eGuide

Quick Guide to Donor Acquisition

Network for Good®

The Best Place to Find New Donor Prospects for Your Nonprofit

Identify and prioritize prospects.

Finding promising prospects is a major component of fundraising. As a first step, it can be helpful to develop a profile of your target audience and generate lists of people, groups, businesses, foundations, and other individuals who have participated and benefited from your work. These lists should be reviewed by a small committee, if not your entire board of directors.

Simply put, your organization needs to be constantly finding new prospects and putting them into your cultivation system. But where can you find a steady stream of new prospects year in and year out, who are at least open to hearing about your mission? The single best place to find new donor prospects is inside your current donors' rolodexes.

Recognize donor motivations.

Individuals and organizations have very specific reasons why they choose to give to your group. Identifying donor motivations is essential to targeting fundraising appeals. Identifying motivations can be a continuing task, and each time a new fundraising activity is designed, you should review generic motivations to be certain that the right prospects and interests are being paired.

Think in Terms of “Two Asks”

While development professionals spend a great deal of time talking about making asks, we’re generally only talking about the “first ask,” which is asking for money. We meet new prospects, cultivate them, and then, when the time is right, ask them to support our organizations with monetary gifts.

Far too often, we don’t ever get to the “second ask,” which is just as important as the first one: “Who else do you know who might be interested in learning more about our organization?” This second ask will form the major portion of your strategy for finding a never-ending supply of new prospects.

Of course, you don’t want to make both asks at once… cultivate your donors, and then ask them to make a monetary gift. Then steward them, and keep getting them more involved. Later, as part of your stewardship process you should ask them to open up their own rolodex to help you find new donors for your non-profit.

Think Like a Salesperson

Doing fundraising is different from being a salesman in many ways… but development professionals can learn from our counterparts in the sales world. One concept we can learn is the idea of a “referral.”

Good salespeople are constantly asking their current customers and others in their network for referrals… introductions to people that might also want to buy the product or service the salesman is selling. You’d be surprised at just how often current customers will refer new customers to their salesperson. In fact, in many businesses (such as real estate and insurance), referrals can make up a majority of a salesperson's new business each year.

Of course, when great salespeople ask for referrals, they aren't asking just for a name. They want their current client *to introduce them* to their friends and colleagues by way of a meeting, a call, or at least an email. This type of introduction reinforces to the new prospects that the salesperson is trustworthy and has a great product that might be helpful.

When Did You Last Ask for Referrals?

When was the last time you talked with your current donors to ask them to open up their own rolodexes and introduce you to their friends, neighbors, clients, vendors, and colleagues? And no, asking for "new names" in the middle of a board meeting or event host committee meeting doesn't count. How many of your board members and donors have you sat with, one-on-one, as part of a cultivation meeting, and directly asked, "Can you introduce me to two or three of your colleagues who might also be interested in learning more about our work?"

If you're not doing that, it is highly likely that you are having trouble keeping your prospect pipeline full. I always advise every non-profit I work with to make the "second ask" (or the "referral ask") a standard part of the cultivation / stewardship process for donors and friends.

So, to summarize, the best sources of new donor prospects for your non-profit are your current donors, supporters, volunteers, friends and board members. Cultivate them correctly, then ask for referrals, and watch your prospect list skyrocket!

Four Critical Steps to Acquiring New Donors

Mobilize your network.

Your role as a Chief Everything Officer is to rally the troops and get them to buy in to the importance of finding new donors (and yes, you need to reach out to your network too.)

Tell your story.

Get your nonprofit out there. Update your website, create a newsletter that people can subscribe to on your site, get active on social media, attend networking events, pound the pavement, and speak to anyone who will listen!

Enable others to share.

Encourage, empower and reward people for sharing about your nonprofit.

Ask for support rather than money

Get people engaged with your organization before making the ask.