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Donor Stewardship

Mini Course by Alma Aguirre

To the nonprofit sector our donors are our stability. They provide the gifts that give us the sustainability that maintains and grows our programs. As a result we need to always be stewards of our donors and of the close relationships that it takes to keep them as close friends and benefactors.

One of the questions that I am always asked is how do we do that?

The answer is not clear cut because nonprofit environments are different from organization to organization but one thing is clear…you must capture the hearts of your donors and you must thank them profusely for their gifts of time, talent and treasure.

You will first need a way to keep track of all of your donors and an accounting of what they give to you is not enough. What do you need to know about your key donors – (and by this I'm referring to their top 150 to 250 or so donors and prospects) – in order to build and strengthen the relationship between donors and your organization?

The following is an excerpt from an article "Keeping Track of Key Donors" from the Charity Channel that lists the qualities that contribute to successful corporate/foundation/major donor fundraising:

★ The system should include a reliable tickler or come-up mechanism that ensures that every prospect on your list receives a minimum number of contacts each year. At the beginning of each week or month, you should be able to pull up a to-do list. While it is particularly important to include proposal and stewardship report deadlines, don't stop there. If you want to do top-notch development work, include everything from "send a note to Mr. Jones at XYZ Corporation congratulating him on his promotion" to "call the Smith Foundation to let them know that last year's scholarship recipient was accepted to medical school." Little things mean a lot.

★ Every donor/prospect in your key donor system should have a corresponding file that includes:

  a. Current contact information.

  b. Prospect research information, such as career and volunteer affiliations, family information (you might not think this is necessary if you're dealing with corporations and foundations, but consider the old chestnut, "people

        give to people"; this information, when handled judiciously, allows for thoughtful relationship building), asset and gift capacity ratings, etc.

    c. A copy of all correspondence to and from the prospect.

    d. A record of and notes from all visits and telephone conversations with the prospect.

    e. Information regarding past gifts, including amounts, dates and purpose.

    f. A record of all stewardship efforts, including written stewardship reports and information about recognition ceremonies and/or plaques.

    g. Cross referencing. It is critical to know when your list crosses with trustee or committee lists.

    h. Notes regarding possible contacts and connections with others on your key prospect list, as well as with others you would like to add to your key list

★ Your tracking system should also provide data to allow for charting the overall progress of your program. This helps you to see trouble spots before they get out of hand, and to keep a close eye on any potential good news to share with your superiors and volunteers. Your goal need to be to provide the following information at a moment's notice:

    a. The number and amount of requests made to your key prospects in the current fiscal year

    b. The number and amount of gifts received from this group in the current fiscal year

    c. The number and amount of requests that remain pending

    d. The number of contacts the organization has made – face to face, telephone, etc – with each key prospect

    e. The number of contacts made with your group overall, for the fiscal year

It is also very important to be able to collect all this information in such a way that it can be compared with past years performance so that you can see the progress of your donor development and retention over the long term.

1. Your overall plan should include annual review of your key prospect/donor list to if new names should be added or others removed. To be on the safe side, keep a list of all names that are removed, when they were removed, and why. You may need to bring back donors who have lapsed so that they can begin to provide donations.

2. Your system should be easy to maintain. Hours and hours in front of your desk updating files and preparing reports do nothing for your bottom line.

3. Your system should be easily understood and used by others. Unfortunately in this profession there is a lot of development staff turnover, and each new wave of employees costs the development program a good six months before it regains its traction. Good records and good systems can help reduce the learning curve.

What do you use to track your donors without such stress on your staff??

It is possible to address these concepts using a combination of standard software, such as Microsoft Word and Excel, and good old paper files. I've heard good things about Access, too. While you will have to put some legwork into setting things up, the other costs are pretty low. Microsoft Office is pretty standard fare, so there are no added software costs and training issues should be minimal.

If your organization's budget allows, there are very sophisticated database systems out there.

A. Raiser's Edge (http://www.blackbaud.com), where all correspondence is scanned in to become part of the electronic file. You will need to have ban IT staffer devoted to the development database system.

B. Web-based fund raising software is yet another option. eTapestry.com offers a subscription-type service that bases its fees on the number of records you store on the system. If you have fewer than 500 names on your list, the service is free (www.eTapestry.com).

The point here has less to do with the medium than with the content, maneuverability, and ease of use of the system. At best, a good donor tracking system keeps you on top of your game by **helping you focus on actions that help build long-lasting relationships for your organization with each and every donor.**

Resource:

CharityChannel LLC

http://www.charitychannel.com

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