

WOMEN'S FUNDING NETWORK

Lesbian Donor Research Project

Final Report



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A consortium of progressive funds and lesbian and gay community foundations partnered with WFN on this project. The Lesbian Donor Research Project Advisory Committee consisted of many volunteers who gave generously of their personal time to enhance its success: co-chairs Nancy Cunningham/Working Group on Funding Lesbian and Gay Issues and Karen Zelermyer/Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation were joined by Lee Badgett/Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, University of Massachusetts; Mary Ellen Capek/Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University; Susan Curry/Philanthrofund Foundation; Joan Garner/National Network of Grantmakers; and Karen Sauvigné/An Uncommon Legacy Foundation.

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The Ordinary Magic research team members were Julia Fitz-Randolph, J. Bourge Hathaway, Paul Ideker, Judith Blair and Bill Treadwell.

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Executive Summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Lesbian Donor Research Project (LDRP) is an extension of the national Donor Research and Marketing Project (DRMP) that was conducted for the Women's Funding Network (WFN) from March 1997 through January of 1998. The DRMP was the first national survey of its kind. It combined qualitative and quantitative approaches specifically conceived and designed to gain a clearer understanding of why women give and don't give to women's funds, what common messages resonate with a diverse group of women and to help focus future efforts by WFN and its member women's funds to build broader, deeper public understanding of who they are and what they do.

In addition, the final report made recommendations about a proposed public awareness campaign that could be implemented nationally by WFN or tailored to the needs and capabilities of member funds within their geographical area.

The overarching goal of WFN's Donor Research and Marketing Project was to help create an informed language of change that member funds can use to communicate effectively with their constituency about the vision of the women's funding movement and hopefully motivate more women to become a part of its success.

While it was acknowledged from the outset of the DRMP that there had been a lack of solid market-based research on women in general and their charitable giving behaviors, even less is known about the giving preferences and priorities of lesbians. The Gill Foundation recognized that a study of lesbian philanthropy that built upon the information gained through the DRMP could be beneficial to lesbian and gay community funds, WFN member funds as well as other public foundations, and agreed to fund the study. By mirroring¹ the DRMP, the Lesbian Donor Research Project sought to:

¹ Using the basic methods and line of questioning of the DRMP, questions were added that were specifically relevant to lesbians.

- Examine why lesbians give and don't give to women's funds.
- Gain insights into the giving preferences and priorities of lesbians, looking at what may or may not be significant differences in how and why and to whom lesbians give their time and money.
- Contribute to the development of messages that will reach and motivate potential lesbian donors to become involved in the women's funding movement and other philanthropic giving.

The Research

The LDRP used the same mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies as the DRMP. The inquiry was designed specifically to expand and deepen knowledge about why lesbian known donors give to women's funds, and/or to projects and programs benefiting women and girls, as well as to develop new information about why other lesbians do not give (or give more) to support philanthropic efforts benefiting these same groups.

The research for the LDRP included four focus groups held in two different cities, 21 personal interviews with known lesbian donors to women's funds or programs and/or known lesbians of influence, a written survey that was sent to 5,000 lesbians identified as non-donors to women's funds throughout the country, and a written test message survey sent to 153 volunteers who participated in any of the previous phases of the research.

The Research — Major Conclusions

An analysis of the key findings of the LDRP reveals some interesting distinctions from, as well as similarities to, the findings of the DRMP. There are certainly some clear indications of what WFN member funds and other philanthropic organizations will need to do — and communicate — if they are to attract and retain lesbian donors.

Lesbians Who Give to Women's Funds

The study participants who reported giving to women's funds have these characteristics in common:

- they clearly understand and believe both in the mission and in the tangible work of the organization,
- they have empathy for the causes, projects or programs a women's fund supports,
- they trust the fund's leadership and judgment about what projects to support and how to support them,
- they understand the strength of collective, targeted giving, i.e., their dollars are more powerful, their giving more leveraged (rather than diluted) when combined with others,
- they were asked to give.

Lesbians Who Don't Give to Women's Funds

The research also identified four common characteristics shared by lesbians in the study who do not currently give to a women's fund. They cited these reasons for not giving to a women's fund:

- they were not asked, at least not in a way to which they could relate,
- their financial resources are limited or they perceive them to be limited and they have other priorities for their giving and/or they do not feel that their small gift would be valued,
- they prefer to give directly to a project or program,
- the fund soliciting the gift does not acknowledge or serve lesbian needs/issues, is not lesbian/gay friendly or otherwise inclusive of those with different sexual orientations, or does not appear to be committed to cultural and/or ethnic diversity.

Message Testing

A total of 157 lesbians who participated in the other elements of the LDRP volunteered to participate in a test message survey. Written test message survey packages were mailed to 153 of these volunteers in August 1998. A total of 108 (70.6%) responses were returned to an independent research firm; 98 of those responses were tabulated.

According to their responses:

- Lesbians want the facts presented in a bold, clean, concise manner, i.e., easy to read and understand. Statistics tied directly to individuals and/or personal situations are most effective.
- Clean, powerful graphics should be used to capture their attention.
- Overly emotional, sentimentalized approaches feel manipulative and contrived. Materials that communicate passivity or helplessness are not compelling to lesbians.
- Lesbians want to know that their donation makes a difference. Materials should demonstrate how each dollar will contribute to solving a stated problem. Be specific and relevant. If the presentation sets up a problem, demonstrate concretely how a financial gift will contribute to the solution of the problem.
- Messages aimed directly at lesbians should not be token or gratuitous. Don't include references to lesbians without substantive reason.

Other Conclusions & Recommendations

In General

It became clear through the process of identifying research participants and compiling mailing lists that only the two national lesbian funds (Astraea and Legacy) could identify their donors or prospects as lesbian, and even then not with 100% certainty. This is, of course, a major inhibitor of WFN member fund outreach to lesbians. Given privacy concerns, maintaining a coded database for purposes of direct mail outreach targeted specifically to lesbians

would be problematic. Women's funds and other philanthropic organizations seeking to attract lesbian donors will first need to develop pro-active ways of learning about and addressing lesbian needs and then projecting a clearly lesbian-friendly/inclusive identity.

Similarities and Differences — Lesbian and Heterosexual Donors

Like their heterosexual counterparts in the DRMP, the lesbians in this study who give to women's funds are likely to have been personally involved with the fund in some way — either financially and/or as a volunteer — although this appears to be less important to them than the mission of the organization. Major donors were likely to have been involved with the fund for an extended period of time and several had been founders of the fund to which they still contribute, or are close personal friends of a founder or original executive director. These lesbian donors to women's funds do not limit their giving to women's funds, but make gifts to a broad range of other causes as well.

The lesbians participating in this study also had a low level of understanding and/or were confused about what a women's fund is, or does, or how it is distinguished from any number of other organizations that benefit women and girls.

Message Development

The DRMP provides WFN and its member funds with information about what motivates women donors, how they make decisions about giving and their preferences for different programs and projects. This information is now further substantiated and augmented by similar information about what motivates lesbian donors. As specific elements of this new research are used to craft various messages specifically to lesbians, there are several key points to keep in mind:

- There is no single profile of a lesbian donor. Do not pander to stereotypes. Remember that lesbians place priority on the same values other women do.

