

7-step Model for Diaspora Philanthropy

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Abstract

This practice paper documents the successful sustainability strategy of The Citizens Foundation (TCF) which has raised more than USD 100 million from Pakistani Diaspora over the last 20 years and the lessons that could benefit other nonprofits. It presents the initiative of ‘bag carrying trips’ as a key strategy of philanthropy from Diaspora and provides advice on implementing a 7-step model based on extensive practical experience.

It is estimated that the size of the Pakistani Diaspora is more than 7 million with large concentration in UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, and Canada. TCF has been particularly successful in USA where donations quadrupled over a 5 year period to USD 6 million per year. TCF has been conferred with Ramon Magsaysay award (dubbed as Asia’s Noble Prize) and Skoll Foundation’s social innovation award. TCF has managed to raise more than USD 200 million over the last 20 years to build and operate 1060 school units in slum areas across 100+ cities in Pakistan with a current enrollment of 165,000 students.

At the heart of the TCF’s Diaspora strategy is a simple initiative called ‘bag carrying trips’. These are visits undertaken by the members of the board or senior management all over the world to meet Pakistani Diaspora and create awareness about the cause of organization. The key ingredient of these trips is finding a member of the Pakistani Diaspora, willing to host a small group of his/her family and friends at his/her house to meet the visitor from Pakistan. The 60 minute presentation includes screening a short documentary and power point presentation about the organization followed by a Q&A session.

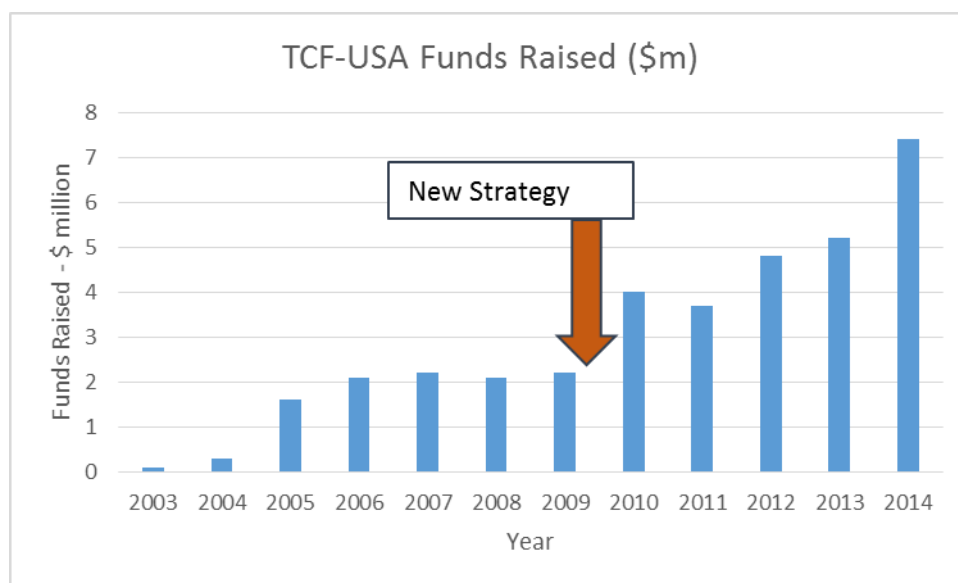
The authors having personally conducted more than 300 such meetings have fine-tuned the approach and have developed a 7 step model for effectively conducting such meetings. This paper outlines in detail the how’s as well as the dos and don’ts for each of the 7 steps including (a) recruiting suitable hosts, (b) planning the event including arranging the invitations and logistics of the meeting, (c) scripting the message with the local core team before the meeting, (d) managing the actual presentation and handling Q&A session, (e) leading the ASK process, (f) reaching agreement on fundraising target and selection of the coordinator, and (g) following up with continuous engagement from home country.

