

Advancing Your Skills: Engaging Your Donors

According to recent research from the Veritus Group, there are three main factors that donors use to choose a charity to support financially - results, trust, and personal connection. Donors are looking for meaningful relationships with the organizations they support, not transactions. Mobilizing your executive leadership, board, and full staff to build more effective relationships with your donors will not only improve fundraising results, but it will also help build a culture of philanthropy in your organization by increasing understanding and engagement in the fundraising process. Start with these helpful tips:

TIP: Make it Meaningful

The most important thing you can do is get to know your donors. Donors want to be your partners; they are looking for a meaningful connection with you and your mission. Share your organization's plans, struggles, and opportunities. Ask for their opinions. Genuinely listen. Board members and executive leadership may hesitate to ask donors for their opinions for fear it will obligate them. Remember, we ask for advice because we want to know answers we may not have thought of, not for definitive conclusions. Donors who have a trusting relationship will know and understand that. Be clear about what you need from them, their honest advice, and how you plan to use it to inform a final decision.

TIP: Make it Personal

Get to know who your donors are and why they give. Ask questions. Be curious. Pay attention to the little things and remember them. Communicate the way the donor prefers - letter, phone, email, or text. Consider location, time of day, transportation, and parking when planning a visit. Remember birthdays, family events, and personal information. Share ideas and resources on things you have discussed or issues they have expressed interest in. Engage them in your work by giving them opportunities that match their interests and talents.

TIP: Follow-up Builds Trust

There is no better way to break trust than with a broken promise. Do what you say you will do and don't over-promise if you can't deliver. Be comfortable with "I don't know, but I will find out," and then follow-up with the correct information promptly. Always be honest, even when it is uncomfortable. If you make a mistake, own it, or if you are unsure, admit it. Honesty and transparency will deepen your donors' trust in you and your organization.

TIP: Use Technology

Assign a relationship manager to each major and planned gift donor and prospect in your donor base. The relationship manager plans the overall strategy and develops goals for that donor, but others play a role in the process. Every interaction with a donor should be tracked, every phone call, email, letter, and visit should be in your database with a contact report. Capture all personal data that is shared. Use reminders for future contacts and follow-up. When everyone who is interacting with your donors is documenting those contacts, your fundraising strategy will be better informed and successful.