

RIVER FUNDRAISING ALERT

Membership-Building Techniques

No. 3/Summer 1994

Acquiring Members by Using Canoe Club and Other Recreation-Oriented Lists

by Pat Munoz

If the mission of your grassroots river group has appeal for river users (canoeists, kayakers, anglers, rafters), one strategy your group can use to create or enlarge your membership base is to do direct mail to targeted mailing lists of local canoe and kayak clubs and other related groups such as fishing clubs, manufacturers of canoe and kayaking gear, and rafting outfitters. These local lists are not mailed to as often as the lists of environmental groups and generally produce higher returns.

In approaching a club, outfitter, or manufacturer, look for a friend who is sympathetic to your cause. Sometimes, local clubs will have a conservation committee. The chair of this committee is a good place to start unless you have a good friend in the club who will act as an advocate on your behalf. Once you have found a sympathetic ear, there are two ways to go: 1) Ask if the club or outfitter will do the mailing for you. This approach has obvious advantages:

a) The club/outfitter usually pays the costs of the mailing as well as providing the labor needed to get the letter out. This is a relatively inexpensive way for the club or outfitter to support your organization, while providing you with an extremely important service.

b) Club members can be tapped as volunteers to lick stamps and seal envelopes, so the mailing can be done very cheaply.

c) The club/outfitter does not have to release its membership list to an outside organization. They maintain total control over the use of the list.

2) Ask for a onetime only use of the mailing list. While this alternative is more expensive, it gives your group more control over the mailing.

Whichever approach you decide to use, here are a few pointers:

☒ A few months before you do the mailing, run an article or articles in the recreation club's newsletter about your organization. This will raise awareness of your organization among club members, and make them more receptive to your message.

☒ Ask a well-known, trusted member of the club or someone else well-known in the paddling community to sign the letter. If possible, have more than one of these people cosign the letter. This will lend credibility to your solicitation and increase response.

☒ Tailor your letter carefully to the interests of the group. Make it as personal as possible.

☒ Keep the letter simple and to-the-point. Always include a reply envelope (although you may decide to omit return postage to keep costs low) and a response card.

☒ If you have something appropriate and inexpensive to include as a premium, this will increase response. The West Virginia Rivers Coalition is offering 10 raffle tickets to new members—a great premium which costs the organization nothing, and is very appealing to the potential new member.

☒ Test, test, test. While canoe club lists are almost surefire, they are usually small. Outfitter and manufacturer lists are often larger, but also much riskier. If a list is larger than 2,500 names, mail to a randomly selected portion the first time and see how you do. If results are good, go back to the whole list.

☒ Personal touches really help. If you have a large group of volunteers, hand-address your envelopes and it will increase response. A pen-and-ink signature and personal notes on the letters will do



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wonders. An attractive stamp (as opposed to a postage-meter imprint or printed indicia) can increase returns.

☒ Keep costs as low as possible. Do a one-page or front/back letter. Put the reply form at the bottom of the letter or on the back of the reply envelope, rather than printing a separate reply card. Don't enclose fancy brochures—if you want to send something, a simple copy of an article about your organization will do more to win credibility than any propaganda you can prepare yourself.

What to Expect

If you have carefully tailored your letter to the interests of the group you are addressing, and have established your credibility through the signatures on the letter and a carefully selected newsclip, you can probably expect a 3-8% response. The usual response rate for larger, less targeted solicitations is 1%.

Pat Munoz is Director of the River Wealth Program at River Network. For more information on membership development, you can reach her at River Network, P.O. Box 8787, Portland, OR 97207, (503)241-3506.

Using Public Records to Build a River-Saving Mailing List

By David Malakoff

Are you trying to develop a good mailing list for your organization—the kind that will help you raise funds and educate key riverside landowners? For some help, take a trip to your local county court house. It holds tax and property records that can help you build an extraordinarily effective list.

These public records were crucial to the development of my organization—Pine Cabin Run Ecological Laboratory, a West Virginia nonprofit dedicated to helping people protect and enjoy Appalachian rivers.

In 1989, we began a major ecological study of the Cacapon River in the northeastern part of the state. We figured that the people who would be most interested in the study would be the owners of riverside land and homes. To get their names and addresses, we visited our county court houses and reviewed land ownership and tax records.

Since the 112-mile long Cacapon flows through three counties, we visited three court houses; the visits netted about 2,500 names. Many had out-of-state addresses; these folks usually owned vacation cabins.

Our first mailing to this list—a simple letter and reply envelope—received a 12 percent response and earned about \$10,000. Today, this list produces about \$40,000 each year.

