

# **The As, Bs and Cs to Solicitations**



## **Making your Budget Stretch for the Year**

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Remember being a Girl/Boy Scout in the springtime, when the cookie sale began? Or what about during the holiday sales when you tried to sell gift-wrap for your school? Solicitations are nothing new to a majority of people, yet it can still be a scary prospect. *Solicitations* is the general term for donations and/or fundraisers that Residence Hall Associations, or any organization for that matter, ask for/put on to get more money for their yearly budget or a specific program. This guide will teach you everything you will need to know about how to solicit funds to expand your budget. You can make a \$500 budget last much longer than you ever dreamed. This guide has been created to give you tips on how to get products and funds successfully. One other thing to remember: after reading this guide, do not expect to be a solicitation expert; it takes some time to reach success. In addition, some businesses have never heard of donating, so please do not expect to get all of your programs solicited on your first try. Some businesses are just not willing to donate, and that's ok. Please don't let one "no" stop you from continuing your solicitation endeavors.

There are two reasons to pursue solicitations:

- (1) To supplement the budget for the year, or
- (2) To save money on a program.

A majority of solicitations are for upcoming programs because it is easier to ask a business for specific items to donate. However, there are some ways to solicit for your general budget, but those will be addressed later in the guide.

One question that always arises is when should I begin to solicit? **It is never too early to begin supplementing your budget.** Generally, if you are soliciting for a program, it is a good idea to start a month or two prior to the program. One of the first steps is to make a wish list of supplies that will be needed for the event. Include everything that you want for the program, and do not worry about the price. The goal should be to try to get a majority of the items on the list donated or money for the items donated (see Appendix A). After you make that list, make sure you are aware of the dates, time, location, target population, and any other significant facts before you start soliciting businesses. Next, make a list of businesses that have either donated before or provide some sort of service to the university you attend (see Appendix B). **Remember to keep this list after you leave because it makes it easier for the people that take office after you.** Ask RHA members if they have contacts with a certain business because there is a greater chance they will be more willing to donate if you mention his/her name. It is always a good idea to draft a letter. If you have RHA letterhead, use it because you appear more professional to the businesses. Make sure to mold the letter for the specific business. For instance, if you are dealing with a food company, like a pizza place, do not ask them to donate clothing or some product they do not produce. Also include in the letter the full name of your organization, what you want specifically from that business, the reward for the donation (e.g. free publicity), and how many residents the

publicity will reach. Once you have completed all these steps, you are ready to approach the businesses on your list (See Appendix B).

When you start the actual process of soliciting, try to visit the stores, rather than making phone calls. Managers prefer to talk to people face to face because then they know with whom they are dealing. It is important to dress professionally because businesses are more likely to donate more if they see this as a serious offer. Another thing to remember-- only take one or two people to the store. You don't want to overwhelm the business with so many people. Also be sure to bring a copy of the letter you created to give to the manager. Always ask to speak to a manager. Generally, only they can make a solicitations decision. If a manager is not in, ask to leave the letter with the employee and get his/her name. If the manager is there, introduce yourself, your organization and why you are at his/her store. When you talk to the manager, make sure you highlight some of the major points that are already in the letter (how much, what the business gets in return, how many residents the program is targeting, etc.). Do not present the letter until you are finished with the conversation. The letter should only serve as a reminder of what they get out of the deal. Try not to pressure a manager. If he/she needs a while to think it over, let him/her (that is why it is better to start early). In a week or so visit the store again and say, "I was wondering if you had an opportunity to consider a donation?" Sometimes your solicitations will require some extra legwork. For instance, if you talk to Publix it takes close to six weeks for them to speak with corporate headquarters and receive a response. So make sure that you give ample time to the manager to clear it with the necessary higher ups. If the manager agrees to donate, make sure to clarify with him/her when the product or money will be ready for pickup. If he/she offers to deliver it, that is fine. But at least offer to pick it up, since he/she is doing you a favor.

If you have any more businesses or stores to talk to, move on to the next business. Otherwise, you are done until a few weeks before the program. It is a good idea to call the store and reintroduce yourself to confirm the deal that you made with them a couple weeks before the program. That's it! You have completed all the steps necessary to receive goods for your upcoming program (and look at all the money you saved). There is, however, one more step to travel the extra mile.

