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The Responsive Fundraising Playbook

28 Practical Plays
for Increased Generosity

The Responsive Fundraising Playbook

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Section 1:

The Need for Responsive Fundraising

Responsive fundraising puts the donor at the center of fundraising. By leveraging signals from each individual, your nonprofit can create personalized donor journeys to treat all donors like major donors. The result is deeper connections and increased generosity.

But how does it work? What should you actually do?

We answered those questions for you in our ebook, The Responsive Fundraising Blueprint. We encourage you to download The Blueprint to learn the details of the current generosity crisis and how leading organizations are responding. If you've already read that book, feel free to skip ahead to Section 2. If you haven't, read on for a quick overview.

A Common Nonprofit Experience

Diana felt like she was shouting into the void. She was the development director at a nonprofit that provided services to people experiencing homelessness. It seemed like her tried-and-true fundraising techniques were not quite so "true" anymore. Each year, the small and mid-sized donor pool shrank.

Things that used to work weren't delivering like they had in the past. Her email appeals remained unopened. Event attendance was down. Her nonprofit's needs were growing, but she was struggling to reach her goals.

Diana hadn't changed her fundraising techniques — something must have changed with her donors. She knew the problem couldn't be that people were suddenly less generous or didn't care about homelessness.

So what was it?

The Current Generosity Crisis

Does Diana's situation sound familiar to you? Then you're in good company.

Nonprofits of all sizes and missions are experiencing a generosity crisis. Despite their best efforts, fundraisers can't seem to improve generosity and the numbers prove it. Small and mid-sized donors have declined by 25% in the last ten years . Donor retention hasn't topped 50% in a decade, and 76% of first-time donors will not make a second gift.

This crisis began in the early 2000s.

Suddenly:

- Social media vastly widened personal networks and connected people around the world. Now, each of us has access to the person who sat behind us in high school Chemistry and our fourth cousins, as well as our close friends and family. We're in an age of hyper-connectivity.

- Smartphones and mobile technology connected us seamlessly to the digital world everywhere we went. Now, we can find the answers to any questions we have about any topic, organization, or person.

- Automated communications and behavior tracking software offered personalized experiences to everyone. Remember when it was a little surprising when Amazon suggested other books you might like, based on your purchases? Now it's expected everywhere.

Technology transformed the way we learn, socialize, and make decisions. In a relatively short period of time, our expectations and preferences changed.

Unfortunately, many nonprofits haven't evolved with the current landscape. They rely on fundraising techniques created for a world that doesn't exist anymore. Most focus the majority of their attention on major donors, and send impersonal mass messages to everyone else. These small and mid-size givers don't connect with the generic messages or engage with the nonprofit, and eventually they drift away.

The Modern Donor

Like Diana concluded, the problem isn't that donors are less generous. People are capable of tremendous generosity. The issue is that they're distracted, busy, and surrounded by personalization. Nonprofits who don't earn their attention and respect their time lose their engagement.

Donors stay where they feel connected, but traditional fundraising approaches don't offer meaningful connections for everyone. The result is decreasing donor retention. Donors don't feel like part of a community, they feel anonymous, so they go somewhere they can be celebrated and thanked for their generosity.

Why donors stop giving Lack of communication & connection	Why donors continue Feeling connected & confident
• Few acknowledgments and limited transparency • Poor and unhelpful communication • Inappropriate asks and impersonal messages	• Accessible and consistent communications about impact • Quick responses and helpful information • Personalized attention and support
Source: Adrian Sargeant Managing Donor Defection: Why should donors stop giving?	

A Fresh Lens: The Responsive Framework

We know donors need to feel connected and engaged, regardless of their gift size. But how do we provide a "major donor experience" to everyone?

Responsive fundraising.

This approach turns the traditional nonprofit-donor relationship completely upside-down. The donor sets the terms, not the organization. They choose how and where to interact with the nonprofit, and the organization responds appropriately.

The Responsive Fundraising Framework relies on three actions: Listen, Connect, Suggest.

- The organization **listens** to donors, identifying their preferences and interests.
- They **connect** with meaningful communication through the most relevant channels.
- The organization **suggests** ways to engage further, including giving.

If it feels familiar, that's because you're likely already practicing The Responsive Framework with major donors. You determine their interests, build a relationship, and make an appropriate ask. You don't send an impersonal message to someone you're asking for $50,000. Responsive fundraising uses technology to universalize the major donor experience.

Technology transformed the way we learn, socialize, and make decisions.

Section 2:

The Rise of Personalization

How do you choose a new doctor, find a baker for your wedding cake, or buy a new car?

For most of us, the answer is radically different than it was twenty years ago. We read reviews, solicit opinions from our friends and family on social media, and make educated choices based on our own research. The democratization of information brought by the internet, plus the popularity of social media platforms created a much more discerning, empowered consumer population. Now that institutions don't hold all the keys to information, consumers can discover the truth instantly.

Successful brands responded to the new dynamic by improving customer experiences through automation. **They created personalized experiences to build trust and loyalty**. They prioritized value and convenience over everything else. Online retailers now send emails with exclusive deals when you abandon your cart. They make suggestions for other items you might like based on products you browsed. Streaming serves notify you with new releases you'll like, based on previous viewing. More and more, organizations are using the information available to create unique connections with each individual.

Donors have the same democratic access to information, and thus, are making decisions about nonprofits in a similar way. **Your donors trust people over institutions,** participate on their own terms. When they decide to engage, they expect it to be personal and relevant.

The Evolution of Fundraising

At first, these changes may seem overwhelming for nonprofits. But when you look at the history of fundraising over the last 100 years or so, you'll see that we've been heading in this direction for a long time. With each technological advance, fundraisers have shifted and adapted to connect with donors in new ways.

Before the 1950s, most fundraising was deeply rooted in communities. It involved door-to-door canvassing, in-person meetings, and small group action. Larger campaigns relied on letters, which were the primary means of communication. This fundraising was conversational and personal, but hard to scale.

As the 20th century progressed, new mass communication tools were adapted to facilitate fundraising. Radio and television made it possible to make mass appeals to a larger audience, but compromised the personal connection in most cases. At the turn of the 21st century, nonprofits used emails and social media campaigns to reach a global audience. The fundraising trend followed the same pattern: wider audiences, fewer personal connections.

But it's time to return to what made fundraising so powerful — the deep, personal relationships between donors and nonprofits.

Why Personalization Matters

Personalization doesn't just prevent you from alienating potential donors—it's essential for earning your donors' attention across the board. More than ever before, donors want to feel a part of the causes they care about most. They don't merely want to give, they want to engage on a deeper level.

Philanthropy is personal. The giving decisions people make are about more than money. For modern donors, donations are a statement about what they value, and who they are. The organizations and causes they support are part of their identity.

Each donor has their own reasons for supporting your organization that may not be addressed by a one-size fits all message. When you offer a personalized donor journey, instead of generic mass messaging, you'll honor their uniqueness, and inspire loyalty and trust.

