

The Art of Proactive Fundraising

A three-day deep dive with the Elizabeth Namaganda Foundation and Tusaidiane Trust
Kampala, Uganda · Wednesday 12 to Friday 14 August 2026 · Trainer: Han Valk, HVFC International

The week at a glance

Following the Introduction Workshop in which five organisations took their first steps into proactive fundraising, three participants returned for a three-day deep dive: Phiona Nalweyiso and Leonard Musolooza of the Elizabeth Namaganda Foundation (ENF), and Rachel Tushabe of Tusaidiane Trust. With a smaller, dedicated group and three full days instead of one, the work went noticeably deeper: real donor research, real relationship plans for real prospects, and a real pitch, refined three times in front of a camera.



Picture 1: Group selfie during a nice cultural performance evening.

Two lessons from the introduction day anchored everything that followed. First, that **people give to people, not organisations to organisations**, so trust has to be built between human beings before it can exist between institutions. Second, the four-part discipline behind every ask: **never too much, never too little, never too soon, never too late. But always ask**. The whole week can be read as putting those two lessons into practice, one deliberate step at a time.

By Friday afternoon, both organisations had a refined and stress-tested fundraising goal, a scored pipeline of real donor prospects, tailored relationship plans for their five highest-priority donors, a shared organisational impact story, a pitch each participant had delivered and improved three times on camera, and a 90-day action plan with named owners and dates. The evaluation scores reflect it: every question averaged between 4.3 and 5 out of 5.

Day one: strategy and donor research

Wednesday opened with an exercise called Fundraising Forward. Rather than starting fresh, the group deliberately went back to the proposals that never got a reply and the pitches that were met with silence, because each of those moments had already been paid for in time and effort, and the lesson inside it had never been collected. Each person drew a card and told the story of one attempt that had not gone as hoped, and the group mined it together, not for blame, but for what could be done differently: was it a fit problem, a timing problem, a relationship problem, or



Picture 2: Phiona is working on her fundraising goal.

an ask problem? Every lesson went up on a wall that stayed in the room for the rest of the week, and the strategy built over the following days had to answer each one.

With that honesty established, the group returned to the fundraising goals and positioning statements drafted on the introduction day and stress-tested them properly this time: was the amount and date still right, did the statement hold up against the organisation's actual track record, and would a donor be able to verify every claim in it? Both organisations rewrote their goal and positioning until the whole team, not just one person, could describe it the same way, and it went up on the wall in large letters for the rest of the week. The capacity conversation that followed was equally candid, covering who actually does the fundraising work and how many hours a week they honestly have, what proof of results exists for a stranger to see, and whether the basics, registration, bank account, bookkeeping, board minutes, are truly donor-ready.

Setting the criteria before searching

The afternoon turned to donor research, and Han was direct about why it matters: research is not the boring part before the real fundraising starts, it is the fundraising. Before opening a single laptop, both organisations worked out their own donor criteria out loud. The conversation was refreshingly concrete. On theme, the group agreed a donor funding only orphans was too narrow a match, since both organisations work with a broader group of vulnerable children; the right response, Han suggested, is either to negotiate a donor's scope wider or, if that fails, to let them go rather than distort the programme to fit the money. On amounts, ENF settled on roughly ten to forty thousand US dollars per donor to reach its goal from around three donors, while Tusaidiane Trust, working at a larger scale, looked toward fifty to two hundred thousand. Both agreed grants below that range cost more in application and reporting effort than they return, and Han shared a cautionary story from his own career, of a budget that grew from three hundred thousand euros to almost eight million in five years and very nearly broke the organisation, precisely because it grew faster than its capacity to deliver or to stay diversified.

Armed with a written filter covering theme, geography, grant size and type of support, the group spent ninety minutes in a live research lab, laptops open, working three tracks in parallel:

following the donors of peer organisations through their websites and annual reports, mapping in-country donors such as embassies and Ugandan companies, and searching international foundation directories. Every find (approx. 20) went up on a sticky note. The exercise showed that finding leads can be done in little time, as long as you dedicate yourself to it and know what you are searching for. Shortlisting the donors (making sure they really fit your needs) means that many donors drop off the list: this prevents you on wasting valuable time and resources on donors that will not fund you.



