CHAPTER THREE

Charting Your Calendar and Annual Giving Plan or “Planning Your Work and Working Your Plan”

In This Chapter

- How to build your annual giving program plan
- Turning your plan into a year-long calendar
- How often to be checking in on your plan; when to do “course correction”

Steps included:

Step 1—Set your Measurable Overall Objectives
Step 2—Develop Your Case for Support
Step 3—Identifying the Critical Few, Filling Your Pipeline
Step 4—Engage and Involve the Critical Few
Step 5—Soliciting Your “Critical Few”
Step 6—Soliciting Your Lower-level Donors
Step 7—Develop Your Stewardship Plan
Step 8—Create Your Annual Giving Calendar
Overview: Building Your Annual Giving Program Plan

The first reason to build a comprehensive, yearlong annual giving plan is the intuitive one: how will you know what to do, when without one? A strong plan should include roles for each of the members of the Health Rocks team, state 4-H program leader, 4-H and/or university foundation representatives, (if you are lucky enough to have them working with you), and also perhaps your county agents, and members of your state 4-H foundation board, each in the right way. You may also know of other groups in your state and/or counties that could add value to your fundraising efforts. Tracking and coordinating the activities of all these different “actors” takes a shared set of priorities, clear action steps and a calendar to guide the work.

Perhaps the more important reason, especially if you are using this guide to help creating a change in the way your program thinks about and conducts its annual giving program, is that a strong plan builds credibility among your key stakeholders that the change you are proposing is workable, achievable and imaginable. To shift from an event-heavy annual giving plan to something more diversified, balanced and comprehensive, you first need a vision for “Why Change?” That rationale for change is a great reason to build out all those benchmarks and goals in the last chapter—they help you define (or redefine) success. Your strategic and tactical annual giving program plan helps build trust that “Yes we can change, and here’s how.”

A note for fund development team members: Without both halves of this equation—“Why change?” and “How to change?”—the rest of your team may be left wondering, “What’s wrong with the way we did things? Things seemed to be going along quite nicely.” Or the state leadership may think, “OK, I see that building for long-term success is a smart idea, but we’ve got pressing revenue needs right here and now. Let’s just stick with what we know and bring in the money in the ways we have tested.” Smart goals and a strong strategic plan provide a powerful case for both.

The third reason to plan—and to involve a broad group of staff and volunteers in your annual giving program planning—is to create a set of shared priorities that you can all return to throughout the year. It’s easy (and common!) for one person or another hear about a clever idea another group is pursuing or think of some new source of potential funding that hasn’t been tapped, throw that idea into the mix and then expect that this idea will be immediately put into action.

While there is absolutely nothing wrong with innovation, fresh ideas and an entrepreneurial spirit, too often these news ideas send you all spinning from idea to idea, project to project, and may take everyone’s eyes off of moving toward a balanced portfolio with long-term stability in giving. With an agreed-upon plan, everyone can go back to the strategies outlined, check to see if the new idea can be worked into the existing set of priorities and make well-considered decisions about what to pursue. Discussing and writing a clear annual giving plan enables everyone to say “Yes!” to the right things and “No…” to the right things.
The short and unsatisfying answer is: It depends.

The longer but more satisfying answer is that if your program has a relationship with the 4-H foundation—or if you, as the 4-H foundation leader are on point for this project—that person should develop the plan or have an advisory role in developing the plan. Ideally, you should vet it with the state leadership, and the Board Chair and Fund Development Chair and then roll it out to the field. Since this person should have professional expertise in this area, the plan development (but not carrying out the whole plan!) should appropriately rest here.

If there is no relationship with the 4-H foundation or a university development staff member, it does fall to fund development team member to develop the plan solo. You should still be looking to build relationships with the state leadership, university partners—and others with experience in development in your community—who can provide advice and counsel on your plan, and perhaps as they review the plan, provide assistance too.

No matter what your staffing situation, the process for developing a rolling out the plan is the same: create the vision for why change, set the right metrics and explain why they are the right benchmarks (short-term, long-term, highest impact priorities, balancing your portfolio), and then share the strategic goals. Once you have agreement on the strategic goals from this group of leaders, roll out the tactical plan, tweak as needed and put it into action!

The step-by-step instructions in this chapter lead you through how to do this.

Creating a Year-Long Calendar

Along with the annual giving plan, your program needs a calendar of activities. There is a sample 13-month calendar included for those programs which will choose to work on a January-December fiscal year; as well as one for those working on a July-June year (or yet again something different), adjust the tool to meet your needs. As you create your annual fundraising calendar of activities, you will also want to take into account your state’s Health Rocks! plan of action and the timing of those programmatic activities.