Introduction

The Citizens Foundation (TCF) was established in 1995 by a small group of Pakistani businessmen to address the issue of out-of-school children. By 2015, TCF had established 1060 schools across 100 cities of Pakistan with current enrollment of 165,000 students from urban slums and rural areas. In these 20 years, TCF had successfully raised over \$200m to build and operate these schools with half the amount raised from Pakistan Diaspora. This practice paper documents TCF's success in fundraising from Pakistani Diaspora particularly from the USA with the objective of sharing best practices..

Starting from 2009, almost every quarter representatives from TCF head office visited USA and held small and large fundraising events in small and large cities of USA in coordination with the local chapter. On average each of these 'bag-carrying' trips resulted in 10 events. This resulted in creation of many core team members within different cities for the USA chapter.

These passionate and enthusiastic supporters were able to create an unparalleled momentum across USA and TCF name became the top of mind charity amongst Pakistani Diaspora. For example in January of 2010 during a 13 day trip to Texas, one of the authors along with the CEO of USA chapter conducted 33 events with about 830 people attending in total. The 2014 annual Houston fundraising event boasted an audience of 900 and donations of over \$1 million. Similarly, in 2009 the donations collected from the Diaspora in DC area was less than \$50,000. The 2015 annual fundraiser in Washington DC netted \$1.75 million with 1000 people in attendance.



Thanks to the transparency required by IRS about nonprofits, one can easily access online the revenue and expenses of other nonprofits. The TCF team compared the fundraising amount generated by top 10 Pakistani causes in the USA and tracked their growth from 2009 to 2014. Interestingly, their total collection has remained constant with little or no growth. Apart from the floods of 2010 which caused a onetime increase in donations for one charity, there was no

significant change. One is led to believe that the 4 fold increase in TCF's donations has not been at the expense of other charities but the actual primary pie of donations from Pakistani Diaspora increased despite the tough economic times for the USA economy during that period.

As the critical mass of core team grew, TCF USA started to organize annual meetings to discuss strategy and targets. Additionally, they were able to coordinate scheduling of their annual events in different cities for someone from Pakistan to be the key-note speaker for multiple events. They hired additional marketing team and housed them at the head office in Pakistan. The key differential was that the supporters now owned the cause and the organization.

The Science of Bag Carrying Trips: 7-Step Model.

While the bag carrying trip is analogous to a travelling salesperson, the transaction is very different. Each event or meetings is hosted by a member of Diaspora who invites friends and family members to his/her house or office for a talk followed by a meal. The talk is about the cause with a multimedia presentation followed by a Q&A session. Brochures and pledge forms are distributed and contact numbers of participants are gathered for follow-up. What seems like a common sense approach requires taking care of small details for fundraising success. The authors having conducted over 300 fundraising events in the USA and other countries have structured their approach into seven distinct steps:

Step 1 - Recruiting Suitable Hosts

Most nonprofits have a heartwarming cause and credible track record. The challenge is to get it across to people by getting them in a room to listen to the story and get engaged by asking questions. To get an acceptable return on investment on the bag-carrying trip, a decent sized audience is a must. However, not everyone has the standing in the community or persuasive skills to get people into a room. Most people shy away from attending fundraisers as the pressure to donate makes them uncomfortable.

For starters the successful host is usually an extrovert who is not shy to ask friends, family and community members to join. Secondly, the host has to be motivated enough to put energy in chasing people to come to the event. The key note speaker who is doing the bag carrying trip has to coordinate with such as host directly. This does not happen through referrals alone.

Events organized by professional and cultural associations of the Diaspora usually draw crowds and is good for networking but the competing priorities of associations does not reveal significant result for your organization. Events organized by individuals is much more personal. The speaker needs to coordinate at least 8 weeks in advance with potential hosts and gain their commitment. Some measures of commitment are the host's willingness to pay for the cost of the event and offer to house the speaker at his home.