- If your organization's mission includes a commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity that includes sexual orientation, clearly articulate this. When lesbians are visibly part of staff, board, or volunteers, and most importantly recipients of grants, the lesbians in this study are more likely to give to the organization.
- Be prepared to deliver a consistent message over a long period of time. Old myths and misperceptions die hard. Don't expect positive results in the short-term.
- The role of a women's fund/foundation is distinctly different from that of other types of organizations, projects or programs serving women and girls. Messages should reflect and highlight those distinctions and core strengths in relationship to the specific needs/issues affecting lesbians.

Part I

Project Overview



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Project

The Women's Funding Network (WFN) links and serves women's funds, women donors and supporting institutions throughout the United States and Canada. Its mission is to ensure that women's funds are recognized as the "investment of choice" for people who value the full participation of women and girls as key to strong, equitable and sustainable communities and societies. WFN serves as the advocate and membership arm for over 70 women's funds across North America, promotes increased giving to women's organizations and provides critical leadership and support to the women's funding movement.

At least two WFN member funds, both national in scope, serve lesbians exclusively as part of their mission. Others also make grants that benefit lesbians. In addition, many contributors to WFN and its member funds are lesbians. Little is known, however, about the attitudes, giving preferences and priorities of this largely invisible group of women. While there has been a great deal written about women donors in general, most of it is anecdotal. Very little, if any, of this material addresses the role lesbians play in funding women's funds, issues and causes, nor does it examine why lesbians give or do not give to a women's fund.

This project grew out of specific interest on the part of the Gill Foundation in the Donor Research and Marketing Project and its implications for learning more about lesbian philanthropy. Ordinary Magic, DRMP project consultant, was retained to design and conduct the Lesbian Donor Research Project.

Project Objectives

The design, development and implementation of the LDRP was governed by the following objectives:

- To use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to obtain new information specifically about the personal characteristics of lesbian donors, their giving habits, and their responsiveness to giving messages and mediums.
- To develop general information about lesbian audiences that can be used to create messages about women's funds and about projects and programs benefiting women and girls.
- To develop, test and refine fundraising messages with volunteers who had participated in earlier phases of the research in order to help WFN, its member funds, and other philanthropic organizations craft successful appeals to lesbian audiences.

Research Design

With the specific project objectives in mind, and with the desire to compare the data gathered with the findings of the DRMP, the research was designed with the same four distinct components:

- 1) **focus groups** — one each for lesbian donors and known non-donors to women's funds, lesbian/gay and other public foundations, and WFN — in two different cities in order to include as much diversity of opinion as possible within budget constraints;
- 2) **personal interviews** with a cross-section of lesbian known major donors at various levels to both women's funds and projects and programs benefiting women and girls, as well as to other philanthropic organizations;
- 3) a comprehensive **written survey** designed to examine the attitudes and giving preferences of known lesbian non-donors to women's funds;
- 4) an additional **written test message survey**, sent to those participants in the focus groups, personal interviews and written survey who indicated that they would be willing to participate further in the test message phase.

This combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches afforded a means by which certain assumptions about lesbian giving behaviors as well as significant themes emerging from the smaller universe of focus group and personal interview participants could be more fully explored or confirmed with a much larger population.

In addition to using one method to help inform another, combining approaches or methods in a single study provides triangulation in the classic sense of seeking convergence of results, and helps identify overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon that may emerge.²

The focus group discussion guides and worksheets can be found in Exhibit A, the personal interview guide in Exhibit C, the written survey instrument in Exhibit D, and the written test message survey in Exhibit E.

² Creswell, John W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*. Sage Publications.

Part II

Methodology and Sample



PROJECT OVERVIEW

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Part III

Key Findings



KEY FINDINGS

The Inquiry

Building on the Donor Research and Marketing Project (DRMP), this study explored what motivates lesbians to give to women's funds or to projects and programs that benefit women and girls. It also sought to capture a sense of what motivates lesbians to give to projects or programs that serve lesbians and gay men, as well as to other charitable causes. Overall, this was a close first look at the giving behaviors, preferences and priorities of lesbians and whether those behaviors are markedly different from the more general population of women⁷ who participated in the DRMP.

In mirroring the DRMP, the Lesbian Donor Research Project (LDR) explored the following major themes, topics and questions:

- Awareness of WFN and/or a member women's fund.
- Awareness of what women's funds are and do.
- Preferences for giving to a fund versus directly to a project or program.
- Type of projects and programs that receive gifts.
- Reasons for giving and not giving — including barriers to giving in general, to women's funds, and to projects and programs that benefit women and girls, and lesbians and gays specifically.
- Dollar ranges of giving.
- How giving decisions are made and the factors influencing those decisions.
- Donor recognition preferences.
- Preferences in case presentation/solicitation methods and materials.
- The appeal of specific test messages.

⁷ It is assumed that the DRMP participant pool is representative of the larger population, i.e., the majority (@90%) of the DRMP participants are heterosexual. Although several lesbians were known to have participated in the DRMP, they were not formally identified as such nor was the data gathering designed to segment the study population along the lines of sexual orientation. There is no evidence that lesbians are any more involved in the leadership of, or as donors to, women's funds than are other women. In fact, the LDRP findings suggest that — with the exception of lesbian-identified funds such as Astraea and Legacy — they are not, choosing instead to fund the arts and culture, lesbian/gay service groups and politically progressive causes and organizations.

The Findings

The presentation of these findings is generally focused on, and organized around, comparisons of the LDRP findings to those of the DRMP. Where possible and appropriate, comparative tables are shown. Refer to Appendices 1-3 for complete tabulations of results.

Awareness

➤ **Awareness of WFN and/or member women's fund.** Lesbian donors, particularly the personal interviewees, tended to be aware of WFN and could name a women's fund in their area. Not surprisingly, the member funds receiving the most frequent mention were the Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation, An Uncommon Legacy Foundation and the Ms. Foundation for Women — the first two serving lesbians exclusively and the sources of the written survey mailing lists. However, only 45% of those participating in the written survey could name a fund or foundation in their area; 40% did not know for sure if there was one in their area, compared to 38% of the DRMP respondents. One could also argue based on the responses that many non-donor lesbians don't think of funds that exclusively serve lesbians as "women's" funds.

Personal interview participants were also asked if they were familiar with other local progressive funds or foundations, and local lesbian/gay community funds. Three quarters answered affirmatively and offered the names of these organizations. On average, these respondents named four funds, although not all were local. Most could identify public foundations or funds that support lesbian/gay issues and have connections to lesbian/gay foundations.

➤ **Confusion about what women's funds are and do.** Responses from lesbian non-donors, and even from some of the fairly sophisticated donors, indicate that lesbians are no less confused about what a women's fund actually is and does — as distinct from a project or program serving women and girls — than their DRMP counterparts. Consistent with the DRMP results, LDRP written survey respondents identified a broad range of woman-related projects and programs when asked to name a fund or foundation in their area. Examples

included Junior League, Women's Bean Project (for homeless women), Planned Parenthood, Leadership in Progress, and the Council Against Domestic Assault. LDRP respondents also named, and were clearly aware of, several projects and programs serving lesbian interests such as Lesbian Natural Resources, and their local gay and lesbian community center.

