

# Soliciting and Closing a Major Gift Request

Executive Fundraising Academy  
2017



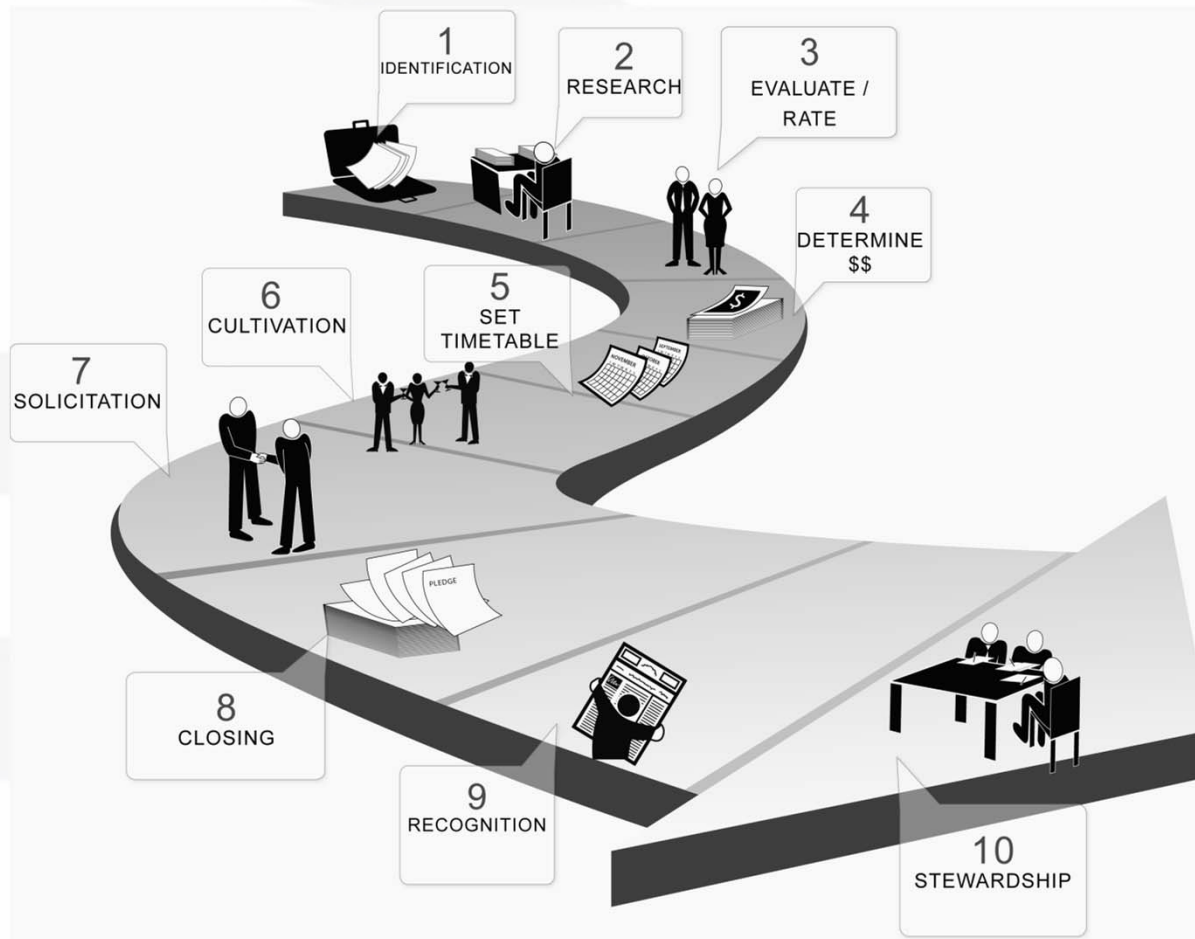
# Learning Objectives

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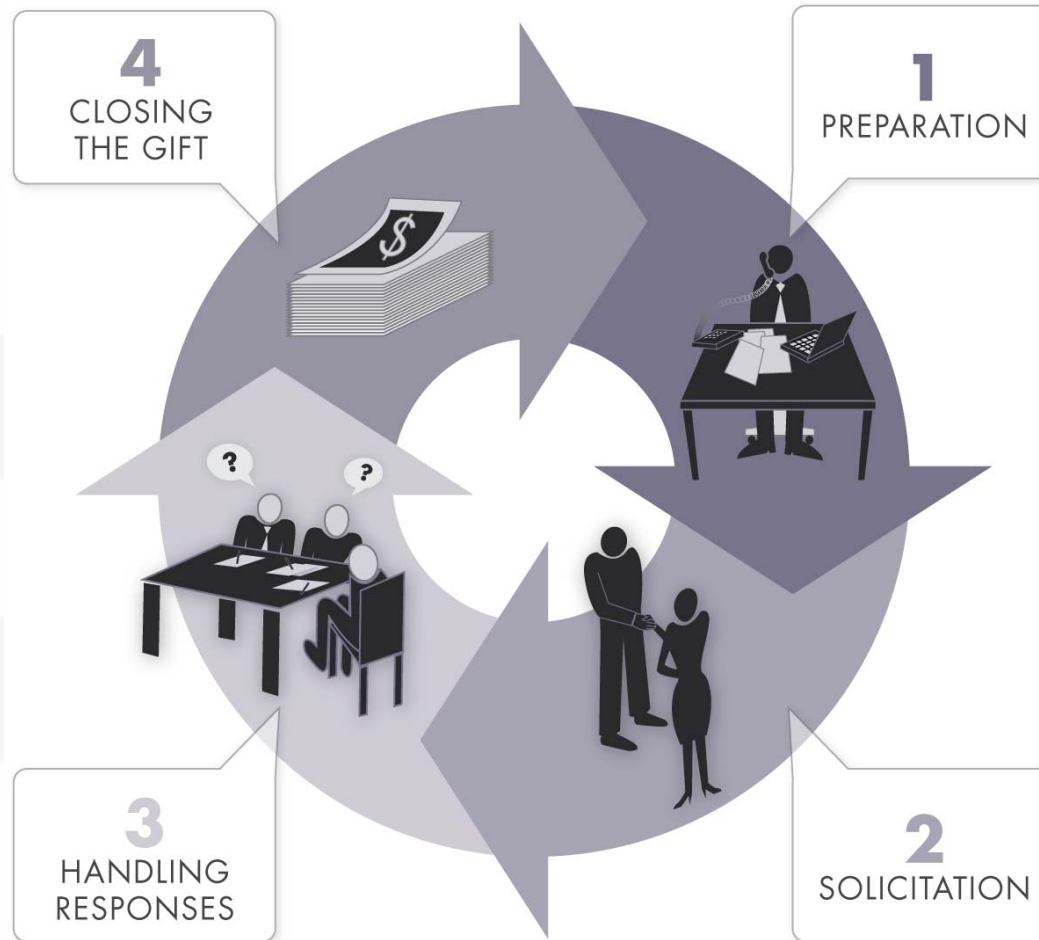
1. Understand the strategic approach to a major gift request.
2. Discuss how best to prepare for a major gift request.
3. Review the materials that should be part of a major gift request.
4. Understand how best to articulate your request for support.
5. Incorporate the use of best practices to increase the likelihood of closing a gift.



# Fundraising Roadmap



# Major Gift Solicitation in Four Steps



# Preparing for a Major Gift Solicitation

- Who is the “best” solicitor?
- Who can influence the gift-making decision?
- How much should you ask for?
- Has the prospect made a gift to the Affiliate before?
- What is the prospect’s giving history?
- Has the prospect given to similar organizations/projects?
- What aspect of the case would appeal to the prospect?
- Does the prospect have anything named after him/her at the Affiliate?  
At other organizations?
- What gift recognition should be presented?
- What is best solicitation strategy?



# Your Preparation

- Review and understand the Affiliate's:
  - Case statement
  - Marketing materials
  - Solicitation prospectus/proposal
- Know the prospective donor.
  - Make sure prospect research is current .
  - Study the prospect's profile.
- Understand the facts of the initiative.
- Know the response to: *"What am I asking for?"*
- Locate and confirm a private meeting location.