In our state, the process of assembling a mailing list from public records is relatively straightforward but can be time-consuming. First, we look at “plat maps” that show who owns a parcel of land. Then, we turn to county tax records to find the landowner’s address. The name and



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address is then entered into our computerized database (today, we take a laptop computer into the court house with us).

If you don’t have a computer, are just getting started, or only want to use the names once, you may be able to order the names and addresses, already printed on sticky labels, from the state—ask your county officials. Usually, there is a small charge.

Another trick we’ve tried recently is asking a county planner—who has access to economic and land value data—to identify the “richest” tax district in a watershed. We ordered sticky labels for that district and mailed to the list (with pretty good results!). ☒

David Malakoff is co-director of the Pine Cabin Run Ecological Laboratory, an environmental education center in West Virginia. He can be reached at (304)876-0725.

RIVER FUNDRAISING ALERT

The “River Fundraising Alert,” was previously a feature of River Network’s quarterly newsletter, *River Voices*, but now is mailed specifically to River Network Partners. This publication and other fundraising information is produced by the River Wealth Program which is dedicated to building the capacity of river organizations to support themselves financially.

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Membership Software Follow-up

In May, River Network purchased DONORS to handle our membership and fundraising management tasks. We’ve arranged a deal with the program’s vendor, JSI Associates in Boston, that allows River Network’s Partners to buy the program at a discounted rate of \$750 (regular price is \$995).

Although we’ve only been using the program for two months, from what we’ve seen, it is solid and relatively easy to use. Depending on how many Partners buy the program, we may be able to arrange group training sessions or help new users with software support.

To learn more, call Pat Munoz at (503)241-3506, or JSI at (800)521-0132.

Selected Readings on Membership Recruiting

American Society of Association Executives. Attracting, Organizing, & Keeping Members. 1575 Eye Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005, (202)626-2723. Price: \$60.25.

Ballenger, Bruce. Direct Mail on a Shoestring, The NRAG Papers, Vol 4, No. 4, Spring 1984. Western Organization of Resource Councils, 2401 Montana Ave. #301, Billings, MT 59101, (406)252-9672. Price: \$7.50.

Ballenger, Bruce. Membership Recruiting Manual. February, 1981. Western Organization of Resource Councils (see above). Price: \$10.

Dawson, Ken. "Direct Mail Fundraising: The Basics (Part One)", The advantages of direct mail and how to get started. Grassroots Fundraising Journal, P.O. Box 11607, Berkeley, CA 94701, (510)704-8714.

Dawson, Ken. "Direct Mail: The Basics (Part Two)", Testing and tracking your direct mailing. Grassroots Fundraising Journal (see above).

Klein, Kim. "Trading Mailing Lists," Grassroots Fundraising Journal, Vol. 8:6, 1989 (see above).

Klein, Kim. "10 Keys to Selecting a Mailing List," Grassroots Fundraising Journal, Vol. 11:1 (see above).

Post Office Domestic Mail Manual. Available for \$56 from U.S. Government Printing Office, Box 371954, Pittsburg, PA 15250.

Warwick, Mal, "When is the Best Time to Mail Fundraising Letters?" Mal Warwick & Associates, Inc., 2550 9th Street, #103, Berkeley, CA 94710 (510)843-8888. ✉



Mailing Lists for River Groups

While local clubs, manufacturers, outfitters and environmental organizations are usually the best bet for mailings lists, sometimes it's hard to get enough names to do effective mailings. Here is a partial list of some of the national and regional lists that are available for rent or exchange. River Network will maintain and add to this list, so if you have other suggestions, please let us know!

American Canoe Association, Springfield, VA. A national river recreation and conservation organization with 10,000 members. ACA is willing to share or exchange their list with selected river conservation organizations. Contact: David Jenkins, (703)451-0141.

American Rivers, Washington, D.C. A national river conservation organization. American Rivers shares and exchanges its list with other river groups on a case-by-case basis. Contact: Mary Ellen Kirkbride, (202)547-6900.

American Whitewater Affiliation, NY. A national conservation and whitewater recreation organization with 3,000 members. AWA is willing to share or exchange its list on a case-by-case basis with other river organizations. Contact: Phyllis Horowitz, (914)688-5569.

Canoe & Kayak Magazine, Kirkland, WA. A national publication for recreational boaters with 22,000 subscribers. Canoe rents its list for \$80/1000, with a 5,000 name minimum. Contact: George Mann Associates, (609)443-1330.