The Technology You Need To Be Responsive

When Diana first decided to become responsive, she pictured sending emails one-by-one, and taking every $5 donor out for coffee. If that were how responsive fundraising worked, no one with more than ten donors would be able to do it.

Responsive fundraising relies on the smart use of technology, not a ton of individual actions. Personalized donor journeys are created with data and automation. To be responsive, you need technology to support you. Here are the three most important tools to equip your team with in order to be a responsive nonprofit.

1. Responsive CRM

Is your donor database essentially a data junk drawer? Do you find yourself digging around in it, looking for a piece of information you know you just looked at? This technology is limiting your ability to respond to your donors.

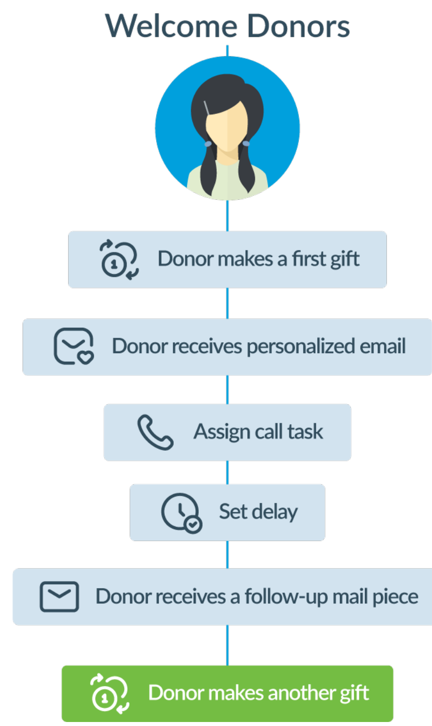
Instead of a junk drawer, you need something more powerful and user-friendly. A responsive CRM like Virtuous uses data to craft comprehensive donor profiles, robust reporting, engagement tracking, and predictive recommendations. It can signal when to make your next ask, identify your most important contacts to call, and even score your contacts based on social and wealth data.

The right CRM software will alleviate the demands of your team members, not add complexity to their daily responsibilities.

2. Marketing Automation

With marketing automation your supporters get the right communication at the right time, based on their behavior. You create workflows with automatic actions that are triggered based on donor behavior. Each sequence runs automatically to nurture donors to the next best step with your cause.

Automation makes it easier to connect with donors in a meaningful way on a regular basis, without spending all your time doing so. Emails, mail, social media, and calls can all be executed automatically, giving your team space to do the big-picture thinking necessary to create deeper connections and inspire greater generosity.



3. Data Enrichment

When you pull in data from other sources to supplement your own data, you make it richer and more useful. Data enrichment includes:

- Survey Responses – When donors give you additional information, keep it!
- Social Listening – Monitoring online conversations about your organization and cause, then taking action based on what you learn.
- Wealth Data – Prospect research and wealth screening enrich your data.
- Relationship Mapping – Understanding how your donors connect with each other, where they are geographically located, and how they may be grouped.

Responsive fundraising helps you treat all donors like major donors.

Section 3:

28 Responsive Fundraising Plays

Now that you understand The Responsive Framework and the new expectations from modern donors, let's talk about how to execute responsive fundraising.

Try these 28 responsive fundraising plays to start improving your donor relationships and increasing generosity. We've categorized them into Listen, Connect and Suggest, but feel free to get creative based on what you know about your donors. The more you try, the better you'll be at finding the right way to connect with all of your donors.

Responsive Fundraising Plays

Listen

How do you know what donors care about most? You listen.

Listening is the first part of The Responsive Framework, and it informs everything that follows. Before you can connect in a relevant way or suggest meaningful actions, you have to find out what your donors are interested in.

Play 1 : Talk Less, Listen More in Email

The fundamental shift to responsive fundraising, where the donor is at the center of all efforts, means your organization must resist the urge to tell donors what you think they should care about. Instead, seek out opportunities to hear from them.

New people engage with your nonprofit all the time, through events, email forms, social media, your website, peer recommendations, and even snail mail. You must be ready for them 24/7/365, and with responsive technology, you can be.

Establish two-way communication from the very beginning of the donor relationship. A three-part automated email series for new donors can help prioritize listening from your first conversations with the donor.

- Email 1: The first email welcomes the donor, sets up expectations, and asks about their preferences and interests. Allow your donors to tell you WHY they are passionate about your cause. Make sure the email is coming from a person (not "communications@mynonprofit.org"!) and encourages real responses. You can collect the answers via a survey or other form, but it's also important to encourage donors to reply directly to your email. This gives them the freedom to give the full context of their why, plus it immediately signals that they are connected to real people at your organization.

- Email 2: The second email acknowledges the inputs from the first email, and suggests a series of potential next steps with the cause (education, telling friends, etc.). It also offers the opportunity to chat with a staff person about how they can maximize their impact apart from just giving. Make sure that this email is sent in a timely manner — don't make donors wait a week to hear back from your team. Marketing automation tools make it easy to respond immediately.

- Email 3: The third email showcases the impact of your work and celebrates the donor's involvement, while still inviting a response to the email or encouraging a 1-on-1 call to talk about the work. Ensure that the impact directly aligns with the programs or causes they care most about. Remember, the modern donor doesn't want to know what you think they should care about. They want you to respond to the things that matter most to them.

By opening up a line of two-way communication with your first emails you:

- Signal that you are donor-centric and you value your donors as people.
- Learn what motivates your donors to give more quickly and efficiently.
- Create opportunities for donors to give more time, talent, and social capital based on their individual interests.

Play 2 : Tune Into Donor Signals

Everything a donor does and says about you is a signal. No single signal should inform your entire strategy, but together, the signals enable you to better understand each donor's intent. The result is personal connections that inspire loyalty and generosity.

There are many ways to listen to your donors, and each adds an important layer of context that can help your team create more effective responsive fundraising strategies. Use the following digital listening techniques help build a holistic, actionable view of each person in your database.

- Use lead forms on your website to gate downloadable assets. Include optional questions on the form to learn more about why each person is interested in your cause. Use tracking pixels to pre-fill form fields whenever possible to make the experience convenient for your donors, thus giving them time to answer your more involved questions.

- Use digital behaviors, like a website visits, email clicks, or online donations to gauge the engagement level and interests of each person. Good tracking tools (email platforms and web tracking pixels) allow you to attach activity to each donor, automatically tag donors based on the CTA or topic they engage with, and then automate follow up based on their activity. Ensure that you're listening to the engagement behavior on each follow-up communication, as well, to maintain relevancy and connection to your donors.

- Social listening provides a mechanism to track your donor's interest via their social profiles. Following your donors on social or automatically scraping their social feeds gives you the ability to find out who your donors are and what they care about without asking them to take any extra steps.

The value of collecting all these different signals simultaneously is to create a more comprehensive donor profile. With more information, you have the opportunity to personalize each engagement so that, over time, your fundraising is more relevant and effective.

