

— \$7.3 Million —  
FROM HUNGER TO  
**HOPE**

— THE CAMPAIGN FOR —  
FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA



**SWANSON** ◆ **HOUSE**  
SIGNATURE FUNDRAISING SERIES



## Food Bank of Central Louisiana

**FOUNDED:** 1989

**ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET:** \$1.2 Million

**STAFF:** 20 Employees

**ANNUAL VOLUNTEERS:** 1,100

## Community Demographics

**CITY:** Alexandria, LA

**POPULATION:** 48,200

**PARRISH:** Rapides

**POPULATION:** 132,700

**SERVICE AREA:** Parishes of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Sabine, Vernon and Winn

## FROM HUNGER TO HOPE

THE \$7.3 MILLION CAMPAIGN FOR FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA

Following its first comprehensive campaign, there were significant “ah-ha” moments for the development staff and volunteers of Food Bank of Central Louisiana.

“One of many lessons I learned: you have to be thoughtful, but bold when you are asking for a major gift,” says Linda Hutson, Director of Development for the Food Bank.

“Don’t make decisions for donors’ would be another lesson,” adds Executive Director Jayne Wright-Velez. “Cultivate, be diligent in your donor rationale, make the ask, and let donors decide for themselves’.”

Hutson and Wright-Velez led a small, but highly effective campaign leadership committee with the ongoing support

of Swanson House, a full-service fundraising consulting firm, ultimately raising \$3.5 million for capital, and \$3.8 million for the annual fund program. During the life of the campaign, they also secured more than \$30 million of in-kind food donations.

“Thoughtful strategy, fearless commitment, endless optimism and dedication to the fundraising process drove the staff and leadership of the Food Bank to success,” says Robert Swanson, President and CEO of Swanson House. “Jayne, Linda and the team embraced major gift solicitation and mastered the art and science of the ask.”

### The Need

Serving more than 120 nonprofit partner agencies across 11 Louisiana parishes, the 23-years-old Food Bank of Central

Louisiana was in dire need of renovated and expanded facilities. The Food Bank had maximized its facility, acquiring, processing, warehousing and distributing more than six million pounds annually. More than 22,000 men, women and children were being helped each month. Still, the need was growing.

“We were expending too much time, energy and resources moving multiple pallets just to complete orders for our partner agencies,” says Wright-Velez. And, that was only one of the challenges. “Additionally, a million pounds of fresh produce and other nutritious food was being turned away each year. “We simply did not have the freezer and cooler space to handle that kind of food. We could have the food for free—if we just had the space, specifically the right kind of space,” she explains.

Swanson House was retained to conduct a pre-campaign assessment study to determine if a multi-million-dollar campaign was viable, and was then retained to provide counsel for the ongoing campaign.

“Robert, our Swanson House consultant, had helped the Baton Rouge Food Bank raise more than \$12 million, among many others,” said Hutson. “We knew we were getting experienced and knowledgeable counsel. What surprised us is how much we, ourselves, learned along the way.”

### The Study, The Quiet Phase & The Public Phase

“The study was an educational process all by itself,” recalls Hutson. “It indicated people were receptive to the idea of a campaign, but needed to know more. We learned that meant education and cultivation strategies were necessary to engage donors. We learned more as we worked with counsel throughout the quiet and public phases of the campaign.”

The quiet phase began with securing a challenge grant for board members. Solicitation of board members quickly followed. “Robert was adamant. Solicit the board and campaign leadership first. The campaign needed 100 percent board participation to qualify for various funders down the road and send a positive message to other prospects.”

“Closing those initial gifts provides an organization confidence and momentum,” says Swanson. “Staff and volunteer leaders also have a chance to practice major gift solicitation before engaging lesser known prospects. Our admonition is, ‘Study. Plan. Practice. Present.’

Additional work was also taking place. Case statement development, creation of campaign management and tracking reports, never-ending training for staff and volunteers, and continual strategy development for cultivation and solicitation dominated campaign activity.

“We thought we needed to know all our potential donors before we started,” shares Wright-Velez. “In fact, half the donors to the campaign were not donors prior to the campaign. We learned that the identification, cultivation and solicitation of donors was a never-ending process.”

“you have to be thoughtful, but bold, when you are asking for a major gift.”

-Linda Hutson, Director of Development for the Food Bank

The pair says their biggest fear never materialized. “Asking for too large of a gift was not the issue we thought it might be,” recalls Hutson. “We learned that as long as you are professional, sincere and direct, people responded positively. If the solicitation was too large, they either received our ask as a compliment,

or responded that the request was simply not within their capacity.”

Volunteer leaders worked to open doors and participated in solicitations by providing their personal endorsement of the organization. “I think we had this impression that the major gift solicitation was about peers asking peers; that wasn’t the case,” explains Wright-Velez. “They would share their story—offer their endorsement of why they were involved in the Food Bank, and why they were donors to the campaign. More often than not, I was the one who asked for the gift. And that was okay!”