Giving Preferences

➤ **Putting lesbians first — most of the time.** When asked if they would be more or less likely to support an organization serving women and girls in general versus lesbians specifically, 48% of the written survey respondents said it would not matter, while 28% said they would be less inclined to support an organization that served women and girls, but not lesbians specifically. When asked the same questions regarding organizations that serve both lesbians and gay men versus lesbians exclusively, 39% said it would not matter but 43% admitted that they would be less inclined to support an organization that supported both lesbians and gays versus lesbians exclusively.

When personal interview participants were asked the same set of questions, only a few stated a preference for organizations serving women and girls without a specific lesbian focus. The rest were divided between preference for funding lesbians exclusively and stating that it would not matter or, "it depends." No one preferred the choice of lesbians and gay men over lesbians exclusively. Responses were evenly divided between preference for funding lesbians only and saying it would not matter or specifically, "it depends."

Similar sentiments were echoed in the focus groups.

"As a parent and at work, my life is filled with straight people. I love building bridges between communities and seeing the kind of change that comes from exchange, but the bottomline is, lesbians and gays are my priority."

"Organizations look to gays and lesbians to be donors and ticket buyers but they don't honor or address gays or lesbians in their programming."

"I don't see straights throwing their life and time and resources into us. If we don't do it, who will?"

➤ **Giving to a fund vs. direct giving.** Compared to DRMP participants, there was almost the same level of the preference to give directly to a project or program; the vast majority (78% LDRP; 81% DRMP) prefer to make direct gifts.

"I just want direct control over my money. I'd rather send a check to 2002 than to Philanthrofund to give it to 2002."

To which one focus group participant replied:

"Part of giving it away is not being in control anymore."

➤ **Types of giving.** When asked what type of giving appealed to them most, LDRP respondents showed a much higher preference than their DRMP counterparts for special event ticket purchase. The following table shows how types of giving ranked with both LDRP and DRMP written survey participants. While the same types of giving ranked in the top four for each group, there is clearly a relative difference in the preference for event ticket purchase.

Table 1. Preferences — Types of Giving

LDRP		Types of Giving	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
56	1	One gift per org made each year	67	1
51	2	Purchase tickets to special events	36	3
43	3	Organizational membership	37	2
36	4	Purchase goods or services/proceeds to charity	32	4

➤ **Who receives the gifts.** Results of the written survey to known lesbian non-donors revealed many similarities to DRMP respondents in preferences for who receives gifts, but some dramatic differences as well. Lesbian/gay rights was barely mentioned by DRMP respondents but, not surprisingly, was the overwhelming preference in this category for the lesbian respondents. Domestic violence/assault prevention and services that topped the DRMP list ranked only sixth on the LDRP list.

Table 2. Social or Political Cause Giving Preferences

LDRP		Type of Organization	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
80	1	Lesbian/gay civil rights		*
51	2	Equal Rights and social justice	43	3
49	3	Equal rights for women	33	4
45	4	Environmental issues	47	2
43	5	Feminist organizations	23	10
36	6	Domestic violence/sexual assault prevent/services	48	1

[* Not ranked; sometimes mentioned in "Other" category.]

In the general, community-based charitable giving category, there were again some marked differences, one fairly dramatic: DRMP respondents put giving to religious or spiritual organizations solidly at the top of their list, across most demographics. But for the lesbian respondents, that category fell to eleventh in order of preference. Otherwise, four of the top six DRMP picks also appeared in the top six LDRP picks.

Table 3. General Community-Based Charitable Giving Preferences

LDRP		Type of Organization	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
49	1	Arts & Culture	39	5
48	2	Health programs/projects (AIDS, heart, cancer, etc.)	46	2
42	3	Lesbian programs		*
38	4	Women and girl's programs	38	6
34	5	Homeless/hunger	42	4
32	6	Women's programs	26	11

[* Not ranked.]

When asked which kinds of organizations serving lesbians and gay men would be most likely to receive their gift, those dealing with civil/equal rights (70%) were preferred over the next closest group, social policy and legal projects (40%) nearly two to one. These were followed by arts and culture (39%), HIV/AIDS related (36%), political candidates or campaigns (35%) and youth programs (33%).

In all, the lesbian respondents to the written survey showed a clear preference for funding the arts and equal/civil rights organizations or causes focused on lesbians/gays and women.

These preferences were confirmed by the lesbian major donors interviewed, as well as the focus group participants. After probing the details of recent major gifts, personal interview participants were asked what kinds of organizations, projects and programs they are most likely to support with a major gift. The range of non profits selected and the reasons for doing so were quite varied. Most respondents named more than five kinds of organizations that they would select. A significant majority of causes and types of organizations specified were either benefiting lesbians or supporting lesbian/gay causes, and women's causes.

While general charities were named by these donors, such as their children's school, their own college or church, Jewish or Israel-related funds and a few global projects, these were not dominant in the responses. The strongly demonstrated preference for supporting women's projects and lesbian/gay causes showed in three main categories; social justice, economic and community development, and health related issues.

Within the category of health related issues, HIV/AIDS related projects were not frequently mentioned and two donors stated they have decreased their funding in recent times.

"It's seen now as a chronic disease. We've stopped losing our friends."

Many focus group participants also addressed this issue, with several stating that their interest in supporting HIV/AIDS related causes had waned in preference for women's health issues that were seen as still largely ignored by their gay brothers to whom they had given so much.

"Gay men are giving to gay things. We are giving to gay men's health issues, but men aren't giving to ours."

Donors also recognize that suicide prevention for lesbian/gay youth is a health issue and four donors specified these projects for their gifts.

These focus group donors showed a strong leaning toward independent thinking in their selections. Like many of their DRMP counterparts, several noted they *only* fund organizations that are not well funded from other sources. They carefully select causes they don't believe others will support.

"I want to help those who may not be able to go elsewhere."

"I only fund within [the gay and lesbian] community."

Another response not seen in the DRMP interviews was offered: several donors chose charities for which they had never been solicited, or that had neglected to solicit them for a repeat gift. They reported searching out the organizations they wanted to support.

"Lambda Legal did not cultivate me. I just do it."

Another approach employed by these participants is to make gifts to funds, organizations and/or charities and direct them to preferred projects.

"I give to the Women's Foundation but I direct the money to lesbian causes."

Several examples were given of contributions to United Way being earmarked for a local lesbian/gay organization or project.

As each of the twenty-one women interviewed identified numerous recipients for their giving, one kind of gift was specified again and again: the political contribution. In the DRMP personal interviews, major donors did not make priority mention of political gifts. We cannot assume that the DRMP pool does not make political gifts — in fact we know they do (Emily's List, individual candidates, etc.). However, these lesbian donors seem more inclined to political giving. The number of political gifts mentioned in the personal interviews points toward a heightened awareness of, and interest in, funding lesbian/gay candidates and/or those who will support lesbian/gay issues.

Motivations for Giving

➤ **The impulse to give.** As were the DRMP participants, LDRP participants in the written survey are inclined to give, with over 95 percent (97% DRMP) having made a charitable gift in the past 12 months. (See page 24 for a comparison of sizes and ranges of gifts.)

"We give 8% of our annual income to charity. It might not seem like a lot, but to us, its like a tithe."

"We give 6% to charity. When I am selecting a non profit I want to feel convinced that the people involved genuinely want to change the circumstances as much as I do."

