

BY Story Clark

## FIVE STRATEGIES FOR FUNDRAISING IN THE

# Economic Crisis

**A**s if land trusts don't fundraise hard enough, this economic climate demands that they work harder and be more strategic than ever before. Just casting a bigger net and cranking up organizational visibility won't be enough right now. Donors are reassessing their philanthropy in light of their change in net worth and an uncertain future. As they cope with real financial loss as well as the distractions of the economy and other pressing issues, donors will have to sideline many organizations they supported in the past and drastically reduce giving to others.

Fortunately in recent years, the environmental sector has benefited from an increasing share of what has been a growing philanthropic pie. Though all philanthropy is hit by the economic downturn, this sector may have a light tailwind to help it through these difficult times. To take advantage of this momentum, land trusts should focus on five specific strategies.

**1 First and foremost, land trusts must strengthen relationships with existing, especially higher-end donors and funders.** Since donors are unlikely to expand their giving to new organizations right now, reaching out to donors who have already invested in the land trust is a good strategy to sustain funding.

Fortunately, over the last decade, land trusts built major donor programs and capital campaigns around high net worth individuals, family offices and philanthropic institutions, many with a longer-term view, diverse portfolios and resiliency to market swings. Within these networks are individuals and institutions with relative liquidity. These donors are the ones most likely to maintain their philanthropy at past levels.

Be knowledgeable, though, about the status of individual donors. Those whose giving came from high incomes during the economic bubble such as partners in hedge funds, or donors who relied in other ways on the success of their companies to fund their philanthropy (through, for example, stock gifts) will have a harder time maintaining previous giving levels. Others with longer-term wealth or wealth generated from more durable sources will be better off.

All donors are being bombarded with urgent fundraising requests. Remembering that people give to people, connect with individual supporters in the most personal way possible. Land trusts have successfully built relationships with donors by making the case for the personal and community value of land. The connection that many donors have with special places unique to their own communities is still a major selling point. Even though, for a period of time, they may be reluctant to invest in anything, their local connection to and passion for *place* remains strong.

To build these relationships, step beyond the formula "donor lunch" and written solicitation. *Invite individual donors to reconnect with the land.* Take them fishing or bird watching or skiing or to visit conserved properties. If an elementary school has a field trip to a land trust property, take a donor along. If a landowner has particularly interesting stories about the area, invite neighboring donors to hear them. Give donors an interesting experience (even a small one) that will distinguish the land trust and be remembered. An investment of time enjoyably spent can be the first step toward an investment, or increased investment, of money, good contacts, new ideas and more. Don't forget that passion for conservation strengthens and distinguishes the message. Be passionate!

**2 Funders must be convinced that this is the best time to invest in conservation, not the worst time.**

With lower real estate values, conservation dollars will conserve more acres than ever before. But to do so, the land trust must be stable. Those attractive conservation "bargains" will only be possible and lasting if the organiza-

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## Mater Artium Necessitas

### Necessity is the Mother of Invention

tion conserving them is strong. Make the case that both operational and programmatic funding are essential. This is the time to put the organization's leadership, the merits of its program and particular projects front and center. Funders will want to know that land trusts are able to continue their work, have plans to weather these times, and that there are important opportunities worthy of support.

**3 Realize that the economic crash comes at a time when the integral relationship between conservation and other social issues is finally being recognized.** The barriers between conservation and public health, conservation and poverty alleviation, conservation and drinking water, conservation and local, accessible food, conservation and economic development, and of course conservation and climate change are coming down. The multiple benefits of ecological services providing clean water and air, sustainable local agriculture, healthy, even therapeutic places for people, especially children, community health and wellbeing are increasingly valued. In this time of economic distress, conservation lands have another selling point: they offer a host of amenities to people *affordably*. Reinforce those benefits that resonate most with donors. Donors will take comfort in knowing that their gift to a land trust serves many other community needs, and does so at a good price.

With the barriers coming down, these other community values are as important to conservation as conservation is to them. Demonstrate that connectedness. Get land trust staff, board and volunteers out of the office and into the community. Show that conservationists aren't

isolated; that they recognize the interwoven nature of the place they live in and will help in other ways as their neighbors struggle through these tough times.

**4 Land trusts should search for other sources of revenue.** While some retailers may be hesitant right now to set up voluntary surcharge programs, start developing relationships with them so that a surcharge proposal will be enthusiastically accepted in the future. Consider a voluntary transfer fee program. If landowners are hesitant to apply the fee on the sale to the next buyer for fear that the fee will reduce their own sale proceeds, write the agreement to skip the first transfer and to start at the second sale. Now might be the time to develop a planned giving, in memoriam or trade land program. Brainstorm

with the land trust's most entrepreneurial supporters on new ideas for revenue sources. Again, be creative, not scared.

**5 Look for meaningful ways to involve volunteers in land trust programs.** With fewer jobs available more people will have time on their hands. If well used, volunteers will save an organization money thus reducing fundraising obligations, and build that commitment that often leads to other forms of support. Recognizing that making the best use of volunteers and valuing them is an art in itself—match and manage volunteers and projects carefully. A few project ideas: restoration and tree planting, property monitoring, event organization, field trip support, research, office assistance...invest in volunteers and they will invest in you! 🌱



Author Story Clark at home on her family's cattle ranch in Wyoming. Clark advises land trusts on, and writes about current issues in conservation finance.

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