One of the best ways to seek potential hosts is to identify exceptional people in the Diaspora and connect them to exceptional people in the home country (trustee, senior management, etc.). Also encourage people to visit your field sites to witness your work. The main ASK is to host an event in their city and not just giving a donation. This converts donors and potential donors to advocates. Such hosts are going to be your lifelong friends; therefore, be yourself with them.

Connect with them and their families on a personal level. One example is that a host in Austin, Texas named his son after the author.

Step 2 – Planning the Event

Once the host has been identified and has accepted to organize an awareness or fundraising event, the next step is to work with the host to plan the event. Incidentally, you will come across many hosts who have never done a fundraiser at their home.

To ensure that Murphy's Law does not apply to your events, the speaker should carry all the required material. This includes laptop, multimedia projector, connecting cables, extension wires, slide flipper, speakers, brochures, pledge forms, signup sheets, pens, visiting cards, flat pin convertors, etc. The only thing that the organizer has to arrange is a projector screen or a white wall to show the documentary. We have witnessed many a times the laptop not talking with the multimedia projector arranged by the host.

The choice of location will depend on how many people are expected. It is best to do the event in the living rooms of the host if the group is manageable. People are more at ease at home as compared to restaurants where noise may be distracting. Other options include the conference room at office or hall at a university. However, for large events like annual fundraisers the appropriate place will be hotel ball rooms or banquet halls. When launching a cause to new audience, it is best to start small and focus on the quality of people attending and not the sheer quantity. People are able to ask questions in detail in smaller gatherings. The Mile deep and inch wide rule works better than inch deep and Mile wide in this case.

Selection of date is major issue as almost all hosts prefer the weekend due to availability of invitees. This becomes a problem for someone visiting from home country for a couple of weeks. They have difficulty in filling their weekday calendar. The authors have been able to pack their schedule with event a day for two weeks at a stretch. The scheduling success lies in working a calendar upfront based on the first few confirmations and then giving only one choice for date to the remaining hosts.

While the events happen mostly in evenings, the mornings are utilized for one on one meetings with potential major donors, appearing on radio shows, catching up on email, sending our thank you notes to people already met, and visiting corporations during lunch hour. During a 5 day trip to San Jose, the authors had 5 brown bag lunch meetings in 5 Silicon Valley companies. At each of these meetings the Pakistan Diaspora members joined in to hear news about a pressing cause.

The flow of events has to be agreed with the host. It is best to have the main presentation before the meal. There are many advantages to this approach. Firstly it gives more time to discuss the cause as discussion continues over dinner. Secondly, after meal people are in a rush to go home for work next day or to relieve the baby sitter. Thirdly, some quiet donors will reach out to the speaker during dinner with their specific requirement. The challenge of starting with the presentation is that some people will come late and will miss the discussion. Also those who come on time get bored while waiting for presentation to start. One of the ways is to keep them engaged is have a slide show running before the presentation with interesting pictures and facts. Also placing the brochures on the seats given them time to read and start the dialogue. It is

important to plan the screening of documentary with dimmed lights and minimum distractions such as people eating, talking or moving about.

The home office should help develop invitation fliers and hosts have to only send them online and make follow up calls. This will ensure brand consistency and speed as most hosts will not find the time to design email fliers. With the social media options available, it is easier to invite to events and keep track of who is coming.

Step 3 - Scripting the Message with the Host before the Meeting

Before the actual event, it is very important for the speaker and the host to discuss the message and their roles. One of the key elements is how the host will introduce the speaker giving the reason why he/she is involved with this cause. At the end of the Q&A, the host has to take charge of the event again and lead the discussion about next steps.

It is also important for the speaker and the host to discuss about forming a group of supporters (local chapter) and identifying core members and a coordinator/ champion to lead the group. The discussion should also be about the fundraising target of the group. The host can share information about the key participants for the speaker to focus at the event. During the course of inviting he/she may have known who the likely donors are and to encourage them to announce their commitment today to motivate others.