Picture 3: A famous influencer had lunch at the ENF restaurant. A great opportunity to test pitching in a real situation.

The day closed with each participant adopting a handful of donors from their own research and completing a full profile card for each: what they fund, how much, their route in, and one thing that surprised the researcher, ready to be pitched to the whole group the next morning.

Day two: relationship building

Thursday began by turning Wednesday's sticky notes into a real pipeline. Each adopted donor was presented in a two-minute pitch to the group, scored together as a strong fit, a possible, or a drop, and the survivors went up on a pipeline wall of ten to fifteen researched names. A shorter list of high-priority donors per organisation were selected, the ones that would get a tailored relationship plan, while the rest of the pipeline would be kept warm through one light, standardised rhythm.

The heart of the day was a single distinction Han returned to again and again: a transaction asks "can you fund our project?" and closes the door the moment the answer is no. A relationship asks "how can we create impact together?", so that even a no becomes advice, a referral, or the start of the next conversation. As the framework put it plainly, proposals do not create relationships; relationships create proposals. Research, relationship, trust and joint vision have to come before the ask ever lands.

"The deliberate process of building trust, understanding and shared ambition with a donor: before, during and after funding discussions."

Seven touches, not one ask

The group then worked through the five types of touchpoint that keep a relationship alive between funding conversations: showing up (meetings, learning events), show and tell (staying visible, sharing relevant content), showing off (progress reports, achievements), showing gratitude (personalised thanks), and showing some love (recognising milestones, personal gestures). The

rule of thumb, roughly seven touches over the coming months, is not a checklist to complete quickly but a long-term rhythm, deliberately mixed across types so that a relationship never becomes one-note.

The participants built out real touchpoint plans in the room. Leonard's, for a warm donor, moved from a phone call to an introduction, to organising a meeting, each step scheduled with an owner. Phiona's, for the standard rhythm across the wider pipeline, listed logs per project, a newsletter every six months, pictorial narrative reports, annual seasonal greetings, and assessment reports, each one triggered only once the right contact person had been identified, since sending a report to the wrong desk defeats the purpose. Han pushed the group to make even the standardised touches personal wherever possible: forwarding a newsletter with a personal note referencing something the donor once said carries far more weight than adding them to a mailing list.

The conversation also turned inward, to the group's own most important relationship of the week: Guus Verzellenberg of Stichting Mirembé, who had made the whole programme possible. Phiona described updating him personally during this week, sharing photos and reactions from the team, and Han used the moment to make a broader point that applies to every donor: small, unprompted acts of gratitude, a WhatsApp message, a shared photo, a public thank you, cost almost nothing and build exactly the kind of relationship the week had been building toward all along. The idea of an appreciation wall, celebrating current and past donors publicly in the office, came out of that same conversation.

Day three: storytelling, pitching and the road ahead

Friday opened with a practical detour into using LinkedIn, walking through profile completeness, the value of crossing the 500-connections threshold, how to read a prospect's recent activity to judge how reachable they are, and the QR-code trick for connecting on the spot at a conference rather than hoping a cold invitation gets accepted later. From there the day moved into the two skills the whole week had been building toward: telling the organisation's story, and pitching it in two minutes or less.

Finding the story

Han's own illustration of why storytelling matters stayed with the room: years of using the statistic that someone dies of tuberculosis every seventeen seconds, a fact everyone forgot, against a single true story about a his grandfather who had spent two years in what was once a military hospital, tuberculosis being treated over two years, a story nobody who heard it ever forgot. The group then learned the Pixar story spine, the five-part structure behind every animated film: once upon a time, every day, one day, because of that, until finally. Working from drafts written the evening before, each participant reworked their organisation's impact story along that spine.

