

Sustained Donor Engagement, and Leveraging Events to Foster Greater Donor Relations.

Purpose of the discussion:

Engage your donors in more activities and particularly more meaningful activities throughout the year in order to build stronger relationships with them and to improve the results and reliability of asks when they do occur. I.e., develop a system of sustained donor engagement to improve the results of fundraising events.

Why you should:

- Donor relations consist of every interaction between asks for donations, which includes events.
- Awareness and support of non-event development functions improves the relative success of fundraising events.
- Hosting other, non-fundraising events helps to deepen relationships between donors and your organization and improves the success of fundraising events.

Types of Events:

In addition to the traditional fundraising event, plan for and incorporate donor appreciation events and donor acquisition events into your complete donor relations cycle.

Touches:

Any interaction with a person; including email, telephone calls, coffee meetings and more. Try to pepper them throughout the donor relations cycle as you would various interactions with a close friend.

Identifying Unique Opportunities for Heightened Donor Engagement:

Work through the following questions with your team and select donors to help identify unique and interesting organizational characteristics around which to base memorable donor engagement opportunities:

1. Describe your ideal donor.
2. Why do your donors and/or volunteers become involved with your organization initially?
3. What does your organization do that is different from others in your segment or specialty?
4. What are the things that you can offer that a donor can only gain access to through board or staff interaction?
5. Is your physical space unique or does it somehow lend itself to interesting experiences? If yes, how?
6. Is there a well-known or well-respected member or friend of your organization or cause who might be willing to lend their name or time to support your organization?

7. Are your team, and particularly your organization's senior leadership and board well read and knowledgeable about your area of focus?
8. Is exploitation of your constituency a concern and are they therefore "off limits" for donor interactions?
9. What events (or elements of events) have been well attended or enjoyed by your ideal donors?
10. What events (or elements of events) have not been well attended or enjoyed by your ideal donors?
11. Put yourself in your donor's place. What are the types of things that you would find interesting?

Focusing on your ideal donor, what are the reasons and differentiating characteristics of your organization that other donors might find interesting and engaging?

If your space doesn't lend itself to hosting memorable events because of its physical characteristics or the activities you perform in the space, focus more on the "what" of your organization when planning engagements and less on the "where". Look for opportunities to involve your donors in the programmatic side of your organization either as a volunteer or observer.

If direct interaction with your clients/programs is not possible, look for ways that donors can become more knowledgeable about what your organization does and who it serves and help them to become a vocal advocate for your cause and/or mission.

Attend the events of other organizations to get new ideas for how others are maintaining the interest of their donors.

Pulling it all together:

Identify activities that staff, donors, board members and other volunteers can share responsibility for. Work to pre-define as many processes as possible and leverage the skills of others to reliably hand them off. Put in place a method for reliably performing these activities and processes consistently for every donor throughout the year and create a culture where sustained donor engagement is the norm.

Finally, schedule a recurring meeting with your team to carefully review the effectiveness of the program you develop. Experiment with different approaches until you find a formula that works for you, and be prepared to continue experimenting over time to account for and react to evolving circumstances.

Questions? Need help identifying engagement opportunities?
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