

Getting Started: Keys to Success

While there are many elements to becoming a successful CLCP--that is, attaining Certified Literate Community Status--a good strategy must include three important components.

Three keys to success are:

1. Tell a compelling story.
2. Set a specific goal.
3. Make it easy to give.

The first key is most the important. The most seasoned, well-spoken and intelligent of advocates can talk for hours about the importance of supporting a cause. They are passionate about their subject, they cross off every possible objection, and they supply fact after fact to convince others to donate to their cause. Then they wonder why people don't immediately pull out their wallets.

It's because their passion, knowledge and facts don't include a compelling story.

A non-profit organization needs to find an emotional connection to the audience at hand. When you see starving children on television, you want badly to give money to help them. That is compelling. When someone talks about breast cancer and holds up a picture of their deceased relative, or persuades you to think about you mother, sister, or other relatives as potential victims, you want to support the cause against cancer. That is compelling. When someone at the National Center for Family Literacy introduces Robert Long, a Native American from New Mexico who, 18 years after dropping out of school, went back, learned to read and write and is now pursuing a master's degree, then you are overwhelmed with the value of literacy in an individual's life. That is compelling.

Every CLCP has a compelling story to tell. Tell your story well and often to drive that call to action.

The second key to success is especially important in effective fundraising. If your goal is to "Raise money," then a donor has nothing tangible to see as a result of their contribution. If your goal is to "Provide an adult education teacher's salary," or "Provide educational materials for adult education classes," then your contributors feel like their \$25 is going somewhere useful.

The third key brings some online tools into play. You can use one of the many free website builders to create your own site. By incorporating an online payment tool, you allow people to donate with just a few clicks. If you'd like to capture their email addresses, that's fine, but don't make people fill out forms, put in credit card numbers (PayPal is a really simple way to avoid this) or sign over their first born just to help you.

At your next board meeting, talk about your fundraising goals and strategies and begin to think of ways to make giving easier in your community. Discover what your compelling story is and how you can incorporate it into your literature, website, daily conversations, and even your grant proposals. If you don't have a website, consider starting one. They are surprisingly easy to create and many are free. By using all the resources within your reach and using these steps to success--telling a compelling story, setting a goal, and making it easy to give--you can see your CLCP continue to flourish and touch countless lives.