# Meeting Materials

- A major gift prospectus/proposal should be prepared well in advance of the solicitation meeting and be part of a “prospectus kit.”
- The prospectus kit should include:
  - The request letter
  - Personalized solicitation proposal
  - Case statement
  - Description of a specific commemorative opportunity for the prospect's consideration, if appropriate
  - Suggested letter of intent or major gift pledge agreement form
  - Business cards and/or contact information of all members of the solicitation team



# Important Considerations

- The solicitation meeting should be **personal** and **private** – try to arrange the meeting at the President/CEO's office, the prospect's home or office, or in another private setting.
  - Solicitations should not take place in a public setting.
  - Major gift solicitations should never be made by mail or telephone.
  - Only members of the solicitation team should be permitted on the visit.
- The solicitors must be **prepared** for the visit and should always use the prospectus/proposal as a guide.
- Ultimately, strive for a **relaxed** meeting and remember – *a great conversationalist is always a good listener!*



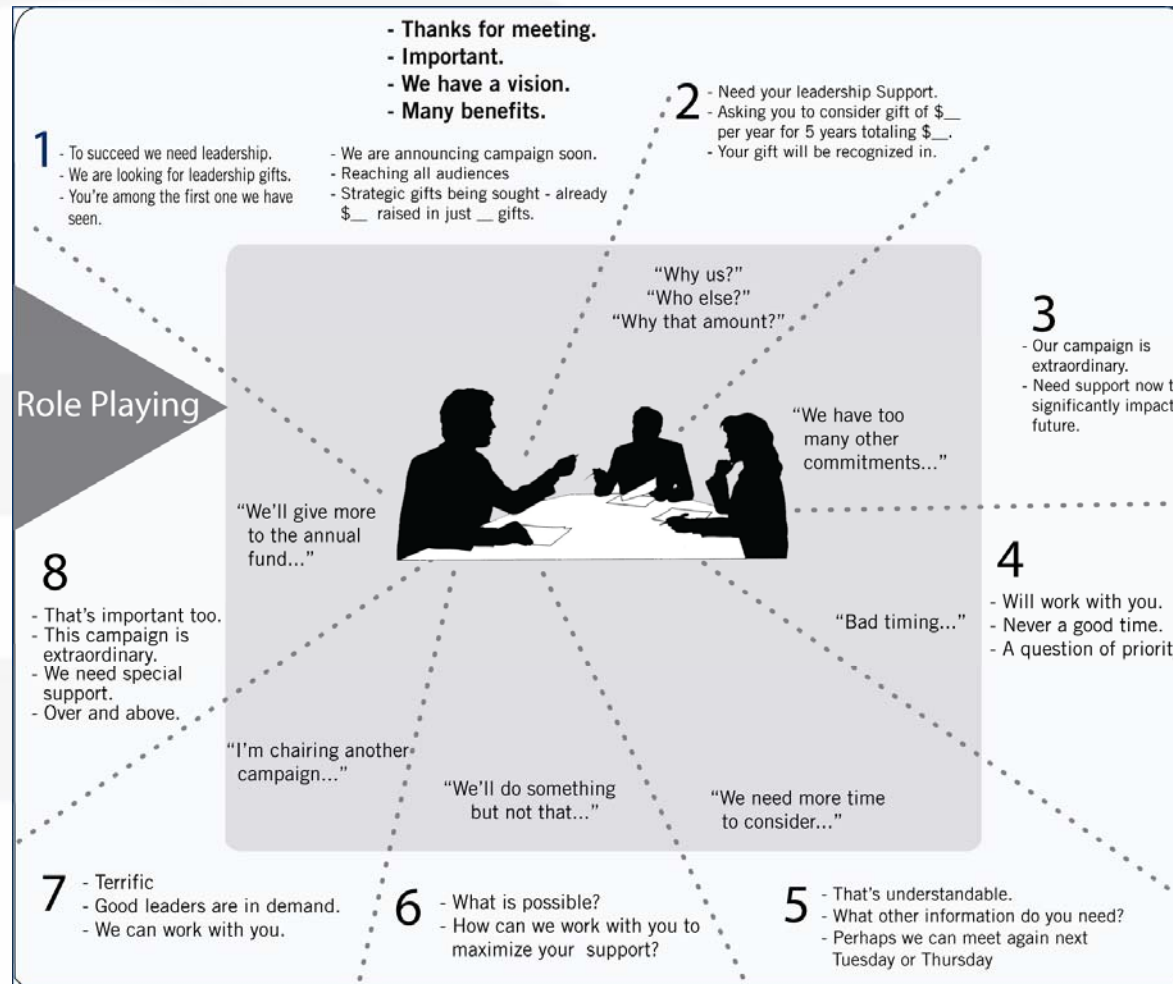


# Rehearse and Role Play in Preparation

- Using the briefing strategy papers and solicitation meeting script, rehearse and practice the “ask.”
- Practice with a partner:
  - Rehearse and role play
  - Anticipate possible objections and responses
  - Decide who says and does what
  - “The ask”
- Clearly state the impact of the prospective donor’s gift.
- Decide what materials to bring to the prospect.