Play 3 : Quarterly Surveys and Interviews

Responsive nonprofits regularly get formal feedback from their donors in the form of surveys and donor interviews. These engagements ensure that you are in tune with the passions of your donors and can deeply understand the reasons behind their commitment to your cause. The result is an ability to refine your fundraising strategy AND provide significant proof to donors that they have real input in your cause.

Use quarterly surveys to determine what issues/solutions motivate your donors. And always push yourself and your organization to go further with your questions. Ask about whether your programs resonate with donors regarding each issue. Don't shy away from the less-than-ideal answers, because all data inputs will help you be a better responsive fundraiser: Here's how to start.

- Create two segments: donors who've given in the last 12 months and those that have given in the last 36 months but not the last 12. Every four months you'll rotate the list and send the survey to 1/3 of each segment. This ensures you're seeking feedback from each individual on an annual basis through this method.

- Now, create a simple survey that asks the following questions:
  - On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to recommend ORG NAME to a friend or family member?
  - Why did you give the score above?
  - What could we do to improve your experience as a key supporter of ORG NAME?
  - What sparked you to give to ORG NAME?
  - For current donors: Why do you continue to give?
  - For inactive donors: Why did you stop giving in the last year?

- Then, put together a two email series that you'll use to invite the targeted donors to complete the survey. Make sure that you're using language and messaging that appeals to the donor segment and their specific interest. In our world of busy inboxes, relevant subject lines and valuable information is the key to conversions.

- Make sure to create an email that is sent to anyone who completes your survey. Thank them for their input, reiterate why you're asking and what you'll do with the feedback, and lets them know what to expect next. Ideally, you'd set this up to be sent out automatically after the donor gave their input.

- Be sure to have a follow-up plan. If a donor shares a low likelihood to recommend, how will you reconnect and learn more? If a donor praises your org, how will you thank them and suggest they get more deeply involved?

Remember, the longer it takes for you to follow up on your donors' generosity (including survey answers), the more likely it is that they will lose trust in your organization. The two-way relationship means that you need to be as engaged as they are.

Play 4 : Supplement with Third-Party Wealth, Demographic, and Social Data

It can be difficult to collect all the donor data that you'll need to connect more deeply with each person. After you've surveyed donors, watched their web behavior, and analyzed their giving history, there will likely still be a few data points that you'd like to know.

Thankfully, there is an abundance of public data available about your donors. Social media profiles, real estate data, corporate filings, public giving data, and other online data sources can all combine to give you a rich profile of each person in your database. If you're just starting with outside data sources we'd recommend integrating your CRM with the following:

- Wealth data through vendors like DonorSearch help provide insights into the financial capacity of each donor. Wealth data can provide charitable giving activity, real estate holdings, political giving, business affiliations, stock ownership, and more. Wealth data should update in your CRM automatically when a contact is entered. Once appended, it can be used to automatically segment donors, notify team members, or prioritize outreach.

- Similarly, social media scraping can be used to pull public data from social media platforms and other profile-based web sites into your CRM. Good social scraping uses your donor's email or home address to collect behavior and preference-based data from thousands of social media sites. Data should be automatically entered into your CRM in real-time, so that you always have the most accurate picture of each individual. This appended data should include images of the donor, links to their social profiles, employment and age information, etc. Social data can be used to fill out donor profiles, identify influencers in your database, or determine the interests and preferences of each donor.

Assign individuals on your team to regularly assess the data included in your donor profiles, like you would with survey results. The more time you dedicate to listening to each signal available to you, the easier it will be to create fundraising campaigns that work.

Play 5 : Pay Attention to Social Media

As a responsive nonprofit, you need to seek out channels that give you access to your current donors and any potential donors. Largely, that means a presence on social media that extends beyond an information distribution channel or a place to loudly promote new fundraising campaigns. Instead, use your organization's profiles to listen to the conversations around your cause, your donors, your organization, and the general sentiment towards generosity. Here are a few strategies to improve your social listening.

- Identify which of your donors are active on social media. Who has a large audience? Do you have any donors that actively participate in a prominent influencer's content? Once you know these details, you can use marketing automation to promote advocacy opportunities to these donors.

- Browse LinkedIn to identify good prospects in your donor base for business partnerships or matching gift opportunities.

- Follow your organization's hashtag or the conversation around your current fundraising campaigns. Who is most active in those exchanges? What can their conversations tell you about their passions or preferences?

- Ask questions on social media with at least one third of your posts. Who responds? What do they care about?

- Show up in Quora groups, discussions boards, or LinkedIn groups associated with your broad cause. Just listen and participate without promoting your nonprofit. What do people care about? What change do they want to see in the world?

Once you've listened, make sure to log your learnings in your CRM and use your findings to refine your overall messaging. When more of your team members can access a wealth of information on each donor, you give yourself better opportunities to come up with the big ideas that leave a lasting impression on your donors.

Play 6 : Map Relationships

Your donors don't exist in a bubble. They are members of communities, faith organizations, clubs, and schools. We know from previous generations that community-driven generosity is one of the more powerful forces in fundraising. When you consider these location-based relationships, you can give donors more personal suggestions and help build micro-movements for your cause. Here's how to get started with relationship mapping based on geography.

- Display all of your donors on a Google map using home and/or work addresses you have in their donor profile.
- Search for dense pockets of donors within a neighborhood or zip code.
- Look for commonalities between donors who make up those pockets. Be sure to prioritize commonalities that are based in motivations and values, rather than demographic data like age or occupation. Look for local groups that care about your cause, local faith congregation involvement, or a local influencer who is connected with all donors.
- Reach out to the committed influencers and see if they'd be willing to host a donor impact event in their community. Be sure that your initial outreach is highly personalized, based on the information you know. Highlight what the impact event can add to their own values, not what it can do for your nonprofit. Stay donor-centric in all communications.

This approach helps solidify your base of support in an area and capitalize on existing geographic momentum. Remember, giving is dramatically influenced by peers and local community. Capitalizing on existing relationships adds social proof and community to your donor cultivation strategy.

Play 7 : Ask Questions in Unexpected Places

Never miss an opportunity to ask your donors a question. Stay curious and encourage all your team members to remain so as well. From casual conversations at events to formal surveys, every communication is a chance to learn more about your donors.

- Evaluate the donor experience after they make a gift. What are you doing in that moment to advance your donor relationships? Use the online thank you page along with paper receipts to learn more. Include a short survey asking why the person gave and what they'd like to see in the future from your organization

- Send follow-up communications to everyone who answers the surveys that acknowledges their answers and sets expectations for how you'll use it, in what timeline and provide a new suggestion for getting more involved in your organization.

- Use the Net Promoter Score (NPS) question on receipts and confirmation emails to see how satisfied donors are with your organization. An NPS survey simply asks users to rate the question "How likely are you to recommend us to a friend?" on a scale of 1-10. It provides donors the opportunity to tell you about concerns so that you can try to remedy those issues before losing that donor for good. Report on NPS questions every nine to twelve months to measure donor experience, pick up additional signals, and learn about ways you can improve.

