

7 Ways to Strengthen Your Donor Base

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Cultivating a strong donor base is a priority for nonprofits, and most use tried and true techniques to tend to their relationships. If you're interested in taking these efforts further, here are seven ideas to reinforce everyday practices.

Delegate.

Staff, board members and volunteers can all contribute to developing donor relationships, and with a minimal investment of time. Assign each one the responsibility of making three to five phone calls each week to existing supporters, just to say thank you. Up these efforts after major events. You'll be amazed what a difference this personal touch makes when the next giving opportunity arises.

Don't 'Ask.' Do Tell.

If every contact you make with supporters includes an 'Ask,' they'll grow weary of hearing from you. Build long-term relationships by balancing requests for support with regular, solicitation-free communications about program improvements, success stories, relevant legislation, etc. These updates can be done quickly and affordably through email outreach and website postings.

Be proactive.

If an unsolicited donation arrives, respond to it immediately with a phone call from one of your team members. Donors want to support nonprofits that get things done. Nothing says proactive like immediate response.

Invest in your donor database.

A well-designed, accurate information management system is the cornerstone of successful fundraising. Yet many nonprofits fall behind on database upkeep and have a high tolerance for incomplete records. As a result, they miss making connections between supporters' interests and the organization's needs and spend money courting people who have moved away or changed jobs. Your database is your most valuable relationship tool. Invest in its maintenance, and support staff training to ensure your agency uses all its bells and whistles.

Feed the passion.

Uncover donors' motivations for being involved with your organization and log this information into your database. Note interest in specific programs, personal ties to the mission, etc. so you can send targeted information about programs, events and volunteer opportunities to supporters. Build on these connections to cultivate new donors through referrals. If a supporter is willing and has a particularly poignant reason to be involved with your organization, share his or her story at a fundraiser or in a promotional piece.

Send a thank-YOU.

Give the routine "thank-you" an upgrade. When you acknowledge gifts, send a personal note, or at a minimum, jot down a few words in the margin of a form letter. These notes can tell donors what their gifts will help your organization accomplish (for example, "your \$50 gift will feed a family of four during December"). For new donors, include a 'welcome aboard' note. For a second gift, note your appreciation for ongoing support. Three or more gifts? Mention that recurring donors are the lifeblood of your organization. The key is to personalize, even in small ways. It's easy to see the critical role an accurate donor database plays in this process.

Give back.

Add donor names to a wall of fame. Connect them with people and organizations that can be of assistance to them, whether professional or personal. Demonstrate your appreciation and respect by caring as much about their success as they care about yours.

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Springboard is a strategically-focused, marketing communications firm that helps growing companies and nonprofits to meet business growth goals quickly and affordably.