Once the program is over, within a week, write thank-you notes to all that gave goods or monies of some type. You should do this, especially if it is a business you are working with for the first time to show your appreciation. You'll want to be able to go back to that business again in the future. If you forget to do this step, you might jeopardize the relationship that you have established. You always want to leave the manager with a good feeling that he/she truly helped, because he/she will be more willing to donate again if you show that you appreciate his/her help. Also remember that even though you have used this

business before, do not take it for granted. They may decide to stop helping you at any time.

That is one type of solicitation that will really aid your RHA in getting many more supplies. There is another type, however, which is not used very often, but can add to many programs or just add to your budget. There are several grants out there, which are actually tailored to residence hall activities. Each of these grants is tailored differently for every university. One place to explore is your housing office. Talk to your director. He/she can point you in the right direction. Your director will most likely know what special grants your university offers to enhance your budget. Another option is to speak to the South-Atlantic Affiliate of College University Residence Halls (SAACURH) Regional Developmental Coordinator (RDC). He/She talks with the South-Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) which is a housing organization that is similar to SAACURH except it is for housing professionals, and can point you in the direction of possibly getting some money from them. Your options are unlimited in this field. You can also talk to contractors or vendors that provide services to your school (laundry, construction, vending machines, etc.). Your director of housing would probably have contact information for them. Also, talk to the rest of your RHA executive board to make a list of possible fundraisers, and try some of them. You can also speak to your director of housing for suggestions on successful fundraisers that have been done in the past.

One last suggestion to conserve money when programming is to co-sponsor. Work with other organizations on your campus. You can split the money, split the work, and guarantee a good turn out. Many organizations are hesitant to do a large-scale program alone. Combine your efforts and achieve success.

Solicitations get easier and easier. By the end of your term, your successor will hopefully have a full contact list that he/she can use to make the budget even larger. I hope that you are successful in all of your attempts made and good luck with the rest of the year!

## Appendix A: Wish List for a Midnight Breakfast

Target population: 150 people

Date: August 24, 2000

Location: Local Hall Recreation Room

Time: Midnight

- 300 pancakes
- 500 pieces of bacon
- 12 gallons of orange juice
- 1 coffee maker
- 2 lbs. of coffee
- 250 eggs
- 3 lbs. of hash browns
- 20 tables
- 100 chairs
- 20 aluminum tins
- 20 table cloths

**Appendix B:**  
**Business Contact List for Midnight Breakfast**

Location	Contact Name	Phone Number
Denny's	John Doe	846-7586
Publix	Jane Deer	374-4334
Sam's Club	Female Deer	364-4728
Perkins	New Contact	379-2828
Kash 'N Karry	New Contact	283-4827

Appendix C:  
Letter to Publix requesting donations for Midnight  
Breakfast

To whom this may concern:

My name is Bob Smith and I am a member of the Inter-Residence Hall Association (IRHA) at the University of Florida. Throughout the first week of classes, IRHA puts on a series of programs to build community in the residence halls.

On August 24, 2000, we are having a midnight breakfast in Dodd Hall, our brand new residence hall. IRHA is looking for some donations of pancakes and bacon for this program.

In exchange for these donations, we will put your name and logo on all publicity, which will be seen by nearly 1,000 residents. We are putting 4 banners in Dodd Hall, where the program is sponsored, and flyers throughout the entire campus.

If you have any questions or comments one of our representatives will be visiting your store to speak with you more on this project.

Sincerely,

Bob Smith  
Inter-Residence Hall Association

## Thank you letter to Publix

John Doe, Store Manager  
Publix Supermarkets  
1234 University Avenue  
Gainesville, FL 32612

Dear Mr. Doe,

I wanted to send this note of appreciation on behalf of the Inter-Residence Hall Association. Your donation of 300 pancakes and 500 pieces of bacon really added to our program. This program would not have been as successful if you had not given us these donations. I hope that we can continue this relationship in the future, and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance to you.

Thank you,  
Bob Smith  
Inter-Residence Hall Association