Some rules of thumb to consider as you build your own calendar:

1. Start with what you know about your own community. Is there a glut of other events in May, for example? Plan yours at another time of year. Does your donor base include a significant number of “snowbirds”? If you’re in the north, plan to capture their attention before November or in April. If you’re in the south, you’ve got November through March to do most of your work. Does winter break or spring break in your schools pull many people away? Don’t plan to hold events or drop mailings while everyone is gone (and your volunteers are getting ready to vacation).

2. In nearly every community, the “prime fundraising season” spans from September—just after Labor Day—through early or mid-June. This means that you’ve got approximately nine months (taking out the two weeks around New Year, when activities are scaled back to phone calls, at most) to get most of your direct fundraising done. The sample calendar goes into more detail, but the next page illustrates how your calendar may break down:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>January–December FY</th>
<th>July–June FY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January–March</td>
<td>• Intensive face-to-face fundraising, focus on leadership giving</td>
<td>• Mid-course correction, review of progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appeal in February (mail or email)</td>
<td>• Face-to-face solicitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perhaps a special event, unless you have one later in the spring</td>
<td>• Appeal in February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Perhaps a special event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–June</td>
<td>• Special event</td>
<td>• Special event (but don’t rely on it for too much revenue so close to the end of the year, solicit early!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Follow-up appeal</td>
<td>• Final appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Final clean-up visits and calls to close gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–August</td>
<td>• Some face-to-face solicitations, around vacations</td>
<td>• Close books, clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perhaps a special event, if not in earlier spring;</td>
<td>• Planning, planning, planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Donor recognition event for gifts in and last fiscal year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of progress and mid-course corrections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September–Mid-December</td>
<td>• Appeal in September and November</td>
<td>• Appeal in September and November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clean-up face-to-face visits to close final gifts</td>
<td>• Face-to-face visits to close year-end donor gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of December</td>
<td>• Close books, analysis and planning for next year</td>
<td>• Calls to final year-end donors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Your Plan

A complete tactical plan should include:

- **WHO**—covered in the first section of this chapter, and in more detail in the Step-by-Step Actions
- **WHAT**—covered in detail below
- **BY WHEN**—included in the calendar
- **BUDGET**—what implications does this activity have on the budget? What costs are associated with different actions planned? Most activities should be relatively low cost, but special events, if not completely or mostly underwritten by donors, may have cash flow implications for your program. Think through whether cash may be tight at the point when you schedule your events.

After the Health Rocks team has reviewed and everyone has bought into the plan, it should form the basis for each meeting throughout the year:

- Update and check-in on important monthly benchmarks and quarterly benchmarks (Go back to Chapter 2 for a reminder of what these area)
  - Are results coming in better or worse than expected? Is an adjustment of the tactical plan needed to compensate for any shortages?
- Check in on the calendar
  - What is next on task for volunteers? Who is doing what in the next quarter? Is it on target? Is brainstorming, strategizing or “muscle” needed from other committee members?
- Check in on the overarching strategic goals
  - Is everyone continuing to focus on these, be mindful of these as they plan and act?

For the team and joint meetings, provide the **Annual Giving Dashboard** as a part of the agenda and deliver quick commentary on progress toward strategic goals. While everyone should be directly involved in fund development work, this planning with each member and implementation of the plan should happen outside of these meetings. If there are specific, overarching strategic topics around fund-raising that come from the plan or implementation into the field, those are appropriate discussion topics for the entire group. Discussing, debating or developing the “nuts & bolts” of the annual giving program plan in a team meeting is not appropriate or advised.

**REALITY CHECK:**

Really??????

Yes. Really.

As the fund development team leader should be working with, referring to and acting from the Annual giving program plan on a weekly or, at least, monthly basis. If you are working jointly on the fund development plan (fund development and implementation leaders, for example), the fund development lead should be reporting on progress toward strategic goals, metrics and providing the team leader with the highest priority tasks (visits, calls, etc…) for the week or month. At least twice yearly—but ideally, quarterly, the entire Health Rocks team should be taking an intensive look at the metrics, strengths and weaknesses of the campaign and planning or re-planning. Formally schedule planning days (on-site or off-site retreats) to do end-of-year analysis and planning, and mid-course corrections.
Step-by-Step Actions

With all the excellent work already accomplished in setting goals and building the name-by-name table of gifts, creating the rest of the annual giving program plan will be simple!

One request: come into this process open to adjusting and rethinking what you have done in the past, rather than trying to fit this work around the things your program has always done. Start with a clean slate and an open mind.