However, only 84% reported that they had made a financial gift to any lesbian and/or gay organization in the last 12 months.

"Some lesbian issues are not at the top of my list so I earmark money to specific things within an organization — even Astraea."

"You give to an organization you love, but sometimes even they fund something you don't agree with."

"I'm not committed to just one thing. It's important for me to give to many things, not just to lesbians only."

The percentage giving to foundations or funds whose mission is to support projects and programs serving women and girls (confusion on this subject notwithstanding) was far less: 51 percent. By further comparison, 61 percent of the DRMP respondents reported giving to women's funds.

➤ **Reasons for giving to women's funds.** Reasons cited by lesbians for giving to women's funds were not dissimilar from other women donors.

"I like giving to a fund or foundation — they have a much better sense of what's going on."

However, the importance of commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity — including sexual orientation — was much greater for the lesbian respondents, while personal involvement was less important.

"If you want lesbian dollars you must deal with lesbian issues or else identify [ask] lesbians for whom these issues are not a priority."

Table 4. Reasons for Giving to Women's Funds

LDRP		Reason	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
74	1	Believe strongly in the mission of the organization	76	1
57	2	Empathy for the causes, projects or programs a women's fund supports	60	2
38	3	Commitment to ethnic/cultural diversity	23	5
32	4	Trust the organization's judgement	27	4
28	5	Personally involved with the organization	42	3

"My own foundation is only three years old and I consider myself in training. I make a large gift to the Ms. Foundation. The staff at Ms. provides me a learning environment."

"I first started giving to the women's fund because I knew the director. As I got more personally involved, the more I knew, the more I wanted to support it. There aren't that many funding networks for women and the women's fund took a lot of risks and funded things no one else would. A lot of us felt it was important — the mission was social change."

"I am interested in social justice. I support national women's funds, because the local group I know well is not really representative. It is run by white women."

"I'm more interested in what's being done and who's doing it, though I do look at credibility, at how compatible the board is with how I define myself."

➤ **Reasons for not giving to women's funds.** The noticeable differences between non-donor lesbians and DRMP non-donors had to do with seeing women as a priority and with perceptions about the financial resources needed to be a donor. Thirty percent of non-donor lesbians cited lack of financial resources, compared to only 20% of DRMP non-donors. Giving priorities not focused on women and girls was cited by 37% of respondents in the DRMP, while only 14% of non-donor lesbians gave this reason. A notable similarity between the two studies was that a similar percentage of non-donors in each

study said that the reason for not giving was that they had not been asked. Note that both groups of non-donors were on the mailing lists of a fund and had, in fact, received some type of solicitation. This would indicate that these lesbians either weren't asked in a way to which they could relate, or that the ask itself (the message) was not powerful enough to be remembered.

The issue of not having the capacity to give is an interesting one since the LDRP written survey respondents reported only marginally lower annual household incomes than the DRMP respondents.⁸

"Why don't lesbians give? Lesbians don't believe they can give. With gay males, money is in their lifestyles."

"I didn't give for a long time and then I realized I didn't have to give a lot. The amount given was less important than the act of giving."

"Lesbians may be nervous about giving because they'll be hassled. I have been through this. They are closeted about having money."

"I think more lesbians don't give to our own causes because they are afraid of being 'outed', especially on the job. They are afraid they will end up on some list and be flooded with mail."

"If women's funds valued small gifts, they might get more of them — if I know the value of my gift and can connect it to something tangible. If I can only donate \$10, that's a truckload of wood for a woman who needs to be there [a women's rural retreat space] for a month or two."

Table 5. Reasons for Not Giving to Women's Funds

LDRP		Reason	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
32	1	Wasn't asked	33	2
30	2	Lack of financial resources	20	3
26	3	Prefer to give directly to project or program	17	5
14	4	Giving priorities are not focused on women and girls	37	1

⁸ Exception: 31% of the DRMP respondents reported income at the \$95K+ level vs. only 21% of the LDRP respondents.

A small number of lesbian non-donors cited a fund's lack of ability or willingness to serve lesbian needs as a factor, while many lesbian donors did. They felt that some women's funds are generally unresponsive (if not outright homophobic) when it comes to lesbian issues.

"My progressive, strict guidelines can make me feel marginalized to the women's funding movement. I require components of what kind of programs, targeted constituency, progressive purpose I want to see. So, I don't make the majority of my funding through women's funds."

Other reasons included:

"Most of my giving is not to women's funds. I think my other giving is important to economic and social justice organizing. I like activities that convene progressive organizers for long term collaborations and leadership development."

"I consider myself politically aware. I prefer giving to grass roots organizations, about \$2,000 on average, then I move from one level of giving to another."

Like many DRMP non-donors, LDRP non-donors felt that their volunteer time is an important contribution, not always highly valued.

"Not having great wealth, my time is what I value. I would write a check to PBS because I watch it, but it's not near and dear to my heart. I wouldn't give them my time. If it's near and dear to me, I will give up time off from work, or a day's pay. I will do whatever they think they need. If it's gathering names, I will do that."

➤ **Types of gifts made.** A majority of written survey respondents indicated that their gift had taken the form of a ticket purchase to a luncheon or special event. For 19% of these lesbians (13% DRMP), it was their first gift.

Table 6. Types of Gifts Made

LDRP		Type of Gift	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
53	1	Purchased tickets to event/speaker event, etc.	44	3
44	2	Annual gift	49	1
31	3	Gift to specific project or program	47	2

➤ **Some personal giving histories.** In the personal interviews conducted with major lesbian donors, a series of questions was first asked about the donor's most recent major gift(s)⁹. The recipients of these most recent major gifts varied from social justice causes, lesbian/gay funds, political contributions, capital campaigns and other charitable purposes.

Of interest is that only about one quarter of these major gifts were regularly repeated gifts, made year after year to support operating and program expenses. Another one quarter of respondents stated their most recent major gift was a *first time gift* to an organization that was relatively new to them. These findings are in sharp contrast to the DRMP where more than one half the recent major gifts were reported to be repeat, annual gifts. Virtually no new or first time major gifts were reported in that survey. The DRMP personal interviewees reported that their gifts grew in size over time to their charities and that they would not be inclined to make sizable gifts until they were more knowledgeable about a non profit cause. The lesbians questioned reported that their major gifts were often first time gifts made at social events (or as a result of an event), and in the company of other lesbians they knew and trusted, who were donating.

The term "social event" is used broadly to include any kind of gathering for philanthropic purposes, including private dinners hosted at a friend's home or other form of house party, a workshop, conference, or large fundraising luncheon or dinner.

Other responses as to the donor's most recent major gift(s) included capital gifts to lesbian/gay community centers and for "other" purposes such as for a special project. In response to this initial inquiry, only one respondent had recently made a donation to an endowment fund. Again, many respondents giving capital or "other" major gifts learned about the non profit at a social event. Even repeat annual gifts may have been generated originally through social events.

"I attended a weekend retreat for women of inherited wealth and I heard about this group then."

⁹ Major gift was self-defining.

"I got into this because I accepted an invitation to see Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' exhibition years ago. Many of us who later founded our gay and lesbian community fund met there."

The importance and role of this social link for lesbians should not be underestimated: regardless of the type of major gift — an annual gift, capital, etc. — three quarters of them were solicited or cultivated through social events.

