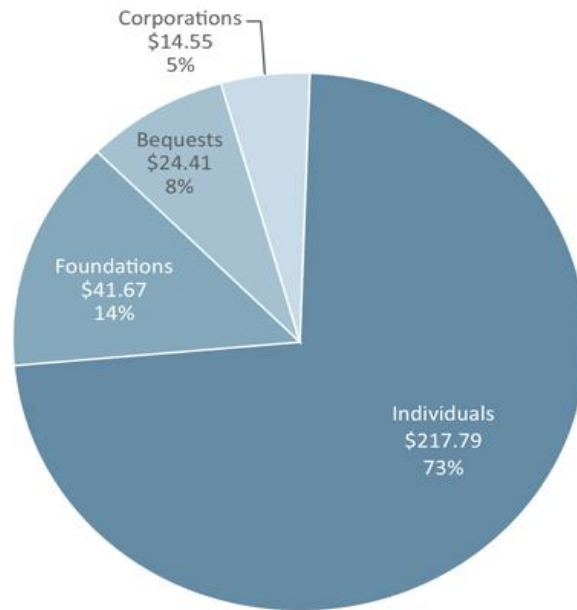


## *Cultivating Individual Donors*

### General Principles

These days, crowdfunding is big news. Artists are using websites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo to reach fans and collect donations to support their creative projects. Online fundraising platforms have made it easier to connect with supporters, and they've activated a generation of younger patrons. Regardless of the medium, individual donors have long been the greatest source of support for the arts—see the chart below from the Giving USA Foundation that breaks annual contributions across sectors by source:

**2011 contributions: \$298.42 billion by source of contributions**  
(in billions of dollars – all figures are rounded)



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Personal relationships are essential to fundraising success, whether you're collecting donations online or in person. There is an art to asking for support from individuals; below are some guiding principles.

**Get to Know Your Audience.** Keep track of who is attending your concerts. These are your allies, your followers, your potential future patrons. Put out a sign-in book at all of your concerts for placing names and email addresses on your mailing list. If possible, arrange for receptions after concerts so that you can interact with audience members and begin building relationships with potential patrons, donors, and collaborators.

**Ask for advice.** Start by making appointments with people who have shown interest in your work, or individuals in the community who support similar artists or projects. Ask to meet them for coffee to share information about your project and seek their advice about possible collaborators or supporters. Your meeting should be fairly informal, but it's a good idea to bring materials that outline what you're setting out

to do (e.g. an album proposal, a program overview, a timeline, a budget, etc.). This is the first step in cultivating a relationship and creating buy-in for your project. Follow up with a thank you note after the meeting and reach out every few months to share an update on your latest accomplishments.

**People give money to people.** Start with the people you know: your extended family, your family doctor, dentist, lawyer, your local Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions club members, your first music teachers, your neighbors, your parents' business associates. You have a large circle of people who feel connected to you and who would take pride and pleasure in contributing to your success. If your campaign involves reaching out to people you don't know personally (e.g. an online campaign or an organization campaign), craft an appeal that delivers a sense of who you are and/or who is being impacted by your project.

**Tell stories that demonstrate involvement or impact.** It's hard to get a donor excited about the day-to-day needs of a project or organization, even if the funds you are soliciting will support the general operating budget. Instead, donors want to connect to the mission, activities and impact of your project. The best way to share these points memorably is through stories—concrete, relatable, moving or humorous anecdotes that demonstrate how your project is impacting individuals and communities. Think about what prompted you to start the project, or a moment when you felt deeply inspired by the outcomes. Share these pivotal moments to help the donor connect personally to the work you're doing.

**Articulate what the money will help to accomplish.** It's important to be as concrete as possible about what the money will help you accomplish. No matter the amount, let the donor know what the money will be used for—a scholarship for a student to participate in your summer program, an additional concert in your series, renting equipment for a special production, etc. You should also be ready to share general financial information, such as your overall project budget, the breakdown of programmatic and administrative costs, and the total amount of money you need to raise.