# Rehearse and Role Play in Preparation



# Essential Themes to Communicate

- Appreciation and gratitude
- Mission
- Achievements
- Future plans
- Imperative
- Fundraising strategy
- Timing issues
- Leadership
- Gift request level
- Gift request impact
- Recognition
- Stewardship



# Presenting the Case

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- Use the solicitation proposal as your guide.
  - Tell a story – make it personal
  - Share organizational background
  - Keep moving – don't get bogged down
  - Speak specifically about what appeals to you
  - Personal and positive
  - Create urgency
  - Extraordinary opportunity



# Preface to “the Ask”

*“I’m going to ask you to consider three things.”*



1. Play a leadership role in this initiative.
2. Make an extraordinary gift.
3. Make a timely gift so it has the greatest impact.



# The Ask

- The “ask” is the most important part of the solicitation meeting.
- Do not apologize for asking.
- Be clear, honest and deliberate.
- Direct the “call to action.”



Ask for a specific gift



# Requesting the Gift: the Ask Sentence

Most Critical Point of the Meeting

- Write it out
- Memorize it
- Do not deviate from it

*"I ask that you consider a leadership gift of **\$10,000 per year for the next three years** for a total gift of **\$30,000.**"*



# Critique Your Ask Sentence

- Is it a closed question?
- Is it simple?
- Is it specific?
- Are you clear in what you are asking?





# Key Words and Phrases

- Would you consider a gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_...
- Would you consider naming our \_\_\_\_\_ facility with a gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_...
- Your gift may be fulfilled over 3 to 5 years...
- We are asking you to consider a transformational gift that will enable us to...

- "Your investment in..."
- "Provide significant funds for..."
- "Provide extraordinary endowed funds for..."
- "Strengthen ties to..."
- "Guarantee the success of..."
- "State-of-the-art foundation..."
- "Improving the experience..."
- "Enhancing life..."
- "Largest gift in our history..."

- "Create exceptional awareness..."
- "Inspire and motivate others to..."
- "The impact of your gift will..."
- "Our bold, but compelling vision will..."
- "Your transformational gift will..."
- "Your gift will give us immediate credibility to..."
- "Will establish a precedence for giving..."
- "Create a climate of excitement..."



# Tips from AFP's *Asking for Major Gifts*

- Anticipate your prospect's questions beforehand and have answers ready.
  - Review the contents of the solicitation kit and the solicitation agenda one hour before meeting with the prospect.
  - Always verbalize the specific dollar amount requested rather than having the prospect read the materials.
  - Once the ask has been made, remain silent and allow the prospect to respond.
  - Encourage pledging the amount and suggest an exact amount that can be paid on either an annual, quarterly or monthly basis.
  - Always request a specific dollar amount from a qualified prospect using a close-ended question or suggestion.
  - Get the commitment in writing! Only signed pledges are valid. Verbal commitments are not acceptable by accounting standards.
- Remember that objections and questions are opportunities for more information. For example, if the prospect says a certain amount is too much money to give right now, encourage him or her to make a pledge for that amount and give at the earliest convenience or in more manageable installments.
  - Be prepared to discuss a deferred/planned gift.
  - No does not mean *never*, it means *not now*. Leave the door open for other options.
  - Review the six R's of solicitation again and see which element needs tweaking.
  - No matter the prospect's response, always conclude each call with a "thank you."
  - No matter the response, always leave the door open for continued negotiations.
  - If a second appointment is necessary, schedule the next visit at the conclusion of the meeting.



# After the Ask

Be quiet and wait for a response.



Do not interrupt!

Allow your prospect to process your request

The prospect must speak first after the ask has been made.