For these lesbian donors, the lesbian/gay receptions, dances and dinners were important points of entry into the world of philanthropy. Several mentioned the fun of dressing up and the specialness of being with other lesbians and gay men.

"We don't go out too much because we have small children. But when we do, it's for a lesbian cause."

"I would never have learned about this group if I hadn't met these people at the reception."

"My friend said going to the HRC dinner was a place to be seen, but it's been rough on me. I'm a Republican! But, I've been going for the last three years."

"You meet great friends by giving."

Size of Gifts

In the personal interviews, each donor was asked the amount of her last major gift, as self-defined. In a few instances the recent gift discussed was less than \$500. However, the overall range of giving for these participants during the last year was \$5,000 to one million dollars. Two donors had made multiple gifts of \$50,000 each within a year, several more had made multiple gifts of \$10,000 each within the past year, and one donor had made a \$40,000 donation.

Written survey respondents (known non-donors to a women's fund) gave predictably less but in a fairly consistent range (\$100-499), regardless of who received the gift.

**Table 7. Comparative Ranges of Giving, past 12 months —
Written Survey Respondents**

Range	Women's Funds		Lesbian Gay Orgs		General Commun	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
\$0	2	0.5	1	0.3	0	0.0
\$1-99	58	32.2	93	25.5	44	12.1
\$100 - \$499	69	37.1	116	31.8	125	34.2
\$500 - \$999	28	15.1	46	12.6	63	17.3
\$1,000 - \$2,499	9	2.5	32	8.8	65	17.8
\$2,500 - \$4,999	3	0.8	8	2.2	23	6.3
\$5,000 - \$9,999	0	0.0	4	1.1	17	4.7
\$10,000 - \$24,999	1	0.3	2	0.5	6	1.6
\$25,000 or more	2	0.5	3	0.8	5	1.4

Fifty-two percent of the written survey respondents indicated that they were likely to increase their overall charitable giving within the next five years.

Major donors in the focus groups reported giving to funds, projects or programs primarily benefiting women and girls in a wide range from no gift at all to \$50,000; directly to projects and programs benefiting women and girls in a range from no gift to \$75,000; and to organizations serving lesbians and gays in the range of \$250-\$75,000. Known non-donors in the focus groups reported giving gifts upwards to \$10,000 to general charitable causes, while the largest gift to women and girls was only \$500, and to lesbian/gay organizations only \$250.

➤ **Means of giving.** Lesbian donors also used a variety of means to make their gifts. One quarter identified their last major gift as a multi-year pledge, with one noting that *"this was the only way we could do this."* Two responded that they made gifts by using their credit cards, voicing surprise that more groups don't offer this option.

"I have an insurance plan that directs my premiums to this organization."

"I set up a Charitable Remainder Unitrust with \$200,000 of my 401K benefits."

Decision Making

➤ **How decisions are made.** LDRP personal interview participants were asked how they select their charities and determine how large their gifts should be. Do they make their decisions alone, with their partners, or rely on advice from counsel? One half of respondents make giving decisions with their partners. One half make their decisions alone. Of these, almost 50% noted they are single. No one relied upon advice from outside professional counsel.

"We always give jointly. The statement is important. It's a consciousness raiser."

Whether or not coupled lesbians tend to make their giving decisions in concert with their partners more than heterosexual women do remains to be seen. Many DRMP personal interviewees and focus group participants reported that they made their decisions independently of their spouse, but offered provisos, such as "but he knows what I'm doing." Still others liked to make decisions with their spouse. LDRP interviewees seemed to relish their joint decision making processes: *"We are disgustingly egalitarian."*

The DRMP included a significant number of donors who included their children in their giving decisions. In the lesbian major donor group, when the concept of a family foundation is mentioned, they are generally referencing their parents' foundation that they run, or their own.

"My partner and I are our own foundation. We take this very seriously."

➤ **Influencing factors.** When asked which factors most influence their giving and help determine how large their gift will be, most donors identified several specific conditions. The reputation or track record of the project or program matters to the donor. The person making the ask clearly influences donor decisions. The demonstrated need of the project is important to these respondents as are the opinions of others who have given. Also mentioned were having made a previous gift, making a memorial gift and the quality of the case presentation.

When asked if they are most likely to respond to an appeal for a gift that is delivered personally, a large number volunteered they respond positively to, indeed expect, outreach from an organization's leadership or personal delivery of the appeal by a friend.

"I have a standard if you are asking me for money: If it's a thousand dollars or more, there must be personal contact. If you want a thousand dollars, I deserve a phone call."

"A brief visit is best. I like to hear personal stories in that meeting."

"If I meet with a charity that is asking for money, I like a client of the program to be there. Let me hear directly from them. I have given more when a recipient of the services is present."

These donors also respond to an appeal for a gift that includes a well written letter or brief proposal. They also respond favorably to a well written letter from someone they know personally.

Many donors learned about their chosen charities through friends' advice and persuasion.

"A friend contacted me about One Hundred Lesbians and Our Friends, a group effort to generate \$100,000 to give away to lesbian causes. Each of us would give \$1,000 and pretty quickly we generated what we were looking for."

Board membership and other forms of service play an integral part in helping make a decision to commit a major gift.

"The woman who chaired the capital campaign asked me to Co-chair. Then she said I'd better make a lead gift. I pledged \$50,000 over three years. It was the largest gift I'd ever made."

Some lesbian donors employ strategies not seen in previous studies, perhaps as a response to perceived discrimination.

"My partner works for an employer that will match employee charitable donations. We set up a joint checking account and I use it to make my own contributions. Then, she submits my gift written on our joint account so she can get a match for the non profit. It's our way to leverage our giving."

Discrimination can have an impact on giving.

"My first donation, after I started working, was to my college, which had meant a lot to me. I always gave each year, until they wouldn't list my name with my partner's. I haven't given again."

A young donor said her older partner — who gives considerably less than she — is always treated as the donor, asked for more gifts and treated with deference. "It's really noticeable," she added.

These participants' personal giving histories also included mentions of significant life benchmarks: inherited wealth, earned income making charitable gifts possible, establishing a family foundation, coming out and coming out to family and employers. Financial and emotional security invariably preceded a commitment to making major gifts.

"I came from a family tradition of giving but as a lesbian, didn't feel I had a place to give. There may be a lot of lesbians not giving back because they're not over their own homophobia."

"When I started giving money, I already had the consciousness that I was a lesbian and an activist and I had to fund my own. It's that simple."

LDRP written survey respondents placed emphasis on many of the same influencing factors as their sisters in the DRMP. Lesbians also ranked the organization's friendliness to lesbians and gays nearly as highly as the reputation or track record of the organization.

Table 8. Influencing Factors

LDRP		Factor	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
71	1	Reputation/track record of the organization	70	2
70	2	Organization is lesbian/gay friendly		*
69	3	The type of people served by the org	68	3
69	4	Personal passion/commitment to org/cause	73	1
63	5	Belief the gift will make a difference	60	5
62	6	Understanding of the need	66	4

[*Not specifically asked in the DRMP survey.]

Recognition

Opinions were divided on the need for recognition and more importantly, the form it takes. Recognition seems also linked to motivation for giving, though not in a traditional sense of ego-gratification.

"It meant a lot that somewhere in print we're together."

