

Speaking of Partnerships

Changing how you approach fundraising starts with the words you choose and the tone you use. The vocabulary for building partnerships with donors invites collaboration and collegiality. Consider how to strengthen the language of partnership within your organization. Start with this exercise for a small group or committee, so there are multiple perspectives – and wordsmithing skills. Take a current fundraising letter and follow the steps.

1: Evaluate

- How do you describe your cause? Are you presenting needs or opportunities?
- Where do you communicate your organization's passion and commitment to your mission? Are there examples? Are they powerful?
- How do you address the recipient? What nouns/pronouns are used? What adjectives?
- What's the tone and feel of the letter (e.g., welcoming, celebratory, pleading)?
- What is the invitation in the letter?
- What is the call to action?

2: Revise

- Look for places to insert the word *partner* in addressing the recipient.
- Add or strengthen a statement that communicates your organization's passion and commitment with powerful examples.
- Add or strengthen language that conveys a feeling of abundance and unlimited potential when like-minded partners – your nonprofit and your donors – join forces on behalf of those your organization serves.
- Add or revise a statement that makes a social justice connection to your cause.
- Add or strengthen an invitation to partners to join you in sharing their passion and commitment to your cause. Include specifics for how you can work together.

3: Reflect

- How do the changes influence the letter's feel and tone?
- What changes have the biggest impact, and why?
- How can you add more power with phrases that invite your *partners* to *build an ensemble ... collaborate around your cause ... co-create ... think generatively ...?*

4: Test

- How do other staff members and board members respond to the revised language?
- Invite volunteers within your organization to read and comment on the letter.
- Share the letter with a sampling of partners (donors) for impact.

5: Refine

- As needed, return to Step 2 and continue refining until you have developed a language of partnership that is comfortable, meaningful and has transformative power.