Step 4 - Managing the Actual Presentation and Handling Q&A session

This is the key role of the speaker. The impression that he/she creates in the first few seconds makes or breaks the event. The speaker must command respect because of his/her personality. The personal appearance of the speaker itself must reflect the cause. Professionally but simply dressed is important. Wearing a Rolex watch and business class luggage tags can prove to be fatal mistakes when asking for donations. The speaker represents the organization and its values. Therefore, has to be very careful about personal values.

The presentation should start with a 2 minute short but powerful story and lead into the 8-10 minute engaging documentary video with emotional appeal. Too many fundraisers bore their audience to death by power point presentations. All the information available on power point slides should come out as a response to questions. The key to success is handling the Q&A session with succinct but powerful responses preferably with anecdotes or quotes. The common thread that binds the Diaspora is cultural and religious roots. The speaker should be able to emotionally connect with the audience and build on national and cultural pride.

The elevator speech must be repeated at the beginning and at the end. It is important that the speaker is involved with operations of the organization so that he/she can share relevant examples extempore. Needless to mention that the speaker has to be a master of the subject.

If the discussion gets off track and goes into a tangent of political or religious debate, the speaker has to tactfully bring back the discussion on track. At times people start talking about what the government should be doing. This can be rephrased as - let's look at what we can do.

Step 5 - Leading the ASK process

As the Q&A session progresses towards its logical end, someone is going to pop the question - what do you want from us or how can we help. This provides the ideal opening to the uncomfortable but most important part of the evening – the ASK, without which the event will remain unsuccessful. Most people are too shy to ask.

It is at best to introduce the host again at this stage and he/she will talk about forming a core group of supporter to work towards a target e.g. educating 1000 children (costing \$120K) or treatment for 10,000 children (costing \$50K). Then the big target can be broken down into smaller groups such as we need 10 people donating 1000 per month. This should still be done as soft sell.

The speaker at this stage can always interject that donations are tax exempt, meet the religious giving criteria, are eligible for employee matching, etc. Also, welcome all suggestions but focus on the main thing. Ideas about in kind donation, volunteering should be welcomed and referred to the appropriate section on website.

Step 6 - Reaching Agreement on Fundraising Target and Selection of Coordinator/Champion
The ASK process concludes with agreement on a fundraising target and selection of a coordinator to take things forward. While this will be the person to champion the cause, it is better to call him/her coordinator. Too many times titles such as President of local chapter cause jealousy leading to split in the team. Usually the audience votes for the host to be the coordinator. The important element is that you want people with good reputation representing the organization. While donations from all is welcome the coordinator has to match the organizational values

Another discussion should be to hold a big annual event with hundreds of supporters. For a big event, the speaker can commit to dates and also suggest to have commitments lined up before the event. This helps the local team to work towards the goal with a date. At this stage the young generation with energy but not much financial muscle are required to become volunteers. The local chapter may set a 5 year target such as building 5 schools in that time but it is important to have a one year target. Raise money to support 500 children next year.

After the event it is important to have a debriefing session with the host and coordinator (if they are different) and get feedback about the event. Discussion about who needs to be followed up and what are the commitments people have made.

Step 7 – Following up with Continuous Engagement from Home Country
In order to keep the flame alive, the hosts and coordinators have to be in touch with the home country at least once every 2 months if not earlier. They should be reminded to identify high net worth individuals and to encourage them to visit the field site whenever they visit the home country. At the home office, coordinating such field visits requires dedicated staff following up with meeting the speaker. Diaspora fundraising is a high contact sport and it is important to get to know and like the team members.

Conclusion

TCF continues to make unprecedented gains in the Pakistani Diaspora market in the USA. The focus required for bag-carrying trips and selection of one country rather than spreading too thin was essential for success. The team leading the effort was not micromanaged rather given a free hand with trustees giving full support and encouragement to the initiative. There are many similar nonprofits in third world countries that can engage with their Diaspora members in first world countries using the steps outlined above to meet their fundraising goals.