"A well-known, award-winning actress here tells the story that she had been with her girlfriend for twelve years and the first time they saw their names jointly in something they cried."

"We want to be listed together. It's important for others to see that lesbians support these things."

"When giving to lesbian organizations, we made the decision to identify ourselves as such. But for other organizations it feels a little exhibitionist."

Many interviewees and focus group participants felt strongly that it was important to be publicly recognized, most especially as a lesbian couple when giving to non-lesbian/gay organizations. High priority was placed on being visible lesbian donors as a model for others.

Being recognized publicly — in published programs and the like — of course has implications for those struggling with being "out." This points again to the possible strong link between financial security, emotional security,¹⁰ and the making of larger gifts.

"The more comfortable you get with yourself, the more you give."

"Maybe you have to 'use' a while before you give."

¹⁰ As defined by the participants, emotional security means, in part, being comfortable with one's sexuality, being out to family, friends and co-workers as well as, for some, being in a committed relationship that is recognized by family, friends and co-workers.

Case Presentation Methods and Materials

➤ **Methods of Presentation.** Both focus group and written survey participants were asked what methods of fundraising they prefer. Preferences were similar, by percentage, for all but one method.

Table 9. Methods Most Likely to Appeal — Written Survey Respondents

LDRP		Method	DRMP	
%	Rank		%	Rank
51	1	Delivered in a well-written letter that is accompanied by an informational brochure	58	1
42	2	Delivered personally by a friend/colleague	32	4
41	3	Delivered in a well-written letter signed by someone you know personally	41	3
40	4	Delivered in a well-written letter/proposal	43	2
30	5	Delivered personally by organization leadership	30	5
30	6	Delivered personally by spouse or partner	17	6

➤ **Materials.** All focus groups participants were shown six separate pieces of written communication. These included two print ads (Exhibits B.1, B.2), a newsletter (Exhibit B.3), and three direct mail fundraising appeals (Exhibits B.4, B.5, B.6), one with a letter accompanied by a brochure, one using a letter format with an enclosed pledge envelope and one a multi-piece package with a brochure. Four of these exhibits (B.1, B.2, B.5 and B.6) had been shown to the DRMP focus group participants.

The reactions and comments were strikingly similar. Exhibits B.1 and B.6 were most frequently cited as the presentations with the highest impact. Exhibit B.6, however, was also severely criticized by the Minneapolis group participants who felt it was environmentally wasteful and emotionally crude. Exhibit B.6, continuing to elicit a few negative comments for its high impact approach, was nonetheless appreciated by the others for its no nonsense, straightforward, "in-your-face" presentation — brief, simple, easily understood, attention-getting. Lesbians, as did other women donors, felt strongly about this one, one way or the other. They either loved it or were offended by it; most loved it and reacted positively. The photographs helped to put a "face" on the appeal and humanize

the statistics that many found to be alarming.¹¹ An excerpt from Exhibit B.6 was tested in the test message survey. Please refer to Appendix 2 for further commentary.

Exhibit B.1 was preferred for many of the same reasons — simple, with very little copy, and a compelling visual of a real person.

"I can totally relate to the feeling in the photograph."

"It's simple and powerful, not glitzy."

"The line 'And someone will give her a chance,' makes me want to be the one."

Similar to the DRMP response, Exhibit B.2 also received high mention for these reasons, though it did not have as high an impact as B.1.

Exhibit B.3, the newsletter, was generally appreciated for being a quick read, inexpensive looking, not a "keeper" but definitely something to skim and mentally file for future reference.

Exhibit B.4 was generally found to be well designed, easy to read, if a bit too expensive looking. It was a good example of the form of communication most seem to prefer: a well-written letter accompanied by a brochure.

Exhibit B.5 was appreciated slightly more by these groups than those in the DRMP. It continued to be criticized for too much copy, no compelling call to action, no emotional or visual appeal. The apparent inexpensive nature of the piece continued to be a plus.

In discussing "celebrity" endorsement, these focus group participants had a slightly different take on the subject from their DRMP counterparts. DRMP respondents generally rejected the idea of celebrity, while many LDRP participants felt that the right celebrity could draw someone to an event who might not otherwise participate.

"It's silly, but there's something to 'star power' for people who aren't that well connected to the community."

¹¹ A few indicated that they knew these statistics already and were much more interested in concrete ways to change them.

In all, these lesbians want and expect the same things from any communication that the DRMP participants did. They want it to succinctly and convincingly tell them

- who the organization is and what it stands for,
- who is doing the asking,
- what's the ask,
- who's on the board,
- how and where the money is going to be spent,
- what are the expected results and how will they be measured.

Message Appeal — Results of the Test Message Survey

The following is an overview and analysis of the responses to the LDRP written test message survey. (See Appendix 2 for the tabulations and demographics.) The participants in the final phase of the project were self-selecting, that is, they were all participants in a prior phase of the research (66% written survey, 18% focus groups, 10% personal interviews, 4% don't recall) and volunteered to give their reactions to a variety of themes and messages that, with slight variations, had been tested earlier in the DRMP.

In reviewing the responses, keep in mind that while 82% of these participants consider themselves a "donor" (compared to 92% DRMP), only 32% consider themselves a "philanthropist" (38% DRMP).

➤ **Responses to Section 1.** Participants were presented with a series of statements and asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each. For ranking purposes, a mean was calculated for all statements. The statement with which there was the strongest agreement was

Rank Question

- 1 1.11 When women and girls are empowered, all of society benefits.

[mean 1.26; DRMP rank 4, mean 1.65]¹²

The next most strongly agreed with statements, in rank descending order were:

¹² The lower the (mean) number, the more agreement.

- 2 1.22 When women are educated they have more choices and can better take care of themselves.
 [mean 1.35; DRMP rank 1, mean 1.30]
- 3 1.16 Violence, homelessness, child care, poverty, unemployment, affordable housing and healthcare all have a disproportionate impact on women.
 [mean 1.49; DRMP rank 5, mean 1.65]
- 4 1.13 Invest in the lives of women and girls and you invest in the future of the world.
 [mean 1.54; DRMP rank 3, mean 1.65]
- 5 1.09 Economic development for women can change the world.
 [mean 1.56; DRMP rank 6, mean 1.68]
- 6 1.19 Learning about money is as important for women today as it was for our mothers to learn to drive and our grandmothers to secure the right to vote.
 [mean 1.63; DRMP rank 2, mean 1.58]
- 7 1.03 Many problems in the world are due to the inherent inequality of how women are treated.
 [mean 1.76; not ranked in DRMP, mean 2.16]

As was the case in the DRMP, only more so, lesbian respondents to the test message survey overwhelmingly rejected the statement

- 1.21: "Feminism is no longer relevant in our society."
 [mean 4.52; DRMP mean 3.92]

Other statements about which there was the strongest disagreement included

- 1.15 There are no women's issues, only society's issues.
 [mean 3.37; DRMP mean 3.00]
- 1.06 Lesbians should use their own money for their own causes first.
 [mean 2.75; DRMP not asked]
- 1.18 Every woman can be a philanthropist.
 [mean 2.68; DRMP mean 2.62]

LDRP written survey respondents showed the same ambivalence as DRMP written survey participants to the following:

- 1.23 Women's funds are good stewards of your gift — balancing immediate support of community projects with investment in the long-term health of the funds themselves.
 [mean 2.00; DRMP mean 2.22]

➤ **Responses to Section 2.** Participants were again presented with a series of statements that they were asked to rank, indicating if they found the statement very meaningful, somewhat meaningful, or not at all meaningful.

