potential Donor**

"Hello Terri,

My name is Erin Denay and I am a Senior at WMU. I am currently completing my Honors Thesis and part of my project includes working with Pretty Lake Camp, the nonprofit organization that provides a free week of camp to at-risk youth in Kalamazoo. Specifically, I am working to gather in-kind donations for their Gathering Roots garden program for this summer. I am identifying and working with local organizations to donate new or gently used gardening supplies. All tools will be used directly by campers and school youth to enhance learning objectives or improve and increase the kinds of work that can be done by young people on the youth farm.

I am contacting Wedel's because I believe your business has a vested interest in furthering Kalamazoo youth's interest and knowledge in sustainable agriculture. Wedel's Nursery was the first greenhouse business that came to mind when I started this project, and I would love to talk with someone about this further. I have attached a document that will tell you more about Pretty Lake's mission with Gathering Roots, the donations they are requesting, and why these donations are so beneficial for the campers.

Please feel free to respond back to this email, contact me at 989-415-9888, or let me know when a good time might be to come in and talk with someone about this further. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Erin Denay"

Appendix IV.**Sample Thank You Note**

Dear River Street Flowerland,

On behalf of the Gathering Roots youth garden program at Pretty Lake Vacation Camp, THANK YOU! Your in-kind donations will help the campers start an herb garden, and the flowers will be a beautiful addition to the camp atmosphere. You will be receiving a formal thank you letter from Pretty Lake in the coming weeks, but I wanted to thank you myself for supporting your community!

-Erin Denay (WmU Student)

Appendix V.

Pretty Lake Farm Summer 2014



Above: Youth at Pretty Lake Farm using tools from the donation drive with Master Gardeners



Above: Pretty Lake Farm

Appendix VI.

Assorted Donation Acquisition Photos



Above: River Street Flowerland cashier with the donated herbs and flowers



Above: Dr. Kohler with the WMU Environmental Studies program and his donations



Left: Jenny Doezema of Pretty Lake Vacation Camp the day I dropped off the above donations