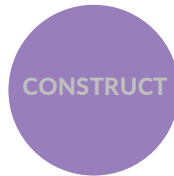


IMPROVING DONOR RETENTION



The Association of Fundraising Professionals works with the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy each year to conduct large scale research about fundraising effectiveness. For 2014, their results showed that donor retention was 43% for return donors and only 23% for first-time donors. This means that if you look at your whole donor database right now, 57% of the people you consider “loyal” (have given more than once) probably won’t give again, and 77% of the people you just worked so hard to gain won’t even give a second time. To learn more, see the entire report at afpfep.org/reports/.

What does this mean for your organization? If you owned a store and worked tirelessly on a grand opening, but knew 77% of the people who shopped the first day would likely never return, how would you change your approach? Begin to think of your donors as customers. You aren’t selling them your services; those go to the participants in your program. Instead, **you are selling them the chance to be part of the supporting team for a great organization.** Just as customers return to a store because they left feeling good last time, donors will be more likely to stick with you if their experience is positive.

If you want your organization to achieve better than those numbers above, it will require a combination of strategies, not just one magic idea. Merging the lessons from this toolkit, especially **Building Partnerships, Telling Your Story, Recordkeeping and Tracking,** and **Thanking Donors,** with the suggestions below will give you a good start. **Remember that it is easier to keep a donor than to find a new one, so effort in this area is well spent.**

Be Connected

You should be in frequent enough communication with donors that they are always aware of upcoming events or changes. Don’t allow so much time to go by that you need to reintroduce the program or restart the relationship as you begin a new campaign. Repeat donors are already familiar with your organization and its works. Sending correspondence to repeat donors that sounds like it’s aimed at a stranger may make them feel they are not remembered or valued.



Be Grateful

Of course, at this point in your process, you've thanked them, recognized them, and promoted their businesses in every way you can possibly imagine. Hopefully, they have had many opportunities to read or hear about your thankfulness and the appreciation of your staff and clients over time. Nevertheless, there is always room to consider if you looked them right in the eye and told them you are grateful. This can be uncomfortable, so it might take practice, but **being able to genuinely convey the value of a donor's partnership is a skill worth perfecting.** Being authentic is the difference between a good campaigner and a great campaigner.



Be Dependable, Yet Innovative

As referenced in **Using Technology**, donors appreciate consistency across communication messages and time. It is comforting to know money is spent wisely and to have a predictable, solid mission that underlies every aspect of the organization. When someone asks a donor why they give to your program, he or she should be able to easily answer because you've been dependable through interactions and stable through services. Do not, however, assume that donors want to see everything stay the same. **While your core values and purpose should remain strong, work should never stop toward innovative ideas, updated goals, new services, and future plans that address the changing needs of the community.**



Be Honest

As referenced in **Reporting Progress**, transparency with your donors should always be a top priority. **Your communication should be impeccable - from tweets to posters to interviews to face-to face meetings - and must show integrity.** If challenges occur, rumors start, or your program receives unfortunate media attention, maintaining this honesty is critical. If the leaders in your organization work hard to set a strong example, it should naturally flow into all aspects of the work. Be sure that among your staff, volunteers, and Board Members, a culture of authenticity is being cultivated. Remember: people do not give to organizations they don't trust.