Best Practices – Leadership Giving

- **Identify and recruit volunteers:** To identify prospective volunteers to conduct solicitations at the leadership giving level, start with the list of top donors. With few exceptions, your volunteers will come from this group. Enthusiasm, commitment, experience, and reliable diligence are important qualities to look for. Also try to be sure you construct a committee that is broad enough to provide a likely match-up with everyone on your list of prospects. As you set about recruiting your committee, emphasize to prospective committee members the importance of the donors who are to be approached and that they are being asked to serve because they have the special qualities needed for the mission. Share the names of others who are serving. Assure them that the work involves inspiration, not arm-twisting, and that they will find working with others toward an important purpose to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

- **Establish goals:** Consider both current potential and past history. The staff can provide historical data. Dollar goals help to focus attention, set a purposeful tone, provide a context for the scale of individual gifts being sought, and stimulate donors to consider higher amounts than they otherwise might. If the goal you are considering is one you believe you can reach but are not confident of, you are probably in the right range.

- **Set targets for individual prospects:** Be optimistic and aspiring, but realistic. Your own gift decision and the gift decisions of others in your core leadership group are a good basis for considering what others might do if they are motivated to make your campaign a high priority. Consider individuals’ past giving history, but give more weight to what you believe to be their actual giving capacity. We have no ability to influence anyone’s capacity to give, but we do have the opportunity to affect their willingness. The setting of targets may be done in a small group or in a screening meeting involving a larger number of people. The staff can advise and assist.

- **Set solicitation assignments:** It is important to try to be as insightful as possible about assigning your best prospects and to give especially careful attention to those you hope will make the gifts at the top of your pyramid. The key question is “who is likely to be most effective with this prospect?” The answer isn’t necessarily the prospect’s best friend. Sometimes that person is too close to be effective. In many cases, a well-informed, committed, and motivated solicitor is the best choice, even if they don’t have a close connection to the prospect. Every situation is individual and deserves careful consideration, especially when the stakes are high.

- **Start early:** Momentum from a few large gifts at the outset of a campaign can set a tone of confidence and enthusiasm that will motivate both your volunteer team and your larger base of prospective donors. And it stands to reason that starting as early as possible provides the best opportunity for completing all the approaches and allowing enough time for the follow-up necessary to develop favorable responses to requests for substantial gifts.
· “Time + Touches”: Larger gifts involve a thoughtful decision. Donors usually will need time to think about it and talk to their family or their philanthropic advisers. Meanwhile, it is important to stay in touch and continue to provide updates about the progress of the campaign or information about questions that have come up in your earlier discussions.

· **Personal touch:** Draw out your prospects’ reflections on their Princeton experiences and the aspects that have been most important to them. This will help you relate those experiences to the Princeton of today and the opportunities and experiences our support makes possible. Talk about the thought process and values that were involved in your own decision to make a substantial gift.

· **Understand the importance of Annual Giving:** Annual Giving seeks to provide current Princeton students with the same kinds of opportunities that earlier generations of alumni provided for each of us through their support. Annual Giving provides the equivalent of the income from well over an additional billion dollars of endowment, and plays a critical part in the “margin of excellence” manifest in Princeton’s emphasis on undergraduate teaching, independent work, attracting and retaining top faculty, and full need-based financial aid to ensure access to the University to students from all backgrounds.

· **You don’t have to have all of the answers:** If someone asks about something with which you aren’t familiar, regard it as an opportunity. This gives you time to find out the information, think about your reply, and then follow up. The staff is there to help you.

· **Address concerns:** Become familiar with common objections (e.g., Princeton has a large endowment already, other causes need my support, my child didn’t get in) and be prepared to answer concerns with a reasoned, neutral voice. Acknowledge the concern, but stay genuine about your beliefs and the important role Princeton plays in educating the leaders of tomorrow. Try to keep the conversation on a high plane, and not to get bogged down in arguments or details. Even those who may be out of sorts about something at the moment usually appreciate that Princeton’s overall distinction remains extremely high.

· **Utilize staff and AG volunteer leaders:** There are resources available to you that can help when you encounter situations that need special attention, advice, or information from someone in the senior leadership of Annual Giving, the Princeton administration, or the Board of Trustees. The staff can help to facilitate these inquiries.

· **Ask:** Make your own commitment first, in order to gain comfort in sharing why you are giving at a substantial level. Second, share your own story about what Princeton has meant to you and why you are volunteering. Think of yourself as an ambassador for Princeton. It is critical to ask for the gift, and to be specific about the target amount you hope they will consider (use those words). You cannot control whether or not someone gives, but you do have control over how they are asked. Listen carefully to their reply (especially if they are non-committal),
thank them for their consideration, and follow-up as appropriate. Keep in mind that a successful solicitation is usually a process with several steps, and takes time.

• **Thank:** Show gratitude with a personal, prompt, and thoughtful note or call. It is not only good form, but a critical step in strengthening personal connectedness, making the donor’s relationship with the University more current, and building the foundation for a favorable gift decision in the near term and additional giving in future years.

• **Stay in regular contact:** Report details about conversations or pledges to the appropriate person in your volunteer organization or to your staff liaison at the Annual Giving office. Regular contact among the volunteer team builds momentum, spirit, and motivation.