- Segment donors who give you a score of 9 or 10 on the NPS questions to enroll them in a donor advocacy engagement sequence. Provide relevant information and opportunities they can sign up for to be more directly involved in your work and programs.

- Ask donors who haven't given in 18 months or more for honest feedback about what changed and what you could have done better. Many times, lapsed donors don't feel heard or recognized. Listening to donors honest feedback might help re-acquire the donor but, more importantly, you can use what you learn to improve donor retention and engagement in the future.

Play 8 : Evaluate Your Feedback System

As Nicholas Ellinger pointed out in The New Nonprofit, good feedback systems:

- Are systems. They help you create a process for collecting, reviewing, and implementing feedback. Don't ask people for information you cannot implement into a plan with action items.

- Are simple and standardized. You're looking for easy and repeatable here. Remember, responsive fundraising is all about scaling your efforts to include more donors. If it is too complicated or dependent on nuanced information, you will likely abandon it for past habits.

- Give donors a reason to participate. Tell them why you're asking, using "because" phrases, as in "We're asking for your opinion, because we want you to be happy."

- Allow the user to pick the channel. Give people options for how they respond. Do they want to talk to a real-live human, or would they rather fill out a form online? Do they want to be anonymous? Encourage participation by accommodating a range of preference.

- Have follow-up. It doesn't feel great to give an opinion or answer a question and never hear back. In fact, to donors, it can feel like another way nonprofits are taking advantage of their generosity. Let people know you're listening by updating them on any changes you've made or consensus you've reached, responding to their specific concerns or questions, and even just thanking them for participating.

- Do your current feedback systems include these attributes? Find ways to refine your system to close the loop on donor feedback.

Play 9: Seek Donor Preferences & Group Donors By Personas

All the inputs you listen for will start to reveal common themes among your donors. Your survey data, social listening, behavior tracking, and communication indexing will work together to show you who your donors are and what they care most about. Soon, you'll be able to craft your unique donor personas, which can help you improve marketing automation, donor relationships and fundraising.

For example, an animal charity may have bird and cat people, or vegans and life-long pet owners. They may have a mix of Democrats and Republicans. Colleges have alumni, faculty, parents, and distant fans. Aid groups may have a combination of disaster relief people and regional advocates. Each group's preferences should inform their messaging and communications.

Here's how to create your donor personas.

- Once you have collected enough data (both over time and across your donor base), build a donor persona for each group. Include motivational data, engagement data, preferences, demographic information, and any other specific pieces of information that helps you get to know each segment.

- Use each donor persona to curate specific content and communications strategies that are highly personalized and relevant for that donor persona.

- Use targeted stories and statistics in direct mail appeals based on the persona of the person getting the letter. Make sure that you include messaging that you've verified will resonate with each person based on the persona they fit.

- Create landing pages on your website with content specifically targeted for each persona. Use Search Engine Optimization strategies to show up in searches by prospects who fit the criteria for that persona and are looking for new causes to support.

- Create email and web content based on topics that are most relevant to your donor personas. Identify what channels each persona prefers so that you can get the most return from each piece of content. Personalize your promotion of each video, blog, ebook, etc., based on donor personas so each person receives the best experience possible.

Responsive nonprofits use the data they have in order to make the most impact with each engagement. Donor personas are a critical step to ensuring that your donors convert on each action you suggest to them.

Listen:

A Practical Example

When Diana evaluated her feedback process, she found that she didn't give donors many opportunities to share their ideas and opinions. She implemented a new survey schedule, reaching out to donors every 9 months to solicit their feedback. She also added a quick, "Why did you give today?" form on the thank you page of her online giving experience.

Through the answers she collected, she discovered three distinct groups of donors within her larger donor pool:

- People who were most interested in the direct services the organization provided.
- People who were most interested in advocacy and resolving big-picture problems
- People who had volunteered with their religious group or workplace

As a result, Diana defined new donor personas and segmented her donors by persona in her CRM. She then began to think about how to appeal to each group with specific content or next steps.

Donors stay where they feel connected, but traditional fundraising approaches don’t offer meaningful connections for everyone.

Responsive Fundraising Plays

Connect

Connection is all about effective, relevant communication with each donor. It includes activities traditionally known as cultivation and stewardship. By applying what you've learned about your donors from your Listen plays, you can create connections that educate, engage and inspire your donors. Often, connection is where donors receive the most value as a supporter of your nonprofit.

For modern nonprofits, personal connection isn't just for your major donors. New technologies like marketing automation, predictive data analytics and web/social listening tools make it possible to personally connect with all donors.

These Connect plays will help you implement tactics that connect personally with all your donors and put your donors at the center of your fundraising.

Play 10 : Keep Your Communication Human

Nonprofits know that people can't form lasting connections with generic communications. But, without marketing automation, it's nearly impossible to scale personalized, genuine connections with each individual donor. Responsive nonprofits operate in sweet spot between automation and one-to-one communication.

You can build the human connection with your donors by adding warm, personalized elements to all your communications. Our friends at NextAfter have conducted many nonprofit email experiments, and they recommend humanizing your fundraising emails by:

- Sending your next fundraising email from a real person's name, not a generic organization email address, like "communications@organization.org." People are more likely to open something from a person instead of a faceless organization.

- Not focusing on the length of the message. Instead, write as much or as little as you need to convey what the need is, what the solution is, why a supporter must act to make it happen, and what happens if they don't.

- Only using images if they will strengthen the value of your appeal.

- Skipping your organization's standard email template for anything outside of your monthly letter. Send a plain text email like you'd send a friend whenever possible.

- Writing with a conversational tone and voice. Aim to sound like a real human being instead of a formal organization. Your email should feel like one person writing to one other person, not a mass message. Try writing a first draft using speech-to-text on your phone, or reading aloud your draft and correcting it to sound more natural.

Play 11 : Earn Trust, Don’t Rent or Steal Attention

Renting a list of contacts in order to send an acquisition mailing focused solely on your organization’s financial needs isn’t an effective way to connect with today’s donor. Organizations who rely on bombarding cold names with “me”-focused institutional messages aren’t building authentic relationships, they’re renting space in donors’ mailboxes. Donors didn’t decide to be on those lists and they don’t yet trust the organization sending them.

In today’s hyper-connected world, we are exposed to thousands of marketing messages a day. No one can possibly consume that much information in 24 hours. So, we ignore any message that comes from an organization we don’t know, trust, or have a personal connection to.

Today, donors have all the power. They turn to their friends, like-purposed community members, and peer reviews to find causes to support. They want to connect on their own terms, and rarely are those terms, “I’ll support whoever bought access to my address.”

Instead of randomly showing up in a donor’s mailbox, organizations need to earn trust by giving donors something of value. “Value” doesn’t mean tote bags or branded magnets. It’s about providing donors with meaning in a way that is relevant to them. Create value through your content, and donors will become more connected to your work and your story.

If your strategy does include buying list for acquisition, focus on how you are providing real value to your prospects. Make your offer about THEM not YOU. Remember, generosity begets generosity.