# Six Possible Responses to the Ask

1

Prospect agrees to gift

4

Prospect offers less than requested

2

Prospect agrees to greater amount (rare)

5

Gift offered is considerably less

3

Prospect asks for time to consider

6

Prospect says "no"



# Handling Responses to the Gift Request

When the Prospect...		The Solicitor may reply with...
1	Agrees to the Gift Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Thank you so much! That is a generous commitment."</li> <li>• "May I ask you to sign the pledge agreement?"</li> <li>• "I will send you a pledge agreement for your signature."</li> </ul>
2	Agrees to a Greater Amount	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as above, but with a bigger smile than ever!</li> </ul>
3	Asks for More Time to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "May I call you in a week to check-in?"</li> <li>• "Would you like to come on a visit and have lunch with the President/CEO?"</li> </ul>
4	Offers Less than Requested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize one or all of the following:</li> <li>• "While generous, that offer cannot be recognized in the way we would like."</li> <li>• "We need you to be included among those leaders mentioned earlier."</li> <li>• "Keep in mind that we have asked for a five-year pledge. Would it help to increase the payment period to six or seven years?"</li> <li>• "Would you like more time to consider the request? We really need you to make this commitment to influence others to do the same."</li> <li>• "Thank you for your time and hospitality (if the meeting is in the prospect's office or home). Can I call you in a week to discuss the gift again?"</li> </ul>



# Handling Responses to the Gift Request

When the Prospect...		The Solicitor may reply with...
5	Offers Considerably Less than Requested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The initiative is in the Major Gift/Leadership Gift phase and we need you to join with others to set the pace for the remainder of the initiative.”</li> <li>• “Do you have a concern that we can resolve?”</li> <li>• “We want to provide you with a visible naming opportunity and it is tied to the gift we invited you to consider.”</li> <li>• “Can we re-visit our request at a later and better time?”</li> <li>• “May I ask you to review the proposal and the these materials... I will call you in about a week to answer all your questions and concerns.”</li> </ul>
6	Refuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicate your disappointment — pleasantly.</li> <li>• “May I ask you to take time to review the proposal and the materials.”</li> <li>• “Would you like to visit with the president/CEO?”</li> <li>• “I will call you in a week to review our meeting.”</li> <li>• “Thank you for your time.”</li> </ul>



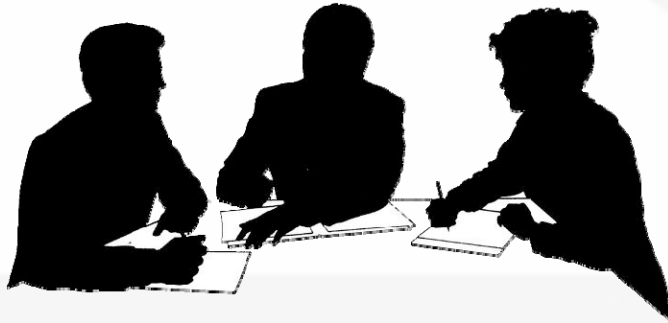
# Clarifying Concerns of the Prospect

- "Help me understand why."
- "Why do you feel that way?"
- "Please clarify that for me."
- "What specific question or concern do you have about the initiative or our organization?"
- "If money weren't the issue, what other concerns or questions would you have?"

*"I have some concerns about the direction in which the organization is heading..."*



# Closing a Major Gift Request



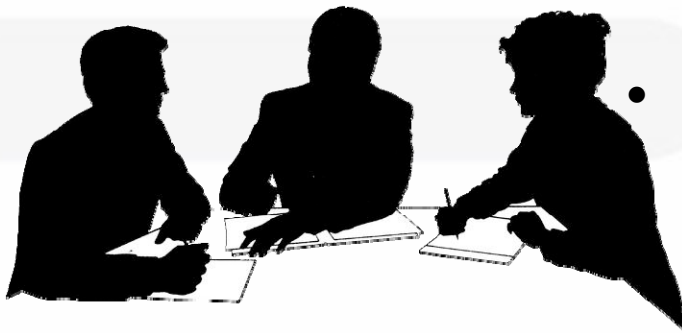
- Put simply, “closing” a gift means getting a firm answer to your request: “yes” or “no.”
- Getting a firm answer from the prospect is not always simple or easy.
- Try to close your requests during solicitation meetings.
- However, until you get a firm answer, you can and must continue to close after the meeting has taken place – most often, days, weeks or even months later.
- The **key** to closing the gift is for the donor and the solicitation team to agree on a **next step** and the **time frame** for that next step **before leaving the meeting**.





