

Year Round Donors: Living out the Development Cycle

Speak to the real “you” that is your donor: See each supporter as an individual and a partner. Learn about them and personalize your communications and contacts.

Look what “we” have accomplished together: Year-round community building precedes year-round fundraising. The best way to lay the foundation for supporters to contribute several times over the course of a year is to build their connection to your organization’s programs and beneficiaries. Communicate, and whenever possible, show them, how their involvement makes your work and success possible. Always prioritize building involvement and engagement with your cause before asking for money: if your prospects personally believe in your mission, they will give more often and larger amounts than if they give simply out of respect for the asker.

Celebrate success together: Whatever the occasion, a graduation, a holiday party for clients, a health fair, or a press conference, invite your donors to be present so that they may see the work they help fund in action. Did you reach a program milestone? Enjoy a special success with a group of clients? Have an informal celebration, and invite some of your donors so that they can share in the credit and participate in the fun without it involving asking them for money.

We try harder: Craft your communications and events so that they will be special to the donor. Are you clear on how you can stick out from everyone else who is soliciting them? Have you gotten to know them well enough to understand what they would find rewarding about getting more engaged with your work? Try this exercise: name three things you might do to distinguish your work in the eyes of a donor, perhaps in terms of effectiveness, fun and even delight.

Birds of a feather: What do your supporters seek in a community? Social connections? Networking? The chance to meet other people who share a commitment to their issues? Create opportunities for your donors to speak to each other, whether online or, for instance, serving together on an event committee. Remember: at the right time, the most powerful asking is done peer to peer. Remember the sequence: stranger, friend, donor, repeat donor, and solicitor.

Share the joy: Don’t build a wall around your volunteers. View volunteers and in-kind contributors as donors and treat them that way. Where appropriate, bring your clients and former clients into the mix, too. Got successful program graduates? How about your charismatic staff members?

You can't say "thank you" too often: Some fundraising professionals advise saying thank you seven times before asking for money again! Provide constant and specific recognition in communications and events. Do you have a donor profile corner in your newsletter?

It's about us: Communicate with your supporters specifically as donors, not in the same way you do to clients or the general public. Tell stories of other donors that let them know they are in good company.

We are all in this together: Tell your story/case in a way that makes the organization's challenges their challenges—build joint ownership. Tie to bigger issues of care, compassion, coping with the times.

Elect a champion: Designate someone on staff to "own" the relationship with your donors and volunteers to assure they receive sufficient attention and that someone speaks up for their interests and involvement.

Hey, where's the asking in all this? If you take the suggested steps to further engage and more deeply cultivate your supporters, then making contributions for special appeals throughout the year will flow more naturally from that involvement. More asks than just your big event and end-of-year appeal can definitely be part of your year-round strategy. But first make sure your prospects have heard plenty about your successes and have registered your appreciation for their past support.