Try these tactics to make each direct mail piece more effective when you're sending to purchased lists.

- Audit the list before you send mailers. Do what you can to make connections between their information and your current donor list. Can you alter the messaging to be location-based? Is there value in making connections to a local social influencer? Any information you can include to make the message less generic will grab the attention of new contacts.

- Test the times that you send your direct mail pieces to purchased lists. Try to discover whether you make better connections with new contacts during seasons that aren't focused around giving. For example, don't try to create a relationship and ask for a financial gift during November and December when mailboxes are flooded. Instead, try fostering that relationship in the beginning of the year.

- Include a variety of calls-to-action on your direct mailers. Create a testing structure that reveals what new contacts are most likely to do upon receiving their first mail piece from you. Will they watch a video? Sign up for your newsletter? Follow you on social media? Give a gift? You'll see a much better return on your mail strategy if you find the right CTAs.

- Let unresponsive contacts go. Don't continue to send information to contacts who aren't responding to your efforts. Use your resources to cultivate relationships and optimize your current strategies to improve your return. Not all donors will want to support your cause, and that is totally fine! That means you can spend more time with the people who do.

Take a look at the growth the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has experienced via targeted content marketing to understand the value of earning trust rather than stealing attention. Using responsive techniques and valuable content, they were able to build a connected community of birders.

Media Cause writes:

"Year after year, the Lab has been able to increase online fundraising numbers by growing their email list and inspiring current supporters to give. The Lab has a wealth of great content that inspires a shared love of birds and highlights the critical importance of bird conservation."

Birders come for the bird content, but stay and become donors once they learn more about the Lab. Using content marketing, the Lab has grown its annual revenue from $400,000 in 2012 to nearly $4M in 2019.

Play 12 : Stand for Something with a Clear, Unique Value Proposition

The modern world is divided, nuanced, and complicated. In the midst of all that grey area, we're drawn to those who are clear about what they stand for and what they're against.

Responsive nonprofits communicate what they're for, and seek to inspire, activate, and rally like-purposed people together. Through content, stories, events, and campaigns, they connect with a community who shares their goals.

Show what you stand for with deliberate storytelling that showcases your cause, your heroes, and your villians. Consider this Instagram video from Preemptive Love, in which they discuss the deaths of people, particularly children, seeking asylum.

Preemptive Love takes a bold stand—they "exist to end war." In this post, they identify the love of power as the villain that needs to be overcome, more than any one political entity. They're not wishy-washy, and you don't have to wonder about what their values are. Donors know exactly what they're supporting.

In one sentence...

- Write out the UNIQUE value that your nonprofit creates that isn't accomplished by any other organization.
- Write out what the ramifications are to the world if your mission is not accomplished.
- Modify that sentence to speak to the different goals of your donor personas. Make sure that each persona can feel connected and aligned to the mission you're working towards.
- Use that sentence as often as possible to remind your donor base exactly what they're giving to and why your organization is the best option for accomplishing that goal.

To make your donor relationships that much deeper, include your donors in the conversations around your mission statement. As they grow and the focus of your organization evolves, your statement might require updating. Let the donors be part of that process. After all, they are at the center of everything you do and every possibility you have for the future.

Play 13 : Automate Welcome Series and New Donor Onboarding

Donor churn may be the biggest single problem facing most nonprofits. On average, 76% of donors will never give again after their first giving. Reducing your first gift churn by even 10% can have a massive impact on the long-term value of your donors.

The most proven and predictable way to reduce new donor churn is with a New Donor Welcome Series. The goal of this series is to onboard new donors by educating them and providing value before you ask for the next gift. With marketing automation, you can determine the frequency, timeline and content included in the New Donor Welcome Series for each individual. The following marketing automation sequence is a great start for organizations who don't yet have a welcome sequence.

Day 0 – Email 1

Theme: Welcome and thank you!

Content: Thank you photo of team. More about the problem you're helping us solve in a unique way... What interests you about the cause?

CTA: Tell us more!

Day 1 – Email 2

Theme: Introducing our community

Content: Nonprofit impact video and stories about unique ways people like you are making a difference. Thank them again for their impact.

CTA: See more impact stories

Day 3 – Thank you call assigned to member of your team

Theme: Gratefulness and curiosity

Content: Thank you for your gift! More about the impact you're having. What made you give? How can we serve you?

CTA: Don't ask for a gift. Be responsive to their needs. Build real relationships!

Day 5 – Email 3

Theme: Ways to help

Content: Volunteer opportunities, advocacy opportunities, program info, and link to social feeds

CTA: Follow us on social.

Day 15 – Email 4

Theme: Learn more

Content: Infographic about the cause

CTA: Complete our quiz!

Day 18 – Welcome packet in the mail

Physical letters still work! A multi-channel welcome series is best.

Theme: Giving

Content: Re-establish value through a story of impact. Refer to some of the stories and stats you've sent through email, THANK THEM MULTIPLE TIMES!, Appeal for a donation

CTA: Make a Donation (if initial gift was under $100 ask for a recurring gift)

NOTE: For gifts over a certain threshold it makes sense to assign a handwritten thank you note to a team member as well.

Day 21 – Email 6

Theme: Giving

Content: Re-establish value through a story of impact. Appeal for a donation

CTA: Make a Donation (if initial gift was under $100 ask for a recurring gift)

After each person has completed the email welcome series, add them to your newsletter list and any other lists that are targeted to the interests they expressed during the welcome series.

Play 14 : Use Predictive Data to Automate Influencer Outreach

Your influencers are the megaphone for your cause. In the new landscape of fundraising peers, influencers can drive far more successful new donor acquisition campaigns than traditional models. It's critical that you identify your influencers quickly and segment them for specific communication. You can identify influencers by listening for:

- Number of known relationships in your existing database: are they already connected with other key donors or partners?
- Number of Twitter followers: are they a social influencer or do they have a large social voice?
- Geographic density: are there a lot of key donors or prospects in their neighborhood or nearby?
- Peer to Peer activity: have they previously run P2P campaigns on behalf of your organization?
- Corporate or Philanthropic Activity: did social scraping or their LinkedIn profile reveal corporate influence, board membership, political influence, etc?

Automatically tag influencers based on the criteria that you've set for your Influencer persona. Set a marketing automation workflow that includes:

- 2-3 emails that describe the impact similar influencers are having on the cause. Provide specific examples of work done by other influencers. Whenever possible, make the connection between the topics you know they care about and the campaign you are suggesting they run. The more relevant your appeals, the more likely they are to be successful. Spend the extra time doing research to ensure that they don't feel like you're sending a generic sequence without genuine interest in their value and audience.

- Create an "Ambassador" or "Advocacy" club, and then invite the influencer to join using an online form at no cost. This provides a feeling of "insider" belonging to your influencers. Use an automation workflow to provide participants with materials they need to understand your cause and how to talk about it in a way that will resonate with their audience. Arm them with the necessary tools to run a successful campaign immediately so you can capitalize on the moments they are most excited about the opportunity.