One statement out-ranked the others as “very meaningful:”

Rank Question

- 1 2.4 When we say we support women, we mean all women — young, old, women with disabilities, lesbians, divorced, women of color, immigrants — everyone.
[DRMP rank 5]

The next six highest rankings were:

- 2 2.9 Your gift of time is as valued as money. Get involved in the things you are passionate about. It will make a difference.
[DRMP rank 1]
- 3 2.16 95 cents of every dollar you contribute goes directly to benefit women and girls.
[DRMP rank 6]
- 4 2.2 95 cents of every dollar you give stays right here, working in your community to help people you know.
[DRMP rank 7]
- 5 2.5 Your gift will help us fund innovative, non-traditional programs designed to help women achieve economic self-sufficiency and personal power.
[DRMP rank 4]
- 6 2.10 You don't have to be wealthy to be a donor. If you are passionate about an issue or cause, give anything you can.
[DRMP rank 2]
- 7 2.15 Your contribution will make a big difference to lesbian and gay families.
[Question not asked in DRMP]

The participants found the following not at all meaningful — the top three in almost precisely the same order as the DRMP.

2.20 To save others from starvation, we must first feed ourselves.

2.18 Give us your dollars, we'll make change.

2.19 When you donate to a women's fund you help all women change the status quo, create a new vision of the world, connect with the forces of change, commit to making a difference, collaborate with concerned others and celebrate all life.

2.17 Your donation will make dreams come true for more lesbians in our community.
[Question not asked in DRMP]

2.13 Women's funds ensure that your dollars get to where they're needed most.

➤ **Responses to Section 3.** In the final section of the test message survey, participants were asked to respond to two comprehensive fundraising appeals or messages. They were asked to indicate if they found each of the messages very compelling, somewhat compelling, or not at all compelling. They were then asked to tell, in their own words, what appealed to them the most and the least about each of the messages.¹³

As it did in the DRMP, Appeal A out-pollled Appeal B by a wide margin. Forty five percent (46% DRMP) found Appeal A very compelling, 43% (45% DRMP) found it somewhat compelling and only 11% (9% DRMP) found it not at all compelling. On the other hand, only 21% (27% DRMP) found Appeal B very compelling, 43.2% (31% DRMP) somewhat compelling and 34% (42% DRMP) not at all compelling.

Appeal A also received high marks for bold writing, understandable statistics and concept (breaking a \$100 contribution down to 28 cents a day), and for being straightforward, action oriented and graphically eye-catching. It was criticized for many of the same traits for which it was praised, and for not being explicit about where the money is going, and about what the women's fund does and specifically supports. The \$100 ask was several times cited as too high. These responses were consistent with the responses of the DRMP.

Many of the comments about Appeal B were identical to those received in the DRMP. There were positive comments for its personal, human approach with which many could personally identify, the final paragraph with its simple facts and a letter format that compelled many to read. However, many LDRP respondents — as did DRMP respondents — also found it over-emotional, manipulative, melodramatic, and contrived. They felt it was vague, conveyed a sense of helplessness, and was irrelevant to most lesbians.

¹³ See Exhibit F — Test Messages Survey Instrument.

Both appeals centered on the same subject or cause (domestic violence/violence against women) but were dramatically different in tone.¹⁴ As you review the verbatim responses included in the report (see Appendix 2), keep in mind that both of the appeals were taken out of their original context and abridged, rewritten and/or edited to serve the purposes of the test.¹⁵ For the LDRP, each appeal was altered further to include lesbian-specific language and details. While several of the respondents liked the fact that lesbians were included by name in the appeals, others found the mention of sexual orientation gratuitous.

Lesbian readers of these appeals agreed almost completely with their sister respondents in the DRMP about the following:

- Facts should be presented in a bold, clear, concise manner. Copy should be a quick read, easy to understand. The communication should capture their attention (or imagination!) with clean, powerful graphics. Make it easy to read.
- Strong personal statements delivered with sincere emotion, stories that are personal and real are the most powerful. However, overly emotional, sentimentalized approaches feel manipulative and contrived. A tone or a presentation that communicates passivity or helplessness is not compelling.
- They want to see evidence of a bad cycle broken, progress made. If your presentation sets up a problem, demonstrate concretely how their donation will contribute to the solution. Don't let emotion cloud the information.

¹⁴ The primary objective of this portion of the survey was to test tone.

¹⁵ Several of the tangential objections to either of the appeals would have no doubt been eliminated if they had been presented in their full and original context. Therefore, the authors of those original pieces need not be unduly concerned about some of the negative comments. When interpreted properly, the rich overall commentary is insightful and provides strong, clear signals about what lesbian donors, or prospective donors, wish to see, read and feel.

"Women are programmed early not to see themselves as powerful. We must say things creatively in ways young girls can hear them."

- Let smaller donors know that their gifts are appreciated and will make a difference. These lesbians donors are no different from other women donors in that they want to know where their donations (even small ones) are going. Paint a clear picture of their dollars at work. Be specific, be relevant.

Major Donor Reflections on Lesbian Philanthropy

In addition to answering specific questions, personal interview participants volunteered additional information. Many were clearly prepared to summarize their giving experiences and were concerned in particular that more lesbians — especially those who are financially able — are not giving.

"I know of many professional lesbians (doctors, lawyers) who can make middle level gifts and not enough attention is paid to them by non profit organizations to cultivate them. More attention is paid to major donors. Women's and gay organizations haven't focused on mid-level donors and accessed the number of women who have middle incomes."

"I want to see more lesbians of earned wealth become major donors — not just those with inherited wealth."

"I am frustrated with many lesbians who may not make a lot of money but who don't see the value of making small gifts even though they believe in the work of the non profit."

"I was invited to sit on the board of the Women's Foundation and I looked around and there were all these lesbians who weren't saying they are lesbians. When I see lesbians serving on high-powered straight boards and not on those of lesbian organizations I wonder what that's about."

"When I asked lesbians for a thousand dollars, they responded 'I don't know if I can'. It's a mind set. Where there's a will, there's a way. My house cleaner pledges and she makes \$24,000 a year!"

"This current year, the women's foundation received no applications for funding lesbian causes. I am frustrated by lesbians whose organizations can qualify but can't get their act together to apply."

"I am embarrassed by the low level of giving in our own lesbian community. My spouse and I have stopped giving fundraising events in our home because the turnout is so low."

"Women often feel they have no money, even when they do."

"I give 10% of my pre-tax income and it drives me crazy that other lesbians don't give. If lesbians knew how few of them gave and therefore, how important their gift would be, maybe they'd give more. Giving makes me feel more alive because I've taken more responsibility for future successes."

Nothing could have more eloquently reinforced the notion that every gift is important than the response of one anonymous test message participant. Her survey indicated that she is over the age of 55 with a annual household income of less than \$10,000. She considers herself neither a donor nor a philanthropist. Yet tucked inside her survey were three one dollar bills to "help us with our important work."