The improvement between drafts was the clearest proof of the week. Leonard's first attempt told the story of Kenny, an ENF beneficiary who learned a trade and became independent, useful and true, but told mostly in summary. Han's feedback was to make the reader feel the fork in the road: what happens to the child who is never found. Leonard's revised version at the end of the week became his own story, told in the first person as "Musolodalenet":

“Once upon a time, there was a young man called Musolodalenet, living in the islands of Kalanga district, and he had a friend called Elizabeth Namaganda. Every day, Musolodalenet would miss going to school because he lacked. Because of that, his friend Namaganda decided to pay for his school fees, and he finally completed his studies. Musolodalenet is now one of the staff members of the foundation.” — Leonard Musolooza, final version

Phiona wrote two stories, one about how a book-and-teacher-training project grew from a simple donation into a workshop programme now oversubscribed, and a deeply personal one about her own path from losing her father to becoming ENF's project manager and board secretary:

“But then ENF stepped in and gave me a chance to go to school through their scholarship fund... one day, I realised that the opportunity I had been given was bigger than just my own life. Because of that, after completing university, I chose to come back to ENF. Not simply as someone who had been once helped, but as someone who could help others.” — Phiona Nalweyiso

Rachel's story, about a school without reliable water, closed on a line Han called out on the spot as one of the best of the week:

“Because when you bring water to a community, you don't just fill a jerrycan, but you fill classrooms, protect health, and create possibilities for the future.” — Rachel Tushabe, Tusaidiane Trust



Picture 4: Phiona sharing her storng personal ENF story.

The pitch: three takes

Pitching was tackled the same way athletes review game tape: an unscripted baseline, then two deliberate improvements, each one filmed. Pitch zero, delivered over lunch with no preparation, set a light-hearted starting point. The conference simulation that followed was more demanding: three real donor personas, an embassy programme officer allergic to vague asks, a CSR manager thinking in partnerships rather than charity, and an international foundation officer testing whether the numbers held, moved around the room while participants tried to earn a genuine follow-up conversation, not a funding decision.

The earliest attempts shared a common weakness Han named immediately: everyone opened with their own name and organisation before the listener

had any reason to care, then rushed straight to an ask. One early round closed within seconds on a request for a business card before any real exchange had happened, echoing the very same shape Han had flagged the day before as too fast, too soon. The feedback sheets, filled in by peers acting as the donor, asked four questions after every pitch: did we connect, or was I being

talked at? Do I remember who pitched, and their organisation? What questions do I still have? And was there a next step I can say yes to?

By the second and third takes the shift was audible. Later rounds opened with a question about the donor's own work, built a real back-and-forth, and ended with a specific, ownable next step, an offer to feed into a policy review already underway, or a request for fifteen minutes to "pick your brains," rather than a vague hope to hear back. As one piece of feedback captured it plainly:

“Do we speak the donor's language? Are we visible? Is our reporting donor-ready?”

— One of the recurring questions the group learned to ask of themselves

Every recording, all three takes, went home with each participant alongside their feedback sheets, to be rewatched before any real donor meeting.

The 90-day action plan

The week closed the way it began, on the wall. Each organisation built a single-page 90-day action plan: the confirmed fundraising goal at the top, the five priority donors each with a named relationship owner and a scheduled first action, the standard rhythm for the rest of the pipeline and who runs it, and two or three quick wins to complete before the end of August. Concrete commitments followed directly from the week's work: updating LinkedIn profiles to reflect current work, drafting and sending the next donor newsletter to test appreciation, digitising the wall plan so it can be tracked and shared between the two organisations, and setting a recurring cadence to review progress on donor actions rather than letting the plan gather dust.

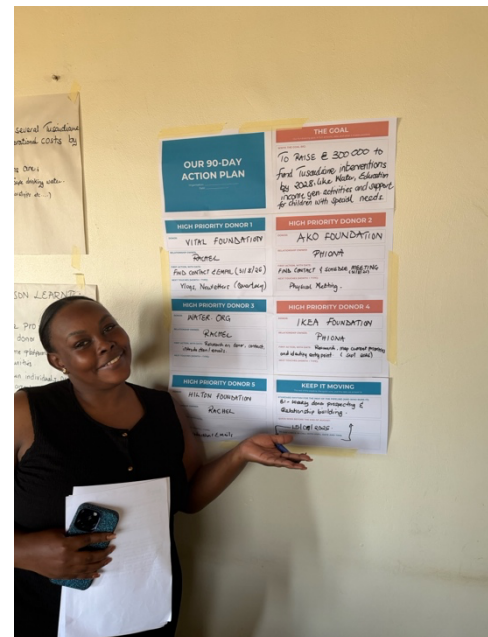
A joint 30-day check-in call with HVFC was scheduled before anyone left the room, built around a simple, honest agenda: did you do it, and how did it go, moving through the wall plan section by section. The team closed with a shared vision board printed and mounted for daily visibility, and a group photograph with their certificates of participation.