- Follow up with a phone call to brainstorm with the influencer about ways they might want to get involved. Understand that you are the expert on your cause, but they are the expert on their audience. Make sure to prepare the phone call, but stay responsive to their interests and needs.

Influencers should be treated the same way the rest of your donors are treated. Make sure their interests and goals are at the center of your partnership to ensure a lasting relationship and better fundraising.

Play 15 : Automate Lapse and Pre-Lapse Sequences to Reduce Churn

Like first time donor churn, lapsed core donors can have a tremendous negative impact on nonprofits. Without a deep, personal connection to your nonprofit, they can easily forget why your cause was important to them in the first place. The business of life and work replace their focus and they don't prioritize giving to you.

To help prevent lapsing it's critical to quickly identify lapsed and pre-lapsed donors. Each group needs a re-engagement strategy to remind donors about the impact they are making in the world and what your organization is doing to meet their goals and live their values. Here's a standard marketing automation workflow that can be impactful in reducing churn. Here's a standard marketing automation workflow that can be impactful in reducing churn:

Day 0 – Email 1

Theme: Thank you for your impact!

Content: We've noticed you haven't given recently. More about the problem you're helping us solve in a unique way. Do you have questions or concerns we can help with?

CTA: Ask a Question or Give Us a Call

Day 3 – Thank you call assigned to member of your team

Theme: Gratefulness and curiosity

Content: Thank you for giving in the past. More about the impact your having. What made you give? Is there something we can do differently?

CTA: Give us your thoughts.

Day 5 – Email 3

Theme: Stories of impact

Content: We miss you! Re-establish value through a story of impact. Infographic about the cause

CTA: Share your impact with friends.

Day 10 – Lapsed letter in the mail

Theme: Giving

Content: We miss you! Re-establish value through a story of impact. Refer to some of the stories and stats you've sent through email. Appeal for a donation

CTA: Make a Donation

NOTE : When possible also send a handwritten card of gratitude.

As with all of your marketing automation workflows, keep an eye on performance metrics. It is critical that you provide enough value to lapsed and pre-lapsed donors before you ask for another gift. If you ask too soon, you risk losing donors forever. Use the engagement metrics to optimize your workflow based on donor personas for an even better return.

Play 16 : Automate Donor Milestone Acknowledgements

Donors want to feel like an important member of your organization. They want to feel appreciated for their contribution. One of the easiest ways to express gratitude is by thanking donors in a special way when they hit particular giving milestones.

This type of milestone recognition varies for each organization but here's a sample automation workflow that we've found helpful. Automation ensures that every donor is recognized in a timely manner without requiring your team to do any additional work. This workflow should automatically run in the background and kick off when key milestones are hit.

$1,000 in total donations

- Day 1 : Assign Task to Development Rep for follow-up thank you call
- Day 1 : Add a Tag for "Mid-Level" Donor
- Day 1 : Send 'Life-to-Date Giving $1,000 Thank You Email
- Day 3 : Assign task to Director of Development for Thank You Handwritten Note
- Day 3 : Follow donor in CRM or assign to a mid-level donor portfolio

Of course, creating milestone celebrations for small donors is important as well. Donors who are recognized frequently tend to have higher average value because they remain loyal for longer. Adjust the recognition and workflows based on the level of commitment from each donor.

Play 17 : Lead with Stories, Follow with Stats

Humans are motivated by stories, not numbers. Stories that focus on one person inspire more giving than statistics because human characters evoke empathy and a desire to help. Without a central character to identify with, people have a hard time understanding the problem or relating to those affected. Thus, it's easier to move on without taking action.

Numbers may give a quick overview of the issue, but stories are what make us care. Stories connect us to other people and inspire giving.

Look for opportunities to tell stories to your supporters that highlight the humans behind the cause. Build a strong, direct connection between donors and beneficiaries as often as possible. Use The Adventure Project as an example. They send monthly updates to "The Collective," their group of recurring gift contributors. Each month, they feature the story of a woman who benefitted from the program the donors funded.

"The Collective" stays inspired and engaged by seeing the human impact their donations make, month after month. Instead of a vague sense of "helping women in the developing world," they have specific people in mind.

Even a semi-fictional character can resonate with audiences, like the YMCA of America's "Zoe for President" campaign. They created the character of Zoe, a one-year-old girl who would run for president in 2064.

The YMCA says, “The campaign highlights the potential the Y sees in all kids to grow up and change the world if they’re nurtured properly and supported along the way. Through Y initiatives like childcare, academic enrichment, mentorship, college prep, job training, and more, kids have the opportunities to succeed, grow, and one day, maybe even become president.”

Supporters could “donate to Zoe’s campaign” by making a donation to the Y. The story engaged imaginations, and gave a specific character to focus on, rather than a generic “children are important,” message.

To get started...

- Write out your three most compelling stories of impact. Focus on relatable stories that create real emotional connection.
- Be clear about the hero of each story (it’s not your organization!)
- Be clear about the antagonist and urgent conflict in each story.
- Be clear about how the donor can change the story by partnering with your organization.
- Find ways to tell each story in videos that are less than 2 minutes.
- Supplement video with CTA focused on your donors’ impact and a statistic that validates your impact.
- Parlay videos into social posts, blogs, event trailers, etc. Translate stories in short written vignettes for direct mail.

Connect:

A Practical Example

After Diana spent time listening to the needs of her donors she created content streams for connection with each of her donor personas, focused on storytelling.

For the people focused on the direct service aspect of her nonprofit, she started collecting stories from people served by each of her organization's programs. Once a month, those donors received stories about someone who eats meals in the soup kitchen, or a family in transitional housing.

For the "big picture" donors, she started sharing updates on policy and reports on sociological research to help educate her constituents. She then followed up with stories and stats about how real clients were affected by the macro-issues.

Finally, she sent volunteers the same stories as the direct service group, with an additional welcome series to introduce them to the organization's programs beyond the soup kitchen — along with a list of opportunities to volunteer in the direct work of the organization.

It’s time to return to what made fundraising so powerful — the deep, personal relationship between donors and nonprofits.

Responsive Fundraising Plays

Suggest

Responsive suggestions follow insights discovered by listening, provided via the right channels identified in Connect. Each suggestion is based on the relationship you have with the donor, not an arbitrary timetable set by the organization.

Donors are people, and no one likes being treated like an ATM. Too often, nonprofits only look to donors for donations, skipping all the unique ways they might want to contribute to your cause. If you look at donors solely through a transactional lens, you'll miss out on a range of contributions.

Play 18 : Use Variable Gift Arrays

One of the most frustrating experiences for donors is when they are asked for a financial gift that is dramatically unrelated to their previous giving or capacity. This results in confusion and disconnection, as in:

“I just gave them $100,000 for the new building. Why the heck are they asking me for $50 a month?”

“I’m a college student who volunteers for that nonprofit 10 hours a week. Do they really think I have $5K to donate?”