Part IV

Conclusions and Recommendations



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lesbian Donor Research Project was designed chiefly to: 1) obtain new information specifically about the personal characteristics of lesbians, their giving habits and their likely response to various giving messages and mediums, 2) develop general information about lesbian audiences that can be used to create messages about women's funds, about projects and programs benefiting women and girls, lesbians and gays, and 3) develop and test successful fundraising messages that will help WFN, its member funds, lesbian/gay and other public foundations to craft successful appeals to lesbian audiences.

In accomplishing these objectives, the study revealed some very simple, very basic, but extremely important things that women funds and other philanthropic organizations — especially those who are not already successfully serving lesbians — will need to keep in mind if they want to successfully cultivate lesbian donors.

Why Lesbians Give to Women's Funds

In General

The lesbians in this study give to women's funds for nearly identical reasons as do other women. They give to women's funds because

- they clearly understand and believe both in the mission and in the tangible work of the organization,
- they have empathy for the causes, projects or programs a women's fund supports,
- they trust the fund's leadership and judgment about what projects to support and how to support them,
- they understand the strength of collective, targeted giving, i.e., their dollars are more powerful, their giving more leveraged (rather than diluted) when combined with others,
- they were asked to give.

In addition to the above, in making giving decisions, the lesbians in this study place great importance on how lesbian/gay friendly an organization is, i.e., not merely tolerant, but inclusive and embracing of diversity of all kinds, including of sexual orientation.

Both focus group participants and the written survey respondents indicated that they place a greater emphasis on the mission of the organization and less on their own personal involvement. In other words, the lesbians who participated in this study did not seem to feel a need to be personally involved in an organization before considering a gift to nearly the same degree that DRMP participants did, as long as they believed in the organization's mission. In addition, there are indications that these lesbians place a somewhat higher priority on funding organizations and funds benefiting women and girls. (See Tables 2 and 3, page 18 and Table 5, page 23.)

Participants in the focus groups and personal interviews also indicated that — having been marginalized as individuals — when it comes to pooling resources, and giving collectively to something through a single source they understand the value of federated giving in ways that other women may not. In this sense, “federated” giving is not seen as a mere convenience, but as a way to put more clout behind the gift.

Having said that, we note that in and of itself understanding the value of federated giving as a way to leverage the smaller gift wouldn't be reason enough alone to give to a women's fund and that lesbian giving to women's funds lags significantly behind their giving to general charitable causes, political candidates and/or issues, and lesbian/gay causes.

Why Lesbians Don't Give to Women's Funds

○ **In general.** The lesbians in this study do not give to women's funds because

- they were not asked, at least not in a way to which they could relate,

- their financial resources are limited or they perceive them to be limited and they have other priorities for their giving and/or they do not feel that their small gift would be valued,
- they prefer to give directly to a project or program,
- the fund soliciting the gift does not acknowledge or serve lesbian needs/issues, is not lesbian/gay friendly or otherwise inclusive of those with different sexual orientations, or does not appear to be committed to cultural and/or ethnic diversity.

➤ **Understanding the mission of women's funds.** Compared to the DRMP non-donor participants, the non-donor participants in this study seem to have no better, or only a slightly better, understanding of what a women's fund is and does, or how it is distinguished from any number of other organizations that benefit women and girls.

In comparison to the DRMP participants, when asked if they were aware of a women's fund in their area, about 45% responded positively (versus 58% DRMP). However, only slightly less than 19% could actually name a bona fide women's fund.

Reaching Lesbian Donors

➤ **Does your organization really want to?** An organization wishing to attract lesbian donors must first decide that it truly wants to do so. By that we mean it requires an organizational willingness to place importance on identifying and then actually serving lesbian needs and issues.

➤ **How does your organization actually serve lesbians?** If, for example, you are a lesbian/gay community fund, simply having the word "lesbian" in your name does not automatically mean that you are perceived to be serving the needs of lesbians. You must clearly demonstrate how you do this in tangible ways. Women's funds that are not specifically or exclusively serving lesbians as part of their stated mission perhaps have an even more difficult task. However, these funds can easily demonstrate their commitment to serve *all*

women, including lesbians, by highlighting lesbian grant beneficiaries and continuing to project a lesbian-inclusive identity.

➤ **Points of entry.** The lesbian participants in this study expressed some clear preferences for purchasing tickets to, and attending, social events, particularly with their peers. And when they look around the room they are asking the same question nearly everyone else does: "Are there others here like me?"

Message Development

The Lesbian Donor Research Project provides the WFN and its member funds, as well as lesbian and gay community funds and other public foundations with a wealth of information about lesbian donor motivations and preferences that can be used to craft messages and appeals that will have resonance. When crafting those messages, it will be crucial to keep several key points in mind. The advice given in the corresponding section in the DRMP is no less applicable here. It is repeated below, incorporating specific references to lesbian audiences.

First and foremost, it is clear from these findings that there is no one single perfect profile of a lesbian donor, large or small, to a women's fund. Lesbians are no less diverse in background, age, race/ethnicity, occupation, income and education than are their heterosexual sisters. There are many striking commonalities, but "one size does not fit all."

While many lesbian non-donors cited lack of financial resources as a reason for not giving to women's funds, a slightly larger number also indicated that they hadn't been asked. That might be interpreted as they hadn't been asked in ways that directly spoke to their issues and concerns.¹⁶ Before you begin to craft lesbian-directed messages, or to build expectations for increasing lesbian donations to your fund, be sure that you have identified in your mission and your programming the ways in which you serve lesbian issues and needs. If you presently do not serve the needs of lesbians, is the organization committed to doing so? How will you concretely demonstrate that commitment?

¹⁶ See page 22, Reasons For Not Giving to Women's Funds.

Remember that actions always speak louder than words. Above all, don't be token or gratuitous in your inclusion of lesbian themes. Insincerity is usually obvious, and almost always punished with doubt. (See Test Message Tabulations, Section 3 of the Test Message Written Survey in Appendix 2.) If you are going to talk the talk, you must be willing to walk the walk.

You also must be prepared to clearly articulate your commitment in several different ways. If you are asking for lesbian dollars, your case must state the benefits simply and compellingly and in ways that signal your understanding of, and affinity with, your prospects' inherent diversity as well as their causes and concerns.

Women's funds that are already strongly lesbian-identified will want to take a closer look at, and craft messages that speak to, two things: 1) the self-perception on the part of many lesbians that they do not have adequate financial resources to become a donor, and 2) the high priority the participants in all phases of this study placed on giving to organizations that address lesbian/gay civil rights, equal rights and social justice and equal rights for women.

Third, do not expect that large numbers of lesbians will flock to your doors, at least not immediately, even if your fund is solidly lesbian-identified. Myths and misperceptions die hard and your organization must be prepared to tell its stories again and again. There is an old maxim in the advertising agency business that just when the public is beginning to catch onto your client's logo, tagline and, more importantly, what it stands for, the client gets bored with it all and wants to change it. Count on continuing to deliver consistent messages to lesbians or any other targeted audience over a long period of time.

Last, don't try to be all things to all women, and recognize that there will be many lesbians who will never give to a women's fund that does not exclusively serve lesbians. Separate what you can change from what you can't, what you can do differently (e.g., your communications strategy) from who you are. Let your messages reflect your core strengths, and deliver a promise you can keep.