

# Linkage Ability and Interest (LAI)

Contributors: Scott Decksheimer, Sue Lee, Cindy Nuefeld

The research concept known as the LAI principle of prospect rating assists in rating prospects, thus allowing the team to direct cultivation and solicitation energies toward those individuals or organizations which are most likely to provide funding.

LAI is one method of tracking prospects. In evaluating gift potential and rating a potential donor as a prospect, the following three criteria must apply.

## **L—Linkage**

*A contract bridge or access through a peer to the potential donor*

It is important to know the linkage of your prospects to your organization. In other words, what is their relationship to the organization or cause? Are they a member of the Board, alumni, volunteer, staff member, or professional affiliate? Are they related to a Board member or a friend of a past client, a former donor, gift-club member, or known to believe in the organization?

A linkage relates to a contact, a bridge or an access through a peer to the potential donor. If there is access to the gift source, then the link to the prospect makes it possible to arrange an appointment to discuss the potential of a gift. If accessibility is not a reality, then it may be difficult to arrange for an appointment. Solicitation may then become a matter of a letter or telephone approach, and neither is very effective in the solicitation of a substantial gift. For the purposes of measurement of linkage, the primary factor shall be the donor's past giving history and relationship to the charity, providing an indication of past accessibility.

## **A—Ability**

*The rater's perception that the prospect has a gift capability at a certain level; the prospect's own reception that such a gift capability is a reality*

Through research, it can be determined that the potential gift source has sufficient discretionary holdings to justify a gift solicitation at an appropriate level. The ability rating is based on their ability to give, not what we think they will give.

## **I—Interest**

*An understanding of the organization's mission and accomplishments*

The interest of a person in your organization might determine if they could be engaged in the organization. How interested is the prospect in your organization? Do they have a specific area of interest? Are they connected through a passion? Is there something that connects them to a program?

If the potential donor has no interest in the charity or little knowledge about its work, then the corporation, foundation, or individual will be prone to make a small gift or none at

all. Interest in the charity and an understanding of its mission, vision and accomplishments are imperative in the identification of valid prospects. The following are examples of two distinct LAI rating systems.

### LAI Methodology Sample 1

The following describes one typical LAI rating system:

---

<b>Linkage (Past Financial Support)</b>	0 = no record of giving or no contact with donor
	1 = pledge but no gift, or one time gift, or memorial gifts
	2 = lapsed donor or occasional donor
	3 = frequent donor—annually
	4 = frequent or current major gift donor

---

<b>Ability (Potential financial support)</b>	0 = \$1 to \$ 2,400
	1 = \$2,500 to \$ 9,999
	2 = \$10,000 to \$ 24,999
	3 = \$25,000 to \$ 49,000
	4 = \$50,000 to \$ 99,999
	5 = \$100,000 to \$249,999
	6 = \$250,000 to \$499,999
7 = \$500,000+	

---

<b>Interest</b>	0 = no interest or knowledge or minimal knowledge
	1 = minimal involvement in a charity-related activity
	2 = intermediate interest or good knowledge, or involved with the charity in some way
	3 = senior volunteer connection or member related committee
	4 = actively involved in the charity, volunteer

---

The LAI rating is achieved by adding up the individual ratings to maximum 15. For example:

<b>L</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
2	4	3	9

Once scored, the LAI can be plotted on a chart.

## **LAI Methodology Sample 2**

The LAI (Linkage, Ability and Interest) rating is a key piece of the Prospect Rating System process because further research and development may not be allocated to those suspects/prospects who have not met the minimum requirement for inclusion in the agency qualification process.

For this methodology it is recommended that ratings totaling 9 or higher out of a total score of 18 be included in the process. Those not meeting the 50% minimum may not be brought to the committee; however, the prospect officer should have discretion over cultivating unassigned suspects. If the rating should change to a higher value to meet the minimum requirement because new information is available, the prospect can be brought for assignment. Conversely, those prospects whose ratings drop because of new information may return to a lower status or even become inactive.

### **Examples of Linkage and Interest in the agency:**

- Member or past member of the board, a board committee or staff
- Agency contact or agency volunteer
- Vendor of the agency (under \$5,000 K)
- Vendor of the agency (over \$5,000 K)
- Utilizes the agency programs
- Agency board member or staff member has a relationship
- Head office is located in Calgary
- Main line of business is in Calgary
- Lives in close proximity of an agency program site
- Previous gifts to the agency
- Previous gifts to similar organizations
- Defined funding area includes Calgary, Alberta
- Defined funding area includes agency program area
- Has indicated an interest to an individual

### **Sample measures of Ability to give**

- Estimated net income or net revenue
- Estimated assets
- Dollar amounts of previous gifts
- Dollar amounts of gifts to other organizations
- Profit margin of industry

The above indicators are used to assign value from 0 to 9 for each of Linkage/Interest and Ability to determine an overall value for the prospect.

## **Guest Writers**

**Scott Decksheimer** is an experienced fund development professional with significant practical fundraising experience in the nonprofit sector. He recently founded Nine Lions Development Consulting, a firm specializing in strategic case for support developments; fund development program assessment and audit; major gift process reviews; and coaching/mentoring programs in fund development. Scott was director of fund development at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) in Calgary where his team completed the largest fundraising campaign in southern Alberta history.

An active volunteer, Scott recently served on the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Calgary Chapter Board Executive. He currently sits on the Board of Directors for The SHARP Foundation and serves on committees for both the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations and the CentrePoint Advancing Non-Profit Management. Scott is a sought-after presenter and has presented internationally and nationally. He is well-known for his groundbreaking co-research related to the philanthropic interests of major gift donors and the roots of their philanthropic spirit.

**Sue Lee** is a senior development officer at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). She received her Masters of Business Administration from York University's Schulich School of Business, and has been in the nonprofit sector for more than 10 years. During this time, she has worked in various capacities from annual giving to major gifts to planned giving with companies across different sectors, from the arts and health to education. In the past two years, Sue has been a guest speaker on "Prospecting and Cultivating for Planned Giving" for CAGP/Leave a Legacy's PG 101. She has also been a co-instructor for the Planned Giving and Major Gifts course at Mount Royal College's and National Program in Fundraising Education (NPFE) Fundraising Certificate program. In the private sector, Sue was a researcher and writer for a financial firm that produced a series of educational booklets on investing for the Canadian Bankers Association. She enjoys her work in the vibrant nonprofit sector and also volunteers with the Calgary Region Arts Foundation to continue her involvement with the arts.

**Cindy Neufeld** is the Stewardship Coordinator in Alumni and Development at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). Prior to being assigned new responsibilities for donor stewardship, Cindy was the coordinator, prospect research and coordinator, advancement services. She has been responsible for creating processes and policies around database management, prospect management, naming, and stewardship. She co-presented "Researching for Success" with Scott Decksheimer in 2004 and 2005 at the CentrePoint Advancing Non-Profit Management. She was a presenter at advancement software conferences in Victoria, San Francisco, and Orlando. Cindy obtained her CFRE in 2003 and brings 14 years of broad fund raising knowledge as an employee, volunteer and working artist. Prior to joining SAIT in the fund raising department, she spent many years teaching, performing, and choreographing dance. Married and with two teenagers, Cindy still takes on the occasional choreographic project and sings with Calgary's The Festival Chorus, just for the joy of it!

Reprinted with permission from  
Scott Decksheimer and CentrePoint  
Suite 1070, 1202 Centre Street SE  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2G 5A5  
[www.thecentrepoint.ca](http://www.thecentrepoint.ca)