### Strategy & Activity

The lessons learned during the campaign according to Wright-Velez and Hutson often ran contrary to popular thought. Among those: A gift must be requested. A specific gift amount must be stated. There is a specific vocabulary and meeting structure when completing a solicitation. Cultivation activity greatly improves the chances of securing a gift and pledge. Many donors don’t think about a multi-year pledge and must be educated about gift-giving opportunities. When a donor says “no,” that doesn’t always mean no forever; it might simply mean “not now”.

Campaign counsel serves many purposes, keeping staff and volunteers on task and problem-solving unique situations as they arise. “There were three especially memorable donor episodes in this campaign,” says Swanson.

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## Axioms

Go off script  
when necessary.

Make the pledge  
work for the funder.

Volunteers don't have  
to make the ask.

Don't discount tenacity.

Don't make decisions  
for donors.

### SWANSON HOUSE FUNDRAISING PROFESSIONALS

Swanson House, Inc., is a full-service nonprofit consulting firm committed to advancing the mission of nonprofit organizations. Its consultants have served as successful development officers and nonprofit executives. Swanson House consultants have partnered with hundreds of organizations across America to plan and complete their multi-million dollar campaigns, incorporating capital, endowment and annual fund initiatives.

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#### ► From Hunger to Hope...continued

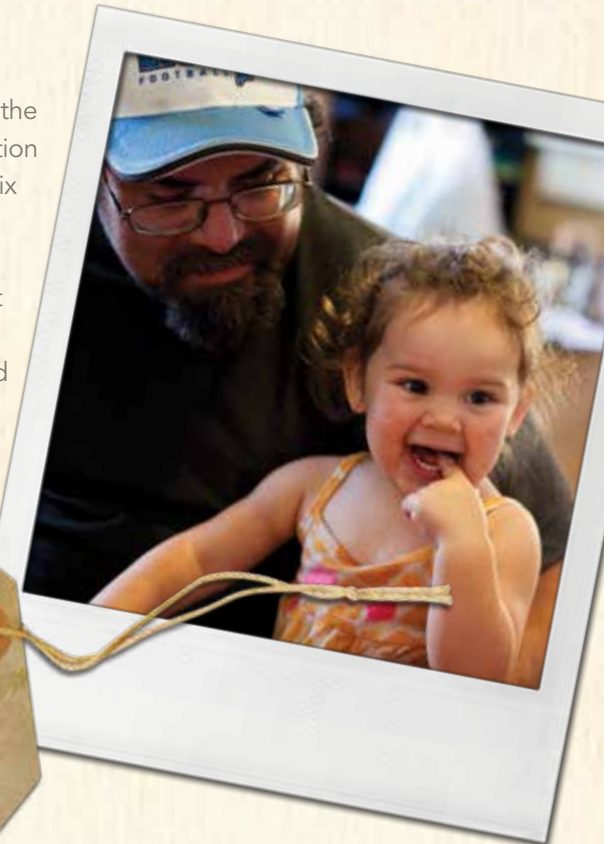
"The first concerned a donor who required 22 months of engagement before allowing a six-figure ask to be made. The Food Bank's tenacity was exceptional. They really earned that gift."

That tenacious spirit continued with funders who would only make a gift one year at a time. "Once we learned the funders' wishes, we developed strategies to return to the funder each year for three years, asking them for each succeeding gift," Swanson explains. "It was not as clean and simple as a three- or five-year pledge, but Jayne and team made it work for them."

Another donor would not respond to their request for a meeting after what the team felt was a very successful cultivation meeting and tour of the facility. "For six months Linda sought out a follow-up meeting with that prospect," recalls Wright-Velez. The duo ultimately went off script with the realization they had nothing to lose. "We finally developed a strategy for a Fed-Ex solicitation featuring the presentation of a

proposal with a thoughtful element included in the package. The prospect responded in less than a week, and said he would make the \$50,000 gift for which we had requested."

"The Food Bank team was excellent at utilizing counsel," says Swanson. "Jayne and Linda called between visits, when opportunities or questions arose. They followed up with us after major cultivation and solicitation visits and did post-analysis play-by-plays. They were happy warriors fighting on behalf of those they served."



### Campaign Leadership Committee

Todd St. Romain, *Mansura, LA*  
Brooks Harris, *Ruston, LA*  
Brian Couvillon, *Alexandria, LA*  
Kevin Broussard, *Alexandria, LA*  
Stan Lott, *Alexandria, LA*  
Leetha Harris, *Alexandria, LA*  
Kay McCray, *Alexandria, LA*  
Debbie Mahfouz, *Alexandria, LA*  
Jayne Wright-Velez, *Alexandria, LA*  
Linda Hutson, *Pineville, LA*

### Capital Gifts Received

Gift Ranges	# of Gifts
\$500,000 & Above	1
\$250,000 to \$499,999	5
\$100,000 to \$249,000	5
\$50,000 to \$99,999	7
\$20,000 to \$49,999	7
\$5,000 to \$19,999	27