The most valuable tool to pull out right now is the Annual Giving Program Plan Template on the Fundraising Toolkit. These step-by-step actions follow this plan and are designed to be your guide as you fill in the plan template. Download it down, tweak as needed for your program and use it as you walk through these steps.

Step One—Set Your Measurable Overall Objectives

1. Easy! You should have completed that in the last step. Fill in the goals you have set and refer back to the last chapter for how often you should be monitoring and updating them.

Step Two—Develop Your Case for Support

1. To be fair, it’s not really a step you have to take right now. The next chapter goes into great detail on developing your case for support. If you’re interested in working through your Annual Giving Plan in exactly sequential format, jump ahead to Chapter 4 now. Otherwise, mark the place on your plan template and come back to it shortly.

Since many programs either divide staffing functions or volunteer focus by source of funding, for the following steps you might find it easier to create three sets of action plans that mirror one another: one for raising funds from individuals, one for corporate outreach and fundraising and one for foundation giving. From here on, the same steps should be followed for each (and any differences to take into account will be noted). Of course, you should be taking a “holistic” view of your work with each one; for example, individual donors could introduce you to new corporate sources of funding—and vice versa; an event designed to introduce new corporate donors to your work could also be a great venue for foundation decision makers, etc.… If you’ve got separate people tasked with focusing on these areas, make sure they’re talking to each other. If it’s just you… well… talk it over with yourself!
Step Three—Identifying the Critical Few, Filling Your Pipeline

While your annual giving program plan is going to focus on raising funds in the right way from those you already know, some part of every year does need to include strategies for expanding your pool and broadening the community of those who are introduced to 4-H and Health Rocks.

1. Working from your Name-by-Name table of gifts and your goals for building the amount raised through leadership giving, how many new prospective donors do you need to find who might give at this level?

Use some or all of these tactics to fill the leadership giving pipeline:

- Start with your Health Rocks team, state or foundation board or local champions, in the course of one-on-one meetings with each person to discuss their individual role in your annual giving program, ask who they know who might be able to give at this level. Remember you’ll need many more potential donors than those who will ultimately give at this level. Ask who among their network might know others and on and one.
- Do the same thing with program volunteers, fund development volunteers, current and past donors, corporate contacts, foundation contacts. The more you ask donors already giving at this level, the more likely you are to find others who could give at this level.

Action Plan 2: Friend-raisers or House Parties
- A variation on “network, network, network”, ask particularly well-connected donors, community leaders or volunteers if they will host a Friendraiser or House Party at their home comprised of a small group—7 to 10 or 12 people from their contacts who they think might be able to give at this level.
- The purpose of a House Party is NOT to solicit. It is an introduction, an opportunity to make the case and share the vision for Health Rocks and 4-H, and then follow-up with attendees to solicit a gift after you’ve established a relationship.

Action Plan 3: If you have one, look into your own database and do some data mining.
- You’ve already looked at anyone who gave $250 or more in the past three to five years. Develop an additional list of those who have:
  - Given smaller amounts but have also given consistently for multiple years,
  - Those who have given multiple gifts in a single calendar year,
  - Anyone who ever gave stock, made a planned gift (or announced an intention to give one), made a gift with an American Express card
  - First time donors who gave more than your average gift
- Start reviewing this list with foundation leaders, other 4-H program leaders, and trusted, close volunteers. Don’t include any past giving information, but offer address and business information if you have it. Ask: “Is there anyone on this list that you know, who might be interested in investing in 4-H and our Health Rocks program at a significant level? Is there anyone on this list who is very philanthropic?” A list like this can jog the memory and prompt a name that wouldn’t have otherwise surfaced, or prompt additional names.
2. As an extension of this process, and working from your data on where your annual giving program comes from, consider where you need to be specifically developing relationships? Do you need to build individual giving? Foundation contacts? Corporate relationships? Factor that into who and how you ask for new potential names.

3. Consider how you are soliciting lower-level gifts; especially through special events. Events are a costly way to raise money but they can be a great opportunity to cast the net more widely into your community. Identify which of your special events offer the greatest opportunity to bring in new potential donors, passionate about girls causes and interested in 4-H and Health Rocks. Include a specific plan for using this event to fill the pipeline and set specific event goals around this. Check out Chapter 7 for more on this.

Step Four—Engage and Involve the Critical Few

1. Decide how many of the prospective donors on your name-by-name table of gifts you can reach out to individually, personally over the course of the year. This is a role that everyone on the Health Rocks team should be actively involved in throughout the year, as well as many key volunteers and/or board members as possible; together you are the “Solicitor Team”. Will you reach out to everyone you intend to ask for a gift of $5,000 or more? $1,000 or more? What’s doable? Remember that reactivation is also one of your goals, reaching out personally to engage lapsed donors who once gave at a higher level is the best and most reliable way to get achieve this goal. Consider that group as well, as you decide whom you can engage personally.

