

Finding Donors: Understanding Who Might or Will Give to Your Organization

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Generosity is not culturally specific, nor is it confined to certain populations or religions. Many people like to and want to give, for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, the single most important reason why people don't give is because they are not asked!

Before we look at the possible donors and prospects for your program, let's identify some of the key concepts for this step in fundraising.

First, over-dependence on one donor, or even a few donors, is risky. The donor might quit giving, move away, change interests, or even die. The best idea is to diversify our donor pool as much as possible, keeping in mind that the fundraising department and personnel need to also ensure they have enough human and financial resources to manage the donors effectively. Personnel also need the skills for making the funding request, in order to meet the needs and desires of the possible donors.

Second, it's vital to take into account all possible donor markets. In theory, any person or organization could or might give to your organization, but we need to qualify the donors in order to maximize our returns for our efforts.

Third, acquiring donors requires a mix of human relations skills as well as technical expertise, because such relationships are based on good communication and relationship-building. This activity also needs the technical support of record-keeping, preparation of materials and reports, and activity tracking (donor retention will be addressed in another chapter—and we strongly urge attention to this part of fundraising because it's easier and more cost-effective to keep donors than to find new ones with whom to develop a mutually beneficial relationship).

In order to find a diverse donor pool, first consider all possible donors. At this point, never say, "Oh, I don't think they would give to us." Consider the possibilities. In making a list, include the following:

- Individuals (who give more than 80% of all donations in developed countries, such as the U.S.).
- Foundations—local, national, international.
- Businesses—local, national, international.
- Government at all levels.
- Organizations (that collect money to then distribute it according to guidelines, such as the United Way in the U.S.).

- Churches (that may wish to have your organization accomplish something they themselves cannot do because you have what they don't—resources such as personnel and knowledge).
- Associations (groups of professionals in a certain field, such as travel agencies or physicians, who may at times wish to help projects).

Of course, it's also possible to receive funds from sales or fees for service, or similar business-like endeavors, but in this chapter we will discuss philanthropic donations only.

Once a list of all possible donors has been compiled—and this should have input from board members, all employees, other volunteers, friends of the organization, and, of course, the fundraiser—it's time to determine which prospects would be most likely to give. To qualify donors, consider three aspects:

- What connection does the prospect have to your organization? Has he or she had an experience with your organization, or been involved in some way, or worked in humanitarian efforts? Is there a philosophy which connects the prospect to your organization's goals and activities, such as the desire to do good? What connection can you identify?
- What interest does the prospect have in your organization's projects, activities, and achievements?
- Is the prospect capable of making a donation and, if so, how much? Equally important to consider: is the prospect philanthropic? We appreciate all gifts, including the proverbial widow's mite, and need the large gifts. Asking for the appropriate amount is also important in a funding request, and this evaluation will aid in preparing for such a request.

A key element in identifying the best prospects is to determine motivations for giving. While cultural, regional, or religious differences do occur on occasion, most human motivations for giving are surprisingly universal. Some of these are to:

- Make a difference.
- Be involved in something larger than one's self.
- Accomplish more than just one person can do.
- Have a sense of belonging.
- Give back (to a cause or type of organization that once helped the donor).
- Fulfill a religious obligation.

Many more motivations have been identified through research. Once motivations have been identified, they are one more element on which to base a relationship and make a case for support.

Some prospect research may be required in order to learn enough information about the potential donor. This should be done carefully, selectively (acquiring only the information needed),

ethically, and accurately. Always ask yourself, “Why do we need this information?” The answer should be, “In order to understand the prospect’s connection to your organization, his/her ability to donate, and the interests which match your organization’s work.” Information can be acquired by asking volunteers and friends about the prospect, searching the Internet and newspapers as well as other printed material, and, of course, from the donor him- or herself, which occurs naturally in many cases while developing a relationship between the prospect and the organization.

A good database is highly essential and is the beginning of the development and use of such technological support. If a database is not available for purchase, study models and develop your own, creating a document that can be manipulated easily, is accessible to those who need the information and will also enter or modify information, and is individualized so that the right information which the organization needs can be stored.

Generally people in any culture, nation, or of any religion truly want to help others. Our task as fundraisers is to find these people (or organizations, which are represented by people), show them the possibilities, tap into their interests, and ask them appropriately on behalf of your programs.