JAMES E. CONNELL k ASSOCIATES

Charitable Estate And Gift Planning Specialists

15 Pinewild Drive, P.O. Box 3335

Pinehurst, North Carolina 28374-3335

phone 910-295-6800 g g g g fax 910-295-6866

Marketing Bequests

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Bequests are the bedrock of all planned gift programs.

Studies reveal those who have indicated either a bequest intention or an actual bequest in their estate plan have two main motivations. First, a belief in the mission of the charity. Second, a dedication to what the future support will accomplish. When promoting bequest arrangements charity must put forth a solid case for support and vision for its future to stimulate these motivations.

A major bequest study was completed by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University in 2006. The study analyzed the likelihood a of a bequest inclusion or bequest consideration by income levels. The researchers found bequest giving, and the potential for new bequest inclusions, was strong across all income levels, a powerful reminder bequest giving is not exclusive to major gift donors or driven by taxes alone. Bequests should be promoted to all constituencies no matter the amount of their support.

Bequests may be accomplished through a variety of legal and beneficiary designations. Will and trust arrangement predominate but beneficiary designations of life insurance policies, retirement plans, and paid/transfer on death account registrations are growing in popularity as cost effective methods. Any promotion of bequest arrangements will naturally promote the reasons and benefits of good estate planning.

When a charity introduces a bequest marketing program it must devise a budget, time line and agenda. Many charities begin with a "Discovery Letter" designed to identify those who have already made an provision in their estate plan.

Every charity should have a bequest or planned giving Society with an appropriate and distinguishing title. The Society must have a brochure which explains the mission of the charity, the criteria for membership, and techniques to provide future support. The Society brochure is often mailed with the Discovery Letter and accompanied by a membership form. The form details the type of arrangement and amount, and the nature of type of recognition desired.

Periodic Society recognition events should take place at which individuals are invited to give testimony on why and how they are structuring future charitable support.

To support bequest giving a document "Bequest Arrangements to Support ABC Charity" should be developed. This document should list the easiest and most common ways to make bequests thru a will, revocable trust, beneficiary designation of life insurance and/or retirement plans, and account title transfers.

The document should cover specific, percentage, contingent bequest arrangements, estate residue gifts and testamentary life income arrangements. The sample wording should be approved by legal counsel and include the charities full legal name and federal tax exempt number in order to avoid confusion with another charity of similar name or mission. Each method of support can be featured in future publications on bequest and life income giving.

This document should be circulated widely to interested individuals, leadership and professional advisors. It should be distributed to every estate planning attorney in the charity service area, used as a handout at every estate planning seminar and easily available on the Internet.

There are various commercial services which publish wills and bequest brochures. A sufficient supply of such brochures should be purchase to respond to requests for further information.

Stories and pictures about the impact of bequests received and highlighting known future bequest arrangements should be included in every publication and not just reserved for an annual report listing. To make maximum use of these important messages they should be used as handouts at seminars and inserts in thank-you notes.

Lastly every letterhead should carry the message; "Please remember ABC charity in your will and estate plans."