

Are you losing your valuable donors? Would you like fundraising to be easier and less stressful? Would you like to have fun while you fundraise?

Putting in place a “Donor Retention Plan” is a very real opportunity for you to enjoy raising more funds. You can involve everyone in your organisation, and it doesn’t have to cost a lot of money to implement some of these retention strategies, whereas prospecting for new donors nearly always costs more.

Donor retention is all about building a relationship with your donors and giving them a reason to continue giving.

Ten top tips for retaining donors

- 1 Develop a special welcome pack for new donors. For example, you can include a handwritten thank you letter, some case studies of people you work with and an invitation to your next open day or event.
- 2 Plan a “thank-a-thon” in which board members, staff and volunteers call donors simply to thank them for their donation.
- 3 Let your donors know how their money was used. This is usually the one thing donors want more than anything else.
- 4 Invite donors to become a monthly donor and give them an incentive to do so (e.g. concert or movie ticket, or the chance to win something). Think about what might be of value to your donors, but easy for you to provide as a thank you.
- 5 Invite donors to a donor recognition event, such as a cocktail party or luncheon and at the event talk about how their support has helped you achieve your outcomes and what your vision for the forthcoming year is. (Tip: Don’t ask for any money at these events).
- 6 Tom Ralser (author of ‘ROI for Non-Profits’) suggests seeing donor gifts as investments from investors rather than donors is a good strategy. That means emphasising to donors your ability to be efficient and make an impact with their donation. You don’t have to forego asking for donations on an emotional level, but you also need to prove that their donation will be used wisely.
- 7 Run some focus groups for donors who give smaller amounts. Use the focus groups to find out more about this group and what would encourage them to get more engaged in your organisation.
- 8 Make sure that you communicate with your donors using happy, cheerful, and energetic language. That doesn’t mean you can’t present your organisation’s fears, challenges and needs, but you should do it in a way that makes people feel excited about supporting you to overcome them.

Donor Retention Tips

- 9 Plan ways you can ‘upsell’. All this means is moving your donors from either small or one-time givers, to more frequent or substantial donors. You do this by looking for different and additional ways to engage your donors financially. But beware, never do this in a tacky or aggressive way, make the upsell valuable and genuine.
- 10 Provide consistently outstanding customer service. Treating donors as important ‘partners’ demonstrates courtesy and it makes them feel valued. Most importantly good customer service builds trust and respect between your organisation and your donors. Make outstanding customer service your number one priority and you will reap the rewards!

Checklist

- Do we treat donors respectfully every time they encounter our organisation and people?
- Do we know who our donors are and what their needs and desires are?
- Do donors know how their money was used by our organisation?
- Do we thank donors promptly and consistently?
- Do we have a Donor Retention Plan?
- How often does our organisation meet or communicate with donors throughout the year?
- Does our organisational culture promote that everyone in the organisation has a role to play in building relationships with donors and supporters?

Appreciation can make a day—even change a life, Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.
Margaret Cousins

Further reading

- Newmana, G. E., & Shen, J. (2012). The counterintuitive effects of thank-you gifts on charitable giving. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 33(5), 973-983.
- Shang, J., & Croson, R. (2006). The impact of social comparisons on nonprofit fund raising. *Research in Experimental Economics*, 11, 143-156.
- Quelch, J. A., & Jocz, K. E. (2011). Respect your customers. *Leader to Leader*, 61, 36-42.

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