Fortunately, modern data analytics can help you solve this problem by varying the gift ask and gift array for each donor based on capacity. You know your donors’ historical giving and you can grab their wealth capacity (see Play 4). By combining this data you can ask for exactly the right amount at the right time. You can even use a “Suggested Gift Amount” generated by predictive data analytics to shift your suggested gift arrays to the range that’s right for each donor. This approach can be applied to your online giving form using a tracking pixel or it can be used as a merge field in your direct mail pieces.

By tailoring the gift ask for each person in your database, you’ll not only alienate fewer givers but you’ll dramatically increase your response rate and average gift amount.

Play 19 : Ask For More Than Money

We know that today’s donors want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to be more than just a checkbook. It only makes sense to offer them more ways to get involved.

When you learn about a donor's interests and observe their behavior, you may learn that the appropriate suggestion isn't money. Knowing when to provide value instead of asking for money builds loyalty and greater engagement from donors. It brings them close to your cause. Realistically, you can only ask for money so many times before alienating donors. Suggesting non-monetary next steps is often more impactful for your organization and more gratifying for donors.

Ask for Time

Donations of time can include traditional volunteer opportunities, advocacy at local events, or peer-to-peer campaigning. It can also include visiting your nonprofit in person to get a better sense for what you are accomplishing in the world. Use surveys and social media to find your donor's particular super powers and then suggest that they engage using their particular talents.

Ask for Influence

Your donors already live in networks and communities—ask them to introduce you! They can share their influence via peer-to-peer fundraising, social media posts, hosting events, inviting friends to volunteer, leveraging their businesses, or making strategic partnerships between your organization and their faith group or networks.

Pre-record a webinar with a few donors who've used their influence to further promote the cause. This could be fundraising, advocacy, or amplification. Use social listening (see Plays 4 &5) to determine which donors have larger social audiences. Create a donor advocacy workflow that is a series of three emails that invite these social donors to watch a recorded webinar where you unpack how they can use their influence to advocate for the cause.

The team at charity:water does a great job of leveraging corporate and celebrity influencers along with the superpowers of their supporters to increase impact. Check out some of their work for more ideas.

Ask for Expertise

Some donors may wish to lend their professional expertise and acumen, founding an advisory counsel or participating in meetups to give their advice on topics like marketing, real estate, finance, or legal matters. Some may prefer to lend expertise around their passions rather than their profession.

Don't be afraid to ask donors for help around their areas of expertise or passion. Keep in mind that donors will have varying availability, so you have to be prepared with a wide array of opportunities. The best suggestions often include specific time constraints and objectives so that donors know exactly what they're signing up for and why they are the best person to help. That said, it's good to leave the door open to listen to donors and let them suggest the ways they think they might add value.

Play 20 : Mobilize Donors, Don't Manage Them

Traditional fundraising tries to push donors to do what the nonprofit wants them to do. Responsive fundraisers act as a pathway for like-purposed people to connect and give. The organization creates the environments and resources that equip supporters to be successful.

One nonprofit did this by empowering supporters to be "Advocates." They created an Advocate Facebook Group, and provided supporters with an Advocate kit that included stories, messages, cause-related statistics, facts about the nonprofit, and calls-to-action.

Hundreds of people joined to share their time and influence with the cause. Some had blogs and businesses, others were students and parents. The nonprofit mobilized their community by distributing stories and videos for them to share, sparking conversations between members that lived locally, and celebrating supporters who organized their own fundraisers.

The nonprofit was a facilitator, the community did the fundraising. They had a tremendous sense of ownership of the cause, and a deep connection to the nonprofit. To easily identify who to mobilize and how, try these strategies.

- Identify qualifications of donors who are most likely to enjoy advocating for your organization.
- Enroll them in an advocate recruitment engagement campaign to understand their level of excitement for participating in a program.
- Call each individual to understand specific goals, passions, and experience level.
- Connect like-purposed individuals via email. Describe their common goals and interests and suggest ways that they can make a direct impact on the work your nonprofit is doing.
- Host weekly online conferences to encourage advocates, check on progress, and provide new ideas to move their project forward.
- At the end of the project, follow up with questions about what they loved and what they wish was different. Use what they tell you to optimize the experience for new advocates.

Play 21 : Automate Planned Giving Outreach Using Demographic & Wealth Data

Recent studies tell us that over the next 30 years Americans will see almost $68 trillion passed down from Baby Boomers. In many cases, these Boomers are looking to leave a lasting legacy with their wealth. As a nonprofit, it's important that you're educating Boomers on HOW planned giving works and WHY your organization can build their legacy in a unique way.

Data analytics can be a critical tool for connecting with these donors and suggesting the next step of a planned gift.

Use your CRM to automatically identify donors who have:

- Given for the last 3+ years
- Are over 60
- Optional : Have a net worth of over $1M according to purchased wealth data

When a donor matches this criteria you can:

- Automatically send a letter and 2 emails with the sole purpose of educating them on planned giving. Tailor the messaging to what you know about their motivations, interests, and giving history.

- Assign a task to a member of your team to follow up via phone to answer any questions. The goal of the call is primarily education. Get comfortable with the fact that they may have a passion for other organizations. Encourage their generosity to ANY organization and talk about how your nonprofit might uniquely fit into their planning.

Play 22 : Amplify Other Voices

Have you ever met someone who exclusively talked about themself? It doesn't take too long to tune out or start avoiding them, does it? It's the same for organizations. Your own messages about how great you are won't resonate with donors for long. It's much more interesting to hear praise from someone else.

Leverage social proof points to confirm to donors and potential donors that your organization is making an impact and doing great work. Testimonies and personal experience can mean a lot to supporters who are getting to know you, and people love to see that "people like them" are involved.

Conduct a simple survey of why people give, and ask:

- Why do you give to Organization?
- Would you recommend Organization to others?
- How can we improve?

Just like you identified donor groups based on interests, you'll find trends in your survey results. You may find that some people give because of direct experience with your cause, while others are motivated by civic responsibility, or seeing your work in the community. For each trend that emerges, choose a story from their responses. Add these stories to fundraising campaigns and your welcome series.

Highlight your donor community with a "Why Give?" landing page on your website that includes these donor stories, along with 10-20 quotes from your survey results. This landing page from World Help features a range of donors talking about why they give. It makes giving seem accessible.

Play 23 : Make Fundraising Everyone’s Job

Donors make it possible for your nonprofit to operate. To that end, donor relationships are a priority for everyone in the organization, not just development professionals. Programs, operations, finance, and administration are all equally impacted by donor activity.

