

Donor Cultivation Cycle



Identification

You must find people who both believe in the mission and have the capacity to make a significant contribution. It is at the intersection of these two lines where you