



## **Donors**

Donors are the people who support your organization. Support can range from time, volunteering, to in kind donations of items or services, to financial contributions. As a non-profit, donors are perhaps your most valuable resource. Donors allow you to create stability, sustainability and widen your sphere of influence. They are the backbone of every non-profit.

Learning how to engage with your donors, which projects they are most interested in and learning to be a good steward of this incredibly valuable resource can take some time. Here are some pointers to help you increase donor involvement.

### **Building a Donor Base**

There are several approaches to building a donor base. Each has benefits, each has challenges. In order to be successful, you must find the one which works for you and your organizations.

### **Donor**

A donor is anyone who contributes their time, treasure and talents on behalf of the organization. This could be through an introduction to a financial donor, a well written opinion editorial in a newspaper or the steadfast volunteer who comes every week to clean. A donor is anyone who leverages their skills to make a positive impact on your organization.

### **Defining your Donor Base**

Most agencies think of donors as the people who make financial contributions to an organization.

Financial contributions are vital to the survival of any organization, but what about the people who donate their time and talents? What about those who share your message with others and build awareness? What about the social media savvy influencers who have a large audience and share your message? These individuals are all donors as well and without their work, your organization would falter.

In order to know what area of donors you currently have a deficit in, or the areas where perhaps some thinning out needs to happen, you must first know the areas you need support. Creating a support matrix will allow you to first list all the services, donations, and man hours needed.

Once you have a clear picture of the needs of your organization, you can begin to plug in the donors you currently have.

Be sure to only plug donors in the areas they have shown interest in, do not assume that because they work in a certain area they will want to volunteer in that area.

Oftentimes, donors want to work in areas they do not work in full-time, for many this is a way to develop and practice a new skill, try a job change out, or expand their resume. Whatever the reason for donating their time, treasure, or talent, as long as they are doing a good job and following your policies, place donors where they want to volunteer.



## **A Well-Balanced Donor Base**

Just as in life it takes people with a wide variety of talents to make an organization successful. Donors donate for a variety of reasons. What is important, is not the reason, but how you leverage their skills, the gratitude you show and how you protect your greatest asset. It is also vital you create a well-developed and well-balanced donor base.

Donors are a resource; you must be very careful to never overuse nor become overly dependent on the resource.

Remember, donors will come and go, interests and passions will change, and only a rare few will walk the journey with you.

A well-balanced donor base is one in which each area of your organization has ample support and help, you receive a minimum of 10%-15% of your annual revenue from donors, and your current donors are continuously introducing new people to your organization. As with any resource, you need to know how much you can respectfully ask of a donor, never push their limits or boundaries, and always be sure to show gratitude and to respect their boundaries.

## **Grassroots Approach**

By far, this is my favorite approach. In this approach, you build a small group, 5-10 people, who then commit to sharing the organization's story with 5-10 people, who then share the story with 5-10 people and so on.

This is a historical method for raising awareness, creating change and increasing the donor base. The idea is to start locally, to begin with the people affected by the problem. Train them how to share the story in the most impactful way possible, train them to ask people if they would be willing to share the message with others. You are empowering the people most affected to share their story.

Through this approach, your clients and advocates raise awareness and bring people together. These people are your donor base.

## **Approaching Potential Donors**

Building a donor base can also be done through individual asks. Should you know a company or person has interests similar to the organization's interests and purpose, scheduling a meeting to discuss a potential donor partnership is almost always successful.

When preparing for the meeting, be sure to research the person or organization, learn what their interests and passions are, and if they have supported your agency in the past be sure to have that data too.

Remember in the meeting, it is always best to ask what the donor needs prior to making an ask. Your goal is to build a relationship, to invest in them before you make any requests. This will show trust and integrity on your part.



### **Needed Marketing Materials**

When approaching a donor, it is always important to have organizational literature with you. As you build the relationship, as you invest in them, you will want to leave pieces of information they can review.

The most important pieces of information to leave are current Year-End Reports, a brochure outlining all programs and services and finally a donor brochure listing the many ways they can become involved in your organization.

It is important you leave information about your agency, information which shows how many people you served, what goals were met, and how you used your resources. Your goal is to inform and create interest, you want the donors to ask you for more information, you want to be so busy getting to know them, their interests, passions and needs, that you don't talk about your organization. Make them ask for more, it will show your integrity and the value you place on them.

### **Honoring Donors**

Donors who choose to volunteer should receive an application, a job description and interview. Once you determine that the donor is a good volunteer for you, you must then treat them in a respectful and professional manner. All volunteers should have a job description, completed application, and receive annual reviews. In addition, all volunteers should receive a formal thank you once a year. This thank you can be a luncheon, a thoughtful card, a picture or some other small token of your appreciation.

### **Donors who make In-Kind or Financial Contributions**

These donors should also receive an annual thank you as well as an annual tax receipt. It is important you honor all donors but do not spend a lot of money on these thanks. Donors are more interested in genuine thanks than a huge affair. If donors suspect you have spent a lot of money on the thanks, they will begin to wonder why they are donating to your organization.

These are just some simple pointers to help you increase your donor base.

Each organization has its own culture which should ultimately guide the way you engage donors.