**Right person, right reason, right time, right amount.** Do your homework to find out who is giving to projects that fall in your area, and if possible, what their average gift is. This will help you assess whether a donor is right person for your project, and what a reasonable "ask" would be. Timing is also important—you don't want to make an ask during your first conversation. In all likelihood, the cues and responses you receive from a potential donor will give you a sense of when they are ready to have a conversation about making a gift. They may ask how they can help, or what you most need to be successful in the coming year. They may begin to give you advice, or talk about how your work connects with projects that they are passionate about. They may express the desire to see your project in action, or connect with other stake-holders. These are all signs that a potential donor is invested and would be open to a conversation about giving.

**You can't say thank you too many times.** Acknowledge all contributors whenever and wherever possible. Besides saying it and writing thank you notes, put their names in the programs, on the CD, on the posters, on your website, announce them at the concert and reception, etc. Your appreciation is a big part of the return on their investment. You might also want to arrange for private "salon" performances for your patrons — they are, after all, music lovers.

**Think beyond cash.** You can also pursue in-kind donations (services or goods) that will help offset your costs and build awareness about your work. For example: securing a recital hall rent-free through your connections with a religious institution, museum, school, or community center; free advertising or an event preview in a print or online publication; sponsorship from a local business in exchange for advertising on your promotional materials; free print services for concert posters and programs. You could explore the possibility of partnering with a local college radio station to record and broadcast your concert. Other possible in-kind donations include chair and table rentals, lighting, and refreshments for the reception.

**Don't say no for other people—be bold.** At times, your own discomfort will hold you back from reaching out to a potential donor, or making a new connection with someone who can help your project. It's easy to say no for other people—it protects you from rejection. If you are honest, respectful and clear, the worst possible outcome is getting a polite "no thank you." The more practice you get, the easier it will be to make these kinds of connections—so *be bold!*

## House Concerts and Fundraising Events

Relationships are built through ongoing one-on-one interactions and shared activities. A great way to do both is organize a house concert, hosted by a donor or friend who is willing to introduce you to people who might also be interested in your work. This helps you broaden your network, make new connections and deepen your relationship with the host. In this kind of intimate setting, you can share your art, your ideas, and build rapport with key figures in the community. These kinds of events can be easier to organize than you think—do a scan of your mentors, teachers, and family friends to assess if any have a home that would be suitable. Hosting a house concert is also a relatively easy way for a donor or advocate to support your project—it's not costly and it's a nice way to bring friends together.

Below are a few basic tips for organizing and maximizing a house concert:

- Have resources on hand—an album or a one-sheet—that audience members can take away with them.
- Deliver remarks before, during and after the concert, that provide information about your project and what the audience will hear.
- Work with the host to choose an appropriate program length and atmosphere for their guests.
- Collect business cards and follow-up with new contacts within a couple days of the concert.

## Language to Use

It can be hard to strike the right tone in an email to a potential donor. Below is a sample email that you might send as an initial request for a meeting.

*Dear Jane,*

*I hope this email finds you and your family well. It was wonderful to see you last summer at the Tanglewood new music concert—I hope you enjoyed the performance and your time in beautiful Lenox. I am back at New England Conservatory this fall and am looking forward to a great last year.*

*I'm reaching out because I would love to pick your brain about a new project that I am developing. Through my involvement with the Community Performances and Partnerships Program last year, I had the opportunity to perform in diverse settings in the Haitian community of Hyde Park and I was blown-away by their enthusiasm and hunger for classical music. This inspired me to create Viva, a project that will commission 3 Haitian-American composers to write new music for my string quartet, which will be performed at local schools, libraries and community centers in Hyde Park. As a long-time educator and supporter of the arts, I would love to hear your ideas and feedback about this project. At this stage, I am looking for new connections, ideas and collaborators to deepen the impact of this project. Attached, you will find some basic information about the project history, goals, and leaders.*

*I would be happy to meet whenever it might be convenient for you. Please let me know what might work for you in the next several weeks.*

*Thanks and looking forward,  
Sam*

## Additional Resources

Links about Fundraising, Philanthropy & Foundations:

- The Foundation Center: [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)
- Council of Foundations: [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org)
- Philanthropy Journal Online: [www.philanthropyjournal.org](http://www.philanthropyjournal.org)
- The Chronicle of Philanthropy: [www.philanthropy.com](http://www.philanthropy.com)

- Fundraising Professionals: [www.nsfre.org](http://www.nsfre.org)
- Alliance for Nonprofit Management: [www.allianceonline.org](http://www.allianceonline.org)
- ARNOVA: [www.arnova.org](http://www.arnova.org)

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