



4 Stewardship Essentials to Inspire Your Annual Givers

By Bonnie Meyer

From minor donations to larger annual contributions, annual giving is the beating heart of many nonprofit organizations. Of course, it's always exciting to receive a planned gift or a major donation that pushes you past a specific campaign goal, but your annual fund provides the ongoing general operating fund revenue your nonprofit uses to remain operating and allocate as the organization sees fit.

Furthermore, as the nonprofit sector recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with a recorded 10% increase in overall donors, it's especially important to ride the charitable momentum and cultivate the relationship with your annual givers.

So, to not only retain your annual donors but guide them to higher levels of giving, let's explore four powerful donor stewardship strategies you can immediately begin implementing.

1. Segment and Organize Donors by Giving Tiers

Annual giving isn't just made up of small donors. Annual givers include a diverse cross-section of supporters who range from low-dollar givers to major donors.

That's what makes donor segmentation such a critical tool — segmenting donors by their affinity, potential and capacity to give allows you to focus your stewardship efforts on top prospects. This will help you visualize annual givers' place on the donor

pyramid, brainstorm strategies to steward them upward and invest wisely in your outreach efforts.

In particular, high-value prospects who have shown their commitment through annual giving are great candidates for stewardship into major gift territory.

2. Create a Stewardship Matrix

Once you've organized your annual donors into giving segments, you can start creating a stewardship matrix, which is a tool that breaks down how and when your nonprofit will reach out to donors based on their giving and engagement histories. This dedicated schedule can take a big logistical load off of your development team's shoulders, giving them a concrete plan and budget for communicating to each kind of donor.

This can be especially effective for stewarding mid-level donors, who contribute up to 35% of your annual revenue, yet often lack dedicated stewardship plans.

As you're building out your stewardship matrix, outline the major types of appeals and communications that each donor segment will receive. For example, personalized appeals, event invitations and even appreciative phone calls are powerful outreach methods that you'll want to organize based on your resources and each donor's importance.

Additionally, pay especially close attention to your stewardship strategies and appeals leading up to your end-of-year campaigns, as roughly a third of annual giving occurs in December alone.

3. Leverage Multichannel Outreach

Did you know that social media is the channel that most inspires millennials and Gen Z donors to give while email remains the most inspirational giving channel for baby boomers? With a multichannel outreach strategy, you can create multiple touch points to reach all annual donors through their preferred channels, maximizing annual giving.

Pay close attention to these major outreach channels:

Email. This is not only an effective channel for appeals, but also regular donor communications. From newsletter blasts to event satisfaction surveys, email communication is the cornerstone of your ongoing relationship with annual givers.

Direct mail. This may seem like an old-fashioned outreach strategy in our tech-driven world. However, with 13 times greater open rates than email, this intimate channel continues to be a critical fundraising and stewardship tool.

Social media. From its complex community-building features to its ability to support different kinds of multimedia, social media is a versatile platform to engage and inspire annual donors.

Of course, these aren't the only paths you should rely on to reach your donors and rally their support. For instance, I've already mentioned phone calls as another tool to engage major and mid-level givers. That being said, email, direct mail and social media are leading channels that many of your stewardship materials will pass through over the course of the year.

4. Go Beyond Monetary Appeals

While your current aim may be to expand annual giving, stewardship is a complex process that goes beyond just asking donors for money. Your ultimate goal is to strengthen a donor's bond with your organization and increase their lifetime value, which can be jeopardized if you only hound them for gifts and fail to engage them with other stewardship methods.

For example, be sure to pepper your outreach with these types of outreach methods.

Engaging event opportunities. These can include community activities, ceremonies and behind-the-scenes tours.

Impact reports. Keep donors informed and inspire them to continue their support.

Stories. These can be from other donors, volunteers or communities your nonprofit is helping.

Volunteer program opportunities. This can be based on areas in which donors may be interested.

Donor appreciation. This can range from email acknowledgments to long-lasting displays of recognition.

How often you send these materials and the extent of your outreach will all depend on your stewardship matrix and each donor's priority to your organization. However, all donors should be given a diverse array of content to bring them closer to your organization and build long-term donor relationships.

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