2. Assign each of those prospective donors to someone on the “Solicitor Team” who will be responsible for developing a plan for reaching out to each of these potential donors, having one or more face-to-face conversation with them over the course of the year and preferably helping them experience Health Rocks firsthand.

- Volunteers should only take a “portfolio” of five to seven names at a time;
- The team leaders should work with 25 to 50 over the course of the year (that’s only three to five per month in the ten best fundraising months!) and…

**BEST PRACTICE BENCHMARK**

By making 8–10 contacts per month with potential top donors (or more!), you will ensure that you are systematically broadening and deepening the number of leadership and potential leadership donors who know your program’s work well and have been engaged meaningfully in the outcomes you achieve.
• As the fund development leaders, you should work with 50 to 75 or more over the course of the year (again, that’s five to eight per month, enabling you jointly to easily surpass the best practice benchmark of 8-10 visits per month—and these are not all solicitations!) If you are a dedicated fund development staff person, your overall portfolio is likely larger than this. And, depending on your goal and the level of sophistication in your program, you may not need that many prospective donors to hit your Health Rocks goal. Let the table of gifts be your guide.

• The fund development leader should also partner with each team member or volunteer to provide support and counsel in developing their relationship-building plan.

Let’s pause here to define “contact” or visits. As much as possible these contacts should be one-on-one visits: in someone’s office or home, for 45 minutes or an hour (or sometimes less). BUT, meaningful contact can happen in lots of other venues as well: an extended conversation at a networking luncheon, working the room at an event you’re hosting, even—sometimes—a really substantive phone conversation with someone. (The one drawback to this is that you can’t read body language, nor can yours be read…) With many other responsibilities, eight to ten visits or contacts can feel really daunting. Broaden your definition…and be deliberate about seeking opportunities where you can get lots done at once.

3. Review or add to your Engagement Opportunities list. If you don’t have a inventory of ways that potential donors can come in contact with your program—the impact and power of what you do—go to the Fundraising Toolkit and download that section and content now.

4. For the rest of the Critical Few, any in your leadership group who you cannot reach out to personally, decide on additional, broad-based options that will be open to them. Some ideas you might consider include:

• Invitation to an Open House at one of the schools, camps or community centers where you are delivering the Health Rocks program.
• Invitation to an End-of-Program or End-of-Year Celebration.
• Inclusion at one of the House Parties or Friend-raisers you are hosting.
• Or find ways to bring a version of your program into the community—perhaps hosting a Lunch & Learn or version of a one-day program at someone’s workplace, or including an element of your programming in a donor recognition event.
Step Five—Soliciting Your “Critical Few”

For everyone you are engaging personally—all or most of your leadership level potential donors—soliciting face-to-face on a first or subsequent visit is the gold standard. Your ability to meet your goal for inspiring increased gift depends on doing this well and consistently! Chapter Five includes everything you need to work this part of your plan.

One note to consider: Soliciting Your Board.

- For some, you do not have access to your foundation board or your state board. You can skim this section.

- For others, you may be engaging some or all of your board(s) in either Health Rocks or the Healthy Living initiative in your state. Read on for some advice that should provide useful, regardless of the purpose of your solicitation.

Your Annual giving program plan—for this or any program—should also include action steps for soliciting your board personally and in the context of a broader discussion of each member’s work and support in the coming year. Here is the ideal approach for this discussion:

1. The conversation should happen close to the end of one fiscal year or beginning of the next. The participants should include the Board Chair or the Fund Development Chair and the 4-H Foundation Executive/Development Director. In some instances, the Chair of Board Development might be the right partner to include in the conversation. In other instances only one person might make the call, but the preferred approach is partners—staff and board.

2. The purpose of the conversation is three-fold:
   - Stewardship: to acknowledge specifically the impact of that board member’s work and giving during the past year, and seek input from the board member about what he or she thought was particularly meaningful about his or her work or gifts.
   - Gift of Time: to discuss the board member’s placement on board committees and in specific roles in the coming year. Does this person want to continue on this same committee? Broaden or change? Are you thinking about this person for a leadership role?

   This is also the opportunity to speak with this board member about their role in fund development in the coming year. The CDO, if not present in this meeting, should prepare the participants with some specific roles that you hope the board member will play (for example, hosting a Lunch & Learn in her company, or making an introduction to a key foundation decision maker, or soliciting five people over the course of the year). As well, this should include questions about what additional roles this board member could play in fund development.