What participants told us

At the end of the week, all three participants completed a written evaluation. As on the introduction day, the scores were consistently strong, every average landing between 4.3 and 5 out of 5, with the two exercises scoring a full 5 being the logical flow of the programme and the lasting value of the handouts and materials.



Picture 5: Leonard practising meeting a prospect donor for the first time.



Picture 6: Rachel showing her 90 day action plan.

Statement (1 = not at all, 5 = very much so)	Average
The week went deep enough into our real situation	4.7
The exercises built on each other in a logical way	5.0
The research lab gave us donors we can really pursue	4.7
The simulation and pitch practice increased my confidence	4.7
The relationship plans and 90-day plan feel realistic to execute	4.3
The handouts and materials will keep helping us after this week	5.0

The open comments were, if anything, warmer than the numbers. Asked for the most valuable part of the week, participants pointed straight at the two hardest, newest skills:

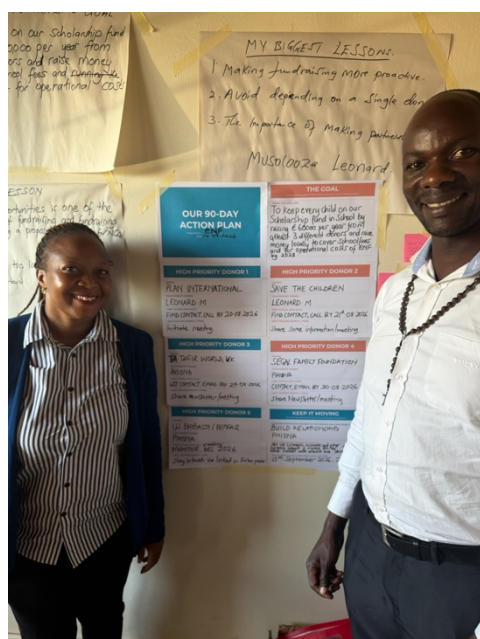
“Writing a SMART fundraising goal and being proactive.” — Leonard Musolooza, ENF

“Creating an impact story was great and pitching teaches a lot.” — Phiona Nalweyiso, ENF

Asked what could be better, the answer was the same one heard after the introduction day, only more emphatic now that they had felt what three focused days could do:

“Having such a programme more often instead of a one-week event.” — Leonard Musolooza, ENF

“Nothing, if only it was longer, but what was offered was really great for the time.” — Phiona Nalweyiso, ENF



Picture 7: Phiona and Leonard showing their 90 day action plan.

On confidence to execute the 90-day plan, the answers were grounded rather than simply enthusiastic. Leonard credited the practical nature of the training itself: "we have the confidence because the training was more practical." Phiona committed her team's best effort, while noting the value of staying in touch with Han by email or WhatsApp for any question or challenge along the way. Asked what support would help most in the coming 90 days, the answers were specific and realistic: consultation with Han to proofread concept notes and proposals and to share feedback on progress, and operational costs, transport, airtime, data, and facilitation, to put the plans into action.

The road ahead

Both organisations leave this deep dive with something the introduction day could only point toward: a real pipeline of researched donors, relationship plans built for actual named prospects rather than hypothetical ones, a story that has already proven, in the room, that it can move people, and a pitch that visibly improved within a single afternoon. The 30-day check-in call will

be the first test of whether the wall plan becomes daily practice, and HVFC looks forward to that conversation.



Picture 8: Phiona received her Certificate of Completion.



Picture 9: Leonard received his Certificate of Completion.



Picture 10: Rachel received her Certificate of Completion.

Our thanks go to the Elizabeth Namaganda Foundation for hosting this deep dive, to Tusaidiane Trust and to Phiona, Leonard and Rachel for the honesty, effort and openness they brought to three intensive days, and to Guus Verzellenberg and Stichting Mirembe for making the whole week possible.

Webale nnyo, and go create your opportunities!

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