Friends of the River, Sacramento, CA. A western river conservation

organization with approximately 10,000 members, most of them in California. FOR will exchange its list with other groups on a case-by-case basis. Contact: Mike Dolin at (916)442-3155.

National Organization for River Sports, Colorado Springs, CO. NORS is a national nonprofit organization for whitewater paddlers with a membership of 5-6,000. NORS will rent or exchange its list with local grassroots river groups (no national groups, please). Contact: Eric Leaper, (719)579-8759

Paddler Magazine, Oceanside, CA. A national publication for recreational boaters with 41,000 subscribers. Paddler rents its list to conservation organizations for \$70/1000 names. Minimum order is 10,000 names. Contact: Jim Ellis, (619)630-2293

Perception, Inc., Easley, SC. A manufacturer and distributor of kayaks and paddling accessories with a list of 2,000 buyers. Perception will share its list with river conservation organizations on a case-by-case basis. Write a letter explaining your need, or call Sonja Lowery at (803)855-5995.

Recreational Equipment, Inc., Sumner, WA. A national outdoor gear and clothing cooperative with 138,000 paddling equipment buyer names nationwide. REI rents its list to conservation organizations for \$80/1000. Contact James Dietsch or Jim Hall at Chilcutt Direct Marketing, (405)478-7245.

For suggestions on local or regional lists, contact Pat Munoz at River Network, (202)364-2550. ✉

Using An Outside Consultant for New-Member Mailings

by Pat Munoz

Many small nonprofits find themselves in a bind when it comes to recruiting new members. They know that to grow and thrive, it is essential to bring in fairly large numbers of new members on a regular basis. But they simply cannot find the time it takes to do regular direct mail recruiting because of the press of other activities. One solution to this dilemma is to hire an outside consultant to do at least a portion of the organization's new member recruiting.

There are a number of advantages to using an outside consultant for this task:

1. A consultant can often save you from "reinventing the wheel" or making costly mistakes.
2. A consultant can usually save a great deal of staff time.
3. With a consultant, you know the mailing will get out regardless of what organizational crisis occurs that week.
4. Sometimes, consultants can take advantage of economies of scale in printing, list rental, stuffing and other activities that are not available to an individual nonprofit.

Last year, I recommended that West Virginia Rivers Coalition (WVRC), on whose board I then served, use an outside membership development service to do a 10,000 piece direct mail. The consultant created the whole package (letter, return form and envelope), handled printing, assembly, and mailing, and also secured the mailing lists.

The mailing the consultant did for WVRC consisted of a letter, preprinted personalized response form and envelope, mailed in a window envelope. It was mailed to members of the National Audubon Society and members of The Wilderness Society in West Virginia and eastern Virginia. Cost (including mailing list rental) was 24 cents per piece, plus approximately 9 cents postage, for a total of 33 cents per piece. (Per piece mailing cost was decreased by careful selection of zip codes to maximize presort rates.)

The results of the mailing were mixed. Overall, WVRC had a one percent response (108 responses) from the mailing—an acceptable level for a mailing to cold prospects—with an average gift of \$22.56. However, the mailing lost money (\$826) and did quite poorly if compared

to other mailings the groups had done in-house to canoe clubs and other whitewater groups.

Lessons Learned

Here are a few of the lessons WVRC learned from this experience which have general application:

1. Listen to your consultant, but don't discount your own feelings about what will work best for your group. You know your own members and your issue better than anyone else. Express your feelings to the consultant and try to reach consensus.

2. Work closely with your consultant. While the point of hiring a consultant to do this work is to save you time, you cannot escape the important job of guiding and working closely with him or her. Make a schedule, establish key check-in points, and ask that your consultant keep you apprised of what is happening. Be sure to communicate key information, such as outside events which could affect the mailing. Analyze past mailings together and pinpoint ways you can improve the next one. Bounce ideas off of one another. Become a team.

3. Look at new member recruiting as an ongoing process. As your consultant works with you and learns more about your constituency and your cause, s/he will get better at selecting lists and putting together the right package for your group. If you can get a 1% return and break even on your out-of-house mailings, you will be doing well. But with ongoing testing and analysis, you may soon reach the point where you are actually making money on your out-of-house mailings, an enviable position to be in.

Obviously, whether or not to use an outside consultant for new member recruiting (and possibly for other ongoing membership activities such as renewals and special appeals) is a question each group has to resolve for itself based on a number of variables. But for groups with small staffs which do not have a reliable, ongoing recruitment program, the use of an experienced, well-credentialed consultant is certainly a very attractive option. ☒

For more details on WVRC's mailing, contact Mary Pat Peck at (304)472-0025. For help in locating a membership recruiting consultant, contact Pat Munoz, at River Network, (503)241-3506.