“Creating a culture of fundraising” sounds complicated, but it’s really about inviting everyone at your organization into the action. Start including them with:

- A one-hour, all-hands-on-deck monthly meeting where everyone comes together to write thank you notes to donors and volunteers, or make thank you calls
- An email to the whole organization that shares recent impact stories, donor testimonies, and a list of ways to amplify the latest fundraising efforts. This alone can give your program and other staff stories to share and ideas for engaging people they interact with.
- Inviting donors to visit your offices or facility monthly, if possible. Host an open house, or give an open invitation for donors to schedule a visit. This lets staff interact with donors and hear their personal stories, and vice versa.
- Create an internal dashboard that highlights key fundraising KPIs and share it broadly, so everyone knows exactly where your nonprofit is compared to goals, how many new donors have partnered with the org, and how many have stopped giving. This level of transparency can help push everyone to keep fundraising and donors top of mind.

Play 24 : Personalize The Experience For All

Traditionally, marketers evaluate contacts with RFM (Recency, Frequency, Monetary Value). Responsive fundraisers still consider those elements, but go beyond it to include things like donor interests, enthusiasm, history, and feedback. They consider a broader context.

For instance, imagine you have a group of donors who are also volunteers. Each year, they take on a small peer-to-peer fundraising project. If you only look at RFM, you could conclude that you need to focus on getting these donors to give more frequently, or transition to larger gifts.

However, if you listened and connected with these donors, you'd find that they consider their volunteerism to be their most important contribution because they are unable to make larger financial gifts. The nonprofit constantly asking for more frequent donations is going to make them feel unappreciated and unseen. Would you blame them for becoming less involved?

What if, instead, you asked them to train other volunteers to do their own peer-to-peer campaigns? That would demonstrate that you value their expertise and service, help them connect with each other and the volunteers they train, and deepen their ties to the organization, while growing your fundraising.

Play 25 : Multi-Channel, One Conversation

Marketing research has shown us that most people don't respond to the first "touch" of a message. They need to encounter it several times before taking action.

As such, you need to create an engagement strategy that allows your donors to see your organization across a variety of channels. You can use each of them to build one continuing conversation. Include email, direct mail, social media, your website, phone calls, events, and in-person interactions in your communications strategy and flows.

This doesn't mean you copy and paste your content everywhere and call it a day. You don't have to tell identical stories on each channel, but your suggestion should be the same.

If the suggestion is, "Become a recurring giver," then you may tell a story about a specific person served by your programs on social media, feature a Q&A video with a monthly giver on your website, and send an infographic about the impact of monthly giving via email. Each message is appropriate to its medium, but they all point to the same thing.

Play 26 : Always Celebrate

People value milestones, recognition, and celebration. From communal celebrations like national holidays to personal markers like a year of sobriety, the calendar provides many opportunities to mark an occasion.

Organizations have an opportunity to tap into our love of celebration, personally connect, and make celebratory suggestions. First, look for personal milestones, like:

- Donor anniversaries:"You've supported Organization for three years! Wow! Thank you! In that time, you've given $XXXX, providing programming for 300 students like Mandy. Watch her story here, and share it with anyone who needs a little inspiration. Happy anniversary!"

- 100 hours volunteered: Send an infographic about what 100 volunteering hours accomplishes, invite them to report back to you on their experience.

- $10,000 raised through peer-to-peer fundraising: Ask them to mentor a new fundraiser or give feedback on the campaign.

Collective milestones are another opportunity for celebratory suggestions. Reach out to celebrate with your community everytime you hit a goal, like your 1,000th student graduation, opening a new facility, or 15th year in operation. Many of these will provide a very natural fundraising ask, like, "Give today to make year 16 the best, yet!" or "Make a gift in honor of the graduating class."

You aren't limited to widely-recognized holidays or obvious milestones, either. You can create your own celebrations for donors to rally around. For example, when charity: water provided clean water for 10 million people, they emailed everyone who had given in the past 13 years. They didn't limit the celebration to active or recent donors--they wanted to show that everyone was a part of reaching that moment.

Play 27 : Close the Loop and Show Impact

Donors give to make a difference, and it's up to nonprofits to show them that they've done it. Close every loop, and let donors know how the projects and programs they're funding are going. Share your success stories, what you're learning, and the surprises that pop up along the way. Demonstrate how lives are changed and problems are solved, thanks to their gifts.

A great example of a responsive nonprofit in action is Watsi, an organization that helps fund healthcare around the world.

When Watsi launched a new recurring gift option, The Universal Fund, they proceeded very carefully. (Get the whole story here.)

First, they listened. They added a checkbox to their donation form, and reached out to the first few hundred people who checked it, asking them to describe the concept of the Universal Fund in their own words. They used this language to launch the Fund and connect with donors.

Then they kept listening as they connected, in order to make better suggestions. COO & Co-Founder Grace Garey says, " For the longest time, we had it in our heads that people donate on Watsi because they are moved by a patient photo or story and they act on impulse. When we started to see droves of people sign up to donate continuously through the Universal Fund, we realized that users' motivations were really varied and there might be new ways to reach them we hadn't ever thought about."

Play 28 : Practice Gratitude

Before you make any suggestions, thank your donors. Communicating the impact of their donations and your gratitude is essential for showing that you consider them part of a community, not a walking wallet.

Thank your donors immediately and frequently. Your thank you messages should be timely, personal, specific, and relevant. It's always a good time to thank your donors—you don't have to wait until they give again to say thanks.

Create a gratitude protocol that goes beyond a receipt and acknowledgement letter. Look to Food for the Hungry for a great example of using email to welcome and thank new donors. Their new donor welcome email series features two thank you messages, along with several cultivation messages showing how donations are put to work. This creates several meaningful touchpoints before they make another ask. Making a gift is only the beginning of the relationship.

Suggest:

A Practical Example

Diana started by asking, “What’s the next right thing?” for each of her donor groups.

- She looked at the data in her CRM, and the predictive analytics pointed her to a list of donors who were ready for a fundraising ask.
- She set up a trigger so that every advocate who had opened an email in the last three months would be sent an invitation to her organization’s next policy discussion
- She sent a video thank you to the organizers of the faith and volunteer groups, featuring people and staff they helped, and inviting the groups to schedule another volunteer date.

Donors don’t merely want to give, they want to engage on a deeper level.

Become A Responsive Fundraiser

A Practical Example

As she turned her fundraising approach upside-down, Diana started to see results from her donors. Her emails were more relevant to individual donors, and consequently, were opened more often. When her suggestions were targeted, more people took action on them. She was raising more money and retaining more donors.

What surprised Diana the most was how much more she liked working this way. Instead of thinking of her donors as a vague group, she was getting to know them as people. She was inspired by the many reasons they cared about homelessness and the connection they felt to her organization. Before, she'd only had this kind of interaction with major donors, but now, she felt close to all of her donors.

When you become responsive, you'll connect with donors in a more meaningful way, adapt to the changes in the hyper-connected world, and grow your fundraising.

Using your responsive CRM, marketing automation, and data enrichment, combined with these Responsive Fundraising strategies, you can gain a deeper understanding of what your donors truly value and help them connect with your cause like never before.

Get the Responsive Fundraising Tools You Need

Provide your team with the necessary tools to execute responsive fundraising. Contact the team at Virtuous! Let us help you grow giving by treating all your donors like major donors.

Give us a call or schedule a demo today!

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