

Innovative packaging for donors and sponsors



Photo: Hoxton Street Monster Supplies

Wendy Smithers
Director, the::hub



Published 2014

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)

Managed by



Supported by



In partnership with



*Thinking of asking individuals for money? Approaching sponsors to sell a show or exhibition? Offering patrons Gold, Silver or Bronze membership benefits? Trying to bore your potential benefactors to tears with the standard tickets, free drink and name on the wall package? Get inspired by the **Ministry of Stories (MoS)** and get creative with your individual giving and corporate options. The chances are you'll have better results and more fun along the way with your partners.*

The context

The Ministry of Stories is a creative writing and mentoring centre in East London, which opened in 2010. It uses storytelling to inspire young people aged 8-18 in the belief that writing unleashes their imaginations and builds confidence, self-respect and communication. The aim is to create a nation of storytellers and to see a Ministry or Ministry-inspired project in every community that can support one.



Photo: Ministry of Stories

One-to-one volunteer mentoring, to help children write the best stories, poems, songs, sketches, soaps and plays they can, goes on behind a real shop. The shop not only sells everything a discerning monster might need but delivers enough retail income to pay the rent and more. Since its beginnings as a pilot in 2010, it has gone on to have widespread fundraising success. After browsing amongst the pickled eyeballs and freshly extracted nails, the children access the writing centre through a secret door that members of the public cannot enter. They get inspired and supported in a purpose built space, whilst the shadowy figure of the Chief Editor sits behind a door that is always closed.

The fundraising approach

The team at MoS decided to take the creative approach of their project right through into their fundraising. Individuals could opt for bespoke Ministerial posts of their choosing whilst sponsors could support their very own departments. Moving away from standard or bland packages, MoS realised people were more likely to give if the offer was fun and distinctive. There was also freedom to choose their own titles and departments, that were bespoke to them and that they had clear ownership of. Copy was silly, fun and in keeping with the MoS creative theme.

As the Chief Editor puts it....

"Like any self-respecting Ministry, we shamelessly take money in brown envelopes. We've sold titles such as Minister for the Sinister to people who have sent bungs our way and turned corporations who support our shadowy work into Departments of the Ministry of Stories. In the same way that the KGB and MI6 scout round elite universities for likely recruits, so we have identified you as a potential agent. If you have what it takes: a sense of adventure, a love of the written word and a desire to see underprivileged young people in east London flourish as writers come and discreetly deliver the code word SNOTMONSTER at our stall today to receive further instructions or fill in and return the contents of the envelope we've dropped into the back of your notebook. Take up your position now. Your Ministry Needs You!"

The offer

For three-figure donations, positions are available in the Stationery Department, and for donations of £1,000 and above, you can create a more literary role, such as the Minister for Rightful Comeuppances, Chancellor for Cyberpunk or Literacy Zar. These jobs entail no actual responsibilities whatsoever, just the satisfaction of donors and sponsors knowing their donation has helped MoS achieve its aims and reach more children.

For each year of their tenure, higher level Ministers receive:

- invitations to intimate and exclusive events with writers and other ministers
- a copy of that year's major publication of children's writing
- an invitation to two exclusive annual events to see the difference their donation has made
- entry to quarterly events with great line-ups of writers, musicians and other special guests
- a regular e-newsletter
- a name plaque for their desk
- an official Ministerial Deed of Appointment

The results

In the opening year there was a lot of success, particularly with the individuals. MoS were lucky to have their launch party at No 10 Downing Street, hosted by the PM. This was a great way to get a lot of press attention and invite and access potential donors they would not otherwise be able to reach. Corporates have taken longer to convert as they were keen to see that MoS could deliver impact and prove their worth. Now MoS are pleased to include Google (The Ministry of All Available Knowledge) and Penguin (The Department Of Reading For Pleasure, Self-Improvement and Impressing Members of the Opposite or the Same Sex) amongst their corporate supporters. High profile individuals signed up to be Ministers, which again helped with PR and made ministerial roles even more attractive. Actor Colin Firth signed up to be the Minister for Fluency around the time of *The King's Speech* release and Emma Thompson, was confirmed as the Minister for Imaginative Naughtiness.

Alain de Botton, Minister for Literary Pleasures and Sorrows, said, "*The ability to master stories - to tell one's own and to understand those of others - is not a luxury, not a pleasant pastime when everything else has been done. It's right at the heart of what it means to be a functioning, civilised society. With wit, creativity and energy, the Ministry of Stories is helping society to feel less scared, less isolated and less angry, in short, more human.*"

The learning

In the excitement of signing up new Ministers, MoS weren't clear with donors how long people were signing up for. Key learning, implemented now, is to ensure there is clarity about ministerial appointments only being available for a year in order to encourage repeat donations.

So before you start asking for money, consider whether you can do it in a more imaginative way, inspired by what your organisation is there to do and how its uses or works with arts and creativity. Make giving fun and you may find it is easier to get money coming in.

Director Ben Payne comments:

"Our Ministerial Appointments Programme was inspired by an off the cuff remark by our co-founder, Nick Hornby at our launch event. We believe that it has the distinctiveness and creativity to make it a good match for the MoS brand and the potential to engage a range of individual and corporate donors. The challenge is to extend it beyond its pilot stage and to market it effectively so that it can become the basis of a long-term source of income for us."

Find out more

- To donate to the Ministry of Stories and acquire a Ministerial title for yourself or as a gift, please visit their [Just Giving page](#), or email donate@ministryofstories.org.
- Find out more about the [Ministry of Stories](#) and Hoxton Street [Monster Supplies](#) here.

OFFICIAL LETTERS PATENT

CONSTITUTING THE CONFERMENT OF MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENTS

FROM THE DESK OF THE PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATEMENTS,
MINISTRY OF STORIES

The Ministry of Stories does hereby constitute, order, and declare that the concordance of every Minister designate be made clear in this indenture, that upon signature and authentication of the Ministerial Seal, each Minister shall be accorded Ministerial powers as decreed by the Ministry as befitting their new Ministerial rank, and said Minister will be expected to uphold, and act in accordance with, all official edicts as made clear in this contract.

- i. *I hereby pledge to facilitate and uphold the literary liberty of persons of limited years.*
- ii. *And commit to assisting all other Ministers in their efforts to provide free assistance to the aforementioned young persons.*
- iii. *And to perpetuate the culture of storytelling for as long as storytelling is deemed necessary by the Ministry.*
- iv. *I vow to adhere to and uphold each and every Ministerial rule and regulation, no matter how ridiculous.*
- v. *I wholeheartedly commit to defend the imaginative, the ingenious and the mystifying.*
- vi. *And to oppose, unequivocally, the mundane, the humdrum and the workaday.*
- vii. *I am a Minister of Stories, and I hold all forms of writing in equal regard.*
- viii. *I maintain these truths to be self evident – that all stories are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Fabrication, Obscurity, and the pursuit of Humour.*

I _____

upon appointment as

in the service of the Ministry of Stories, hold these facts, fictions and half-truths to be self-evident.

Signed _____

Date _____

Approved by the Chair of the Board of Trustees,
Mr Nick Hornby

Signed _____

Date _____