   - Financial Contribution: to solicit a specific amount from the board member for the purpose or impact that is most important. If your annual campaign includes a high-profile special event (gala or golf outing), or a variety of different ways in which your board members want to be seen as supportive, solicit a single, joint gift for all of these purposes. For example,
• We would like you to consider a $5,000 commitment to 4-H which would include:
  — Your continued $1,000 sponsorship of the Big Deal Golf Outing
  — Your participation in our inaugural Gala with a $1,500 table
  — And an increased outright gift of $2,500 to support our core programs

3. From these individual conversations, you should have:
• 100% of your board giving at the highest levels possible, and in a way that brings them joy
• A clear understanding of who is serving on what committee, and what work they wish to be involved with over the coming year
• An individual fund development plan for each board member, that feeds your overall Annual giving program plan and that you will return to over the course of the year to support, prompt and reward progress

---

**Step Six—Soliciting Your Lower-Level Donors**

Your plan for soliciting leadership giving level donors—starting with your board—is the most important part of your plan, but probably is the simplest part of your plan, on paper: engage, inspire and solicit, engage, inspire and solicit. Soliciting your lower-level donors is more complex on paper because it has more “moving parts”. Don’t confuse “steps” for “priority”. Leadership giving is simple but deserves most of your time and attention. Remember that 60% or more of your Annual giving program is coming from these donors.

To reach out to your existing lower-level donors and cast the net widely for new potential donors in your community, your plan should include a variety of these activities throughout the year:

1. A twice or three-times yearly mail appeal, which also may include follow-up phone calls from staff or volunteers. Everything you need to plan and implement a mail and phone appeal is included in Chapter 6 of this guide.

2. Regular email outreach and social networking to solicit funds and new contacts. You’ll find more on this in Chapter 7.

3. Some number of special events to help you:
  • Introduce new potential donors to you—House Parties or Friendraisers are one example
  • Recognize and steward donors—an Annual Donor Recognition Event
  • Engage donors—a Lunch & Learn, Open House, or other contact with programs
  • Solicit donors—perhaps a gala, a golf outing, or other event that includes a “ticket price” that raises money for your program.

There is more on this in Chapter 7, as well.
Special events have raised many dollars, for all kinds of organizations around the country; there’s no doubt about that. But special events often don’t raise many donors for organizations. That’s one problem: we go in for the “quick buck”, our event brings in a shot of revenue but then what happens to our relationship with anyone who attended the event? If we had built a relationship through the event at all, we usually don’t tend to that relationship for another 364 days of the year. That’s why special event-focused fundraising programs usually have such low retention numbers.

The other problem is that special events are a really expensive way to raise money. Remember those ROI numbers from Chapter 2? And that study only captured staff costs, it didn’t even take into account opportunity costs for the time staff spends planning events versus the time they could spend on higher-impact activities.

Well-planned special events that help you achieve a variety of different goals—engagement, stewardship, filling the pipeline and raising revenue certainly have a place in your Annual giving program plan. They just aren’t the centerpiece. Anymore.

Step Seven—Develop Your Stewardship Plan

While stewardship planning is not addressed in great detail in this chapter, it is not because it is not absolutely critical—nay, IMPERATIVE to your successful annual giving program. Go to Chapter 8 for a step-by-step approach to building a stewardship plan to complement your annual giving plan.

Step Eight—Create Your Annual Giving Calendar

1. Go back to the section in the Overview on tailoring your calendar, use the sample calendar included with this guide and your Annual giving program plan to develop your own year-long calendar for your program as a complement to your plan.

2. You may also want to note team meetings, significant program dates as a check and a reminder of workflow challenges throughout the year. This calendar is not meant to become the overall Health Rocks calendar or the overall fund development calendar but a focused checklist for the annual giving program plan.
Summary of Key Points

A strong annual giving program plan will help you inspire, drive and manage change in your program. Most people will push back when they are fearful or uncertain about what will happen next—or that nothing will happen. A great plan will draw champions to your annual Giving program and build the will to grow and expand.

Sustainability is the watchword in building an annual giving program plan. A smart plan must include not only short-term growth tactics, but balance that with activities that build long-term growth for the entire fund development program. Create a diversified action plan tied specifically to the goals you have set.

Throughout the year, return to and check your focus on spending the most time and resources on the highest-impact activities. Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize and spend time where the results are greatest.

Tools, Templates and Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Giving Plan</th>
<th>Annual Giving Plan Template</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 Month Annual Giving Calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stewardship Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Health Rocks!