# Establish Next Steps to Close the Meeting

During the meeting



- Be prepared for the prospect to need some time to consider the gift request.
- Next steps should be developed as a response to the reactions or concerns that the prospect expressed during the meeting.
- The closer should outline – out loud, for all to agree with – a brief plan to meet the objections, delays, questions, and negotiating points that the prospect brought up during the meeting.
- The closing, therefore, is always personalized to the needs of the prospect and the situation at hand.
- Establish the initiative timetable and create a sense of urgency.
- Do not leave the solicitation meeting without a mutually agreed-upon next step:
  - Deadline for the prospect's answer or a date for the next meeting
  - Date you will supply the prospect with additional information



# Essentials to Closing a Gift

- Make personal phone calls.
- Draft and send thank you letters.
- Invite the prospective donor to special events.
- Send additional materials, institutional publications and other items to keep the prospective donor informed of Affiliate activity.
- Engage peers and special friends to follow-up with the prospective donor.



What can you do to keep the ball in play after the ask and/or meeting?



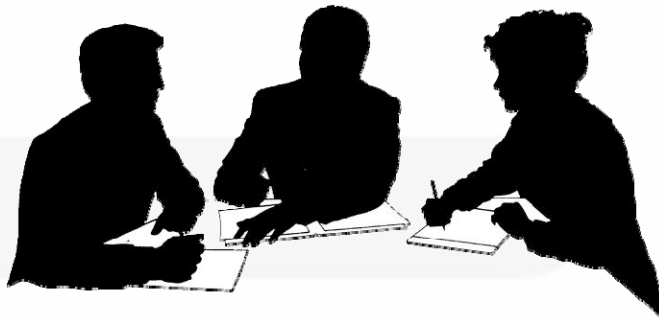
# “No” Does Not Necessarily Mean “Never”

- Maybe you haven't *cultivated* enough.
- Maybe your presentation was not sufficiently *compelling*.
- Maybe there are *objections* that have not been satisfactorily resolved.
- Maybe the prospect's financial *circumstances* are not optimal.
- Maybe there are other *personal issues* at stake.
- Maybe your proposal is for the *wrong project*.
- Remember: the Urban League movement is *not* on everyone's mind like it is yours!



# After the Meeting

Quick, firm follow-up



Thank prospect

Show you were serious about the request

Convey importance of this gift to the initiative and the Affiliate

Confirm urgency, timetable

Provide information/proposal as promised



# Embrace Deadlines

- Make the calendar work for you.
- Look at your initiative and institutional calendar for:
  - Significant meetings and announcements
  - Board meetings
  - Special events
  - Upcoming solicitations
  - Crucial programmatic and budgeting dates
  - End of fiscal and/or calendar year
- Create urgency: *"We would like to announce your gift at the next board meeting..."*

June 2009							August 2009							
S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	
						1						1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
30	31													
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
	Identify Prospects 	Initiative Major Gifts Committee Meeting 1:00	Prepare Proposal											
6	Solicitation Meetings 9:00-7:00pm	Solicitation Meetings 4:00-8:00pm			Solicitation Follow-up Phone Call 9:10 AM 	Campus Tours & Reception 10:00-1:00pm								
13		Board Meeting 9:00-11:00am	Send invites 											
20		Committees 9:00-1:00pm			Solicit Corporations	Special Event 6:00pm 								
27			Mail Newsletter 											



# Suggested Reading

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- *Ask* by Jerold Panas
- *How to Succeed in Fund Raising by Really Trying* by Lewis B. Cullman
- *Asking for Major Gifts* by AFP Ready Reference Series
- *Major Gifts* by AFP Nonprofit Essentials Series



# For Discussion

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1. Does the process described seem feasible?
2. Which elements seem most valuable? Least valuable?
3. How do you envision your Affiliate implementing the ideas discussed?
4. Have you used any of the suggestions outlined? What has and/or has not worked well for your Affiliate?
5. Other questions and/or comments?



# Thank you



Thank you for your participation in the NUL Executive Fundraising Academy and for your commitment to furthering the Urban League movement!

