

CHARACTERISTICS OF FUND-RAISING SOLICITATIONS BY ENVIRONMENTAL AND ANIMAL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: This paper analyzes a full year of direct mail fund-raising solicitations received by the author in 1986. Ninety-nine solicitations were received from 33 organizations. The average minimum donation requested was \$15.33. Most organizations were headquartered east of the Mississippi River. Wildlife and environment issues were the main theme of 75 of the solicitations, with animal rights and animal welfare the dominant theme of 21. Marine mammals, animal suffering, endangered wildlife, and environmental protection were issues emphasized.

Organizations concerned with environmental or animal rights issues, or both, rely heavily upon direct mail solicitations for increasing their membership numbers and for monetary contributions. These solicitations usually target specific issues as a focus for prospective members and donors. Issues such as the hunting of young harp seals (*Phoca groenlandica*), the persistence of DDT in the environment, and the potential extinction of the snail darter (*Percina tanasi*) have received much attention in the past, but these issues are being replaced with new issues, such as grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) management, deforestation in the tropics, and animal experimentation.

I suggest that the issues raised in solicitations can be used as a barometer of environmental and animal rights concerns and, if monitored, they will provide a record of the evolution of the public's attitudes toward wildlife. Other methods, such as surveys, are available to obtain similar information; however, an advantage in monitoring solicitations is that solicitations are designed, through market research and experience, to target issues that appeal to the public's pocketbook via their concern for the environment. There are many issues important to the public, but the public cannot donate money to all of them. Issues found in solicitations are not simply issues that the public is interested in. They are issues that the public is both interested in and willing to donate money to support. This makes solicitations unique as a barometer of environmental and animal rights issues. As people change in their interests and concerns, organizations will change to take advantage of these new issues to solicit funds and members.

This paper analyzes a full year (1986) of direct mail solicitations received by the author from many environmental and animal rights organizations in the United States. This data set can be used as a baseline for future comparisons.

METHODS

The solicitations analyzed in this study were those received by me in 1986. The extent to which these solicitations are representative of the total population of solicitations is unknown, although it is recognized that organizations do make their mailing lists available to

other organizations. Although they may not be random samples, they were unsolicited and thus removed from normal selection biases.

The majority of solicitations came with a 2-6 page cover letter, a return envelope, and an insert card, with the insert card containing an address label, check-off boxes for determining the amount of the donation, and a short statement summarizing the main reason money should be donated (the "power plea"). For each solicitation, I recorded the name and address of the organization, the date received, the minimum donation requested, and a quotation from the power plea. I considered this power plea to be the essence of the 2-6 page cover letter. For this study, all solicitations were organized into categories based upon the topic of the power plea.

RESULTS

Ninety-nine solicitations from 33 different organizations were received in 1986 (1.9/week), with no quarterly period (January-March, April-June, July-September, and October-December) receiving more than expected by chance ($\chi^2 = 5.44$, 3 df, $P = 0.141$). The average minimum donation requested was \$15.33 ($n = 33$, $SD = \$5.47$), with a range of \$0.00 to \$29.00. Most solicitations came from organizations with headquarters based east of the Mississippi River ($\chi^2 = 8.03$, 1 df, $P = 0.005$), with the majority of them in Washington, D.C. ($n = 14$), followed by California ($n = 7$), New York ($n = 5$), and various other states ($n = 7$).

Solicitations were separated into two main categories: wildlife and environment ($n = 75$) and animal rights and animal welfare ($n = 21$). Three solicitations fit into neither category; a further breakdown is given in Table 1. The most common wildlife or environment appeal was directed at protecting wildlife or natural resources or the environment, followed by concerns about endangered species in general and marine mammals. The relatively high N/M ratios (average number of appeals per organization in each category) for these categories (Table 1) indicated multiple solicitations by the organizations involved. The most common animal rights or welfare appeal was animal suffering or animal welfare in general,

Table 1. Categories of solicitations ($n = 99$) received in 1986, based on the contents of the "power plea." Given are the number of appeals in each category (N), the number of different organizations mailing the appeals (M), and the average number of appeals per organization in each category (N/M ratio).

Category	N appeals	M groups	N/M ratio
Wildlife/ Environment			
Protect wildlife or natural resources or the environment	29	9	3.22
Endangered wildlife (general)	16	4	4.00
Marine mammals	12	7	2.25
Specific wildlife issues	9	4	2.25
Assorted specific issues	6	3	2.00
Pollution	3	3	1.00
Animal Rights/ Welfare			
Animal suffering or welfare (general)	10	8	1.25
Dog and cat eating	6	1	6.00
Animal experimentation	3	3	1.00
Trapping	1	1	1.00
Food animals	1	1	1.00
Other			
Interspecies communication	2	1	2.00
Sponsor orphan wildlife	1	1	1.00

followed by dog and cat eating and animal experimentation. With the exception of dog and cat eating, the low N/M ratios indicated a single mailing by the organizations involved. Table 2 reviews the power pleas for the different categories of solicitations.

The most prolific solicitants were The Wilderness Society ($n = 13$) and the World Wildlife Fund ($n = 13$), followed by Defenders of Wildlife ($n = 9$), Greenpeace USA ($n = 8$), the Environmental Defense Fund ($n = 6$), the International Fund for Animal Welfare ($n = 6$), and The Nature Conservancy ($n = 5$). Other organizations sending solicitations are listed in Table 2. Defenders of Wildlife demonstrated a great deal of breadth in its activities with solicitations in five different areas. Most organizations concentrated their fund-raising solicitations in one or two categories.

DISCUSSION

With this analysis, issues which are and which are not emphasized can be identified. Issues emphasized included marine mammals (dolphins and porpoises (Delphinidae), pilot whales (*Globicephala melaena*), walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*), orcas (*Orcinus orca*), "whales," and "baby seals"), animal suffering or animal

welfare (general), endangered wildlife (general), and protecting wildlife or natural resources or the environment (general). These are the issues which (presumably) are successful in raising money and increasing or maintaining membership, and they show great similarity to the environmental topics seen in newspapers, magazines, and on television. The public is concerned about habitat loss, endangered species, and animal welfare.

The second aspect of interest deals with the issues which were *not* specifically included in the solicitations. These issues are varied and include lead shot, hunting in general, specific hunting events, and specific North American wildlife (except for gray wolves, *Canis lupus*, which were included). It would seem that, although these issues often seem to be controversial, they may not stimulate donations as well as the other issues covered.

The analysis of solicitations should be helpful in charting the evolution of the public's attitudes toward wildlife and natural resource issues. As argued previously (Schmidt and Bruner 1981, Schmidt 1987), wildlife professionals should take the initiative in all philosophical and management issues regarding human

use of and human impact on our wildlife resources.

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