



Improve Your Fundraising with
the Credible Messenger Principle

How did a music nonprofit get a 100% response to its fundraising appeal?

LOW RESPONSES to fundraising appeals are not uncommon. But if you are a small organization, you need everyone you know to contribute. An organization that runs music programs in inner-city schools couldn't ask parents or the schools to contribute, but they asked their students to help. Each solicitation to donors included a handwritten thank-you note from a student. While the list was small, the appeal elicited a 100% response rate.



CREDIBLE MESSENGER

You Respond Best to People You Trust

Students, in their own voice and handwriting, telling the story of music in their lives, are heart-warming and believable. The best person to deliver your message is the one who is most believed by the recipient, usually someone they can identify with. Deliver your message through someone your donors trust. Typically, nonprofits appeal to donors with solicitation letters written by someone from the organization. But is that person the most credible and convincing one?

Shared Experiences Create Trust

How do you appeal to youth who are at-risk for involvement in the criminal justice system? It's not through probation officers, because they are not trusted by those youth. The Credible Messenger Justice Center in New York City trains ex-convicts who have transformed their lives to be mentors for at-risk youth. Since these mentors come from the same neighborhoods and have faced the same challenges as these youth, they are trusted.



Peer-to-Peer Messages Are Believable

At age 18, children in foster care age out of the system. Without a family to support them, many end up homeless. The Commonwealth of Virginia wanted to prepare foster youth to avoid this outcome. But people in the government are not highly trusted by these foster youth. Instead of the message coming from the state foster care coordinators, the message was delivered by other youths who had aged out of the foster care system. They revealed what they would have done differently to prepare for independence. Coming from peers who had lived it, these messages were well received by the kids still in foster care.



"Know that you have a voice. Don't be afraid to talk and be open to let somebody love you."

LENA
Former Project LIFE
Participant

Apply the Credible Messenger to Your Fundraising

- Have someone who has influence with your donors write (or sign) the letter or email on behalf of your agency. Consider a local celebrity, business, or community leader.
- Use a letter written by people your organization has helped — they can vividly describe how their lives were transformed. Or have their parents, children, or siblings write it.
- For high-net-worth individuals, business leaders (particularly in their sector), might have great influence. Financial advisors might also. Consider getting their endorsement or having a letter signed by them.
- Use a photo of your "credible messenger" including their work, home, or other environments to lend additional credibility.



Red Rooster Group uses behavioral science to help nonprofits raise more money, create effective marketing, and improve their programs. Our Behavior Change Cycle and Fundraising Action Pack card deck help nonprofits put behavioral principles into practice. Contact us to tap into our insight.



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