FOR's Rafting Chapter Membership Program

by Mike Dolin and Rachel Stevens

Is your river group looking for a fun, innovative means of fundraising? If so, Friends of the River's (FOR) rafting chapter will probably be of interest to you. Based in California, FOR works to protect free flowing rivers through public education, citizen activist training and organizing, and expert advocacy to influence public policy.

FOR's rafting chapter carries out a program of noncommercial river trips that raises money and awareness and recruits new members for the organization. Since its founding in 1981, the rafting chapter has provided a crucial and highly successful fundraising strategy for FOR which capitalizes on the one asset that all river groups share—rivers.

The rafting chapter raises money by holding an annual membership drive in which its members, who are experienced rafting guides, volunteer to bring as many of their family, friends and acquaintances as they can gather on river trips. Rather than charge their guests for the trips, members of the rafting chapter ask them for a donation to FOR.

As an incentive to members of the rafting chapter to recruit as many new members for FOR as possible, FOR holds several drawings at the end of the rafting season based on the number of membership credits that guides have collected.

Guides receive one membership credit for each new member, or the monetary equivalent thereof, recruited. Those guides who collect 150 or more membership credits qualify for the first level drawing; guides who have collected 100 membership credits

qualify for the second level drawing, and so on. There are a total of four levels for which participants may qualify. Participants who do not win at the highest level for which they are eligible are moved down to the next level drawing. This past year, FOR awarded such prizes as a raft, kayak, rowing frame, dutch oven, pump, and life jackets.

Last year 40 individuals from the rafting chapter participated in the membership drive and recruited more than 1,100 new members into FOR between March and November. With an average donation of \$35, the membership drive brought in almost \$38,000 dollars, which was split between FOR and the rafting chapter. The rafting chapter's portion of the proceeds goes toward equipment upkeep and staff salaries.

FOR's method of fundraising does more than just raise money. The river trips serve an educational, as well as recreational, purpose. Once the rafting chapter gets people on the river, guides use the opportunity to raise people's awareness of the issues surrounding rivers and to encourage direct grassroots action, both of which complement the fundraising efforts and reinforce FOR's mission to preserve, protect and restore rivers, streams and watersheds. ☒

Mike Dolin works in the Sacramento office of Friends of the River. Rachel Stevens is an intern with River Network. For more information regarding FOR's rafting chapter and membership drive, contact Mike Dolin at (916)442-3155.



"Since its founding in 1981, the rafting chapter has provided a crucial and highly successful fundraising strategy for FOR which capitalizes on the one asset that all river groups share—rivers."

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

FUNDING DEADLINES

Foundation Deadlines for September-November

Listed below are September-November funding deadlines for some funders with an interest in local river preservation efforts. Before submitting a proposal to any funder, be sure to obtain their guidelines and read them thoroughly.

<u>Funder</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Phone</u>
Laird, Norton Foundation	National	August 31	206-464-5292
The Flow Fund	National	September 1	212-649-5618
General Service Foundation	National	September 1	303-920-6834
Foundation for Deep Ecology	National	September 15	415-771-1102
Strong Fndtn for Environmental Values	Pacific NW, N. CA	September 15	415-882-7928
Virginia Environmental Endowment	VA/WV/KY/MD/OH	September 15	804-644-5000
George Gund Foundation	Great Lakes	September 30	216-241-3114
Ben and Jerry's Foundation	National	September 30	802-244-7105
Lyndhurst Foundation	SE Appalachia, TN	September 30	615-756-0767
Acorn Foundation	Western U.S.	October 1	510-644-1904
Kongsgaard-Goldman Foundation	Pacific Northwest	October 1	206-935-4511
Foundation for the Carolinas	NC, SC	October 1	704-376-9541
Turner Foundation	NM/MT/SC/GA/FL	October 1	404-681-9900
Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust	New England	October 15	617-426-7172
Davis Conservation Fund	New England	October 15	207-781-5504
William G. Gilmore Foundation	N. CA, OR	November 1	415-546-1400
Needmor Fund	National	November 1	303-449-5801
Samuel S. Johnson Foundation	OR,WA,CA	November 15	503-548-8104
Bullitt Foundation	Pacific Northwest	December 1	206-343-0807

Correction: The last River Fundraising Alert listed incorrect phone numbers for two funding sources. The correct phone numbers for Patagonia and Finlandia are, respectively, 805-643-8616, and 703-451-0141. Sorry for any inconvenience.