



## 14 IDEAS To Energize Donor Relations

### Information

*If donors receive meaningful information they will continue to give and will make increasingly generous contributions.*

### Listen!

**Our donors are trying to tell us how to raise more money.**

Specifically, they are trying to tell us that they will give again, and will increase their gifts, if we will just pay attention. **Pay attention to them.**

In her book, *Donor-Centered Fundraising*, fund development professional Penelope Burk reveals the results of an extensive study on donor relations. The vast majority of donors, she says, appreciate recognition but what they really want is more meaningful information. Comments collected from surveying some 13,000 donors across the U.S. further revealed this amazing notion: *If donors receive meaningful information they will continue to give and will make increasingly generous contributions.*

### Consistently, this is what donors said they needed:

- Prompt, personalized acknowledgment of their gifts
- Confirmation that their gifts have been set to work as intended
- Measurable results from their past gifts prior to being asked for another contribution

### What are our donors telling us?

#### They just want to know that we know them.

- ... that we recognize their partnership in our mission.
- ... that they are making a difference (which is what we told them they would do if they sent a gift in response to our appeal, remember?)

***It sounds so simple. We have such good intentions.  
Yet, our customer service is unsatisfactory.  
Let's put on the donor hat for a moment.***

When I make a gift, I expect sincere thanks, evidence of making a difference, and stories about people helped through my gift.

I expect the organization's staff to be capable, knowledgeable, efficient and respectful of my time.

I expect an accurate accounting of my giving history.

I am hopeful for a good overall experience from start to finish.

If I am disappointed, I may not say so in words; more than likely, my giving will decrease or cease.

Worse yet, I may mention my disappointment to another potential supporter.



# 14 IDEAS

## To Energize Donor Relations

### Communication

*Don't waste an opportunity to make progress with each connection.*

### 14 Ideas to Energize Donor Relations

#### Acknowledge your donors...

**Idea 1: Thank you calls from staff and board**

- Need to be prompt
- Rewarding for all

**Idea 2: Hand-written note of thanks**

- Post-it note on a standard letter
- Extra note/letter written from CEO or board director
- K-I-S-S. Just thanks, not a lengthy message that begins to sound like another appeal.

**Idea 3: Photos**

- Carry a camera!
- Photograph volunteers at work
- Photograph donors with clients, students, patients
- Share prints with a thank you letter
- Email images to your volunteers the very next day with a big thanks
- For corporate groups, be sure the boss gets a copy, too

**Idea 4: Client Testimonials...stories from those who benefit, in their own words**

- Students who receive scholarships
- Youth who get to attend a week of summer camp
- Doctors and patients who benefit from a new high-tech medical device
- Caretakers on the front lines who have the supplies they need

**Idea 5: Meaningful, measurable information between solicitations**

- Measurable results should include both qualitative & quantitative components
- This is the ultimate form of acknowledgement for donors

### Communicate with your donors

**Idea 6: Begin each day by making one appointment. This could include**

- Telephone call to a donor
- Writing a letter that asks for an appointment with a donor
- Asking a volunteer to set up an appointment for you
- Show donors you value their time by preparing one or two things to discuss, or news to share, on a cultivation call. Don't waste an opportunity to make progress with each connection.

**Idea 7: Share Client mini-stories**

- Prepare several different stories about individuals your organization has helped. Tuck a half-page into a thank you letter or other correspondence. (2 or 3 paragraphs)

**Idea 8: Send an email greeting with an update or invitation**



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### Recognition

*Recognize partnerships  
and how they are  
making a difference.*

**Idea 9:** Invite Donors to designate their gifts. This builds loyalty, especially among new donors.

**Idea 10:** Follow up calls after events

- Make timely calls to guests who were new, had questions, showed interest in a particular aspect of the organization's work, or volunteered to help in some way

**Idea 11:** Embrace (planned) Spontaneity!

- Delight donors with an out-of-the-blue communiqué
- Beyond the usual holiday and birthday cards, send a message from the cruise ship, mountaintop or national monument! Prepare a mail kit for the executive director or CEO who travels; include address list, note cards and stamps.

### Recognize your donors

**Idea 12:** Ask donors or prospects to write an article for your newsletter or website

- Many of your donors are interesting people with great stories to tell
- Professional advice
- Personal memories
- Practical matters
- Dare we consider...humor?!

**Idea 13:** Feature story about a donor and his/her gift

- The donor deserves the spotlight
- Story may inspire others
- Quotes from the donor about his/her motivation for the gift
- Quotes from the CEO or board chair about the difference the gift will make
- Quotes from those people who will benefit from the donor's generosity (patients, students, seniors, etc.)
- Remember to focus on the PERSON, not the gift itself. The person is generous, not the gift.

**Idea 14:** Ask Advice. People feel valued when you seek their advice

- Involve a donor in soliciting someone else as a way to engage and further cultivate interest.
- Invite a small group (3-4 people) to meet with your CEO in a brainstorming session about people, projects, and ideas.

*"Communicating results is the most important thing  
a fund raiser can do to ensure ongoing donor loyalty."  
- Penelope Burk*

**It's not easy, but it is simple.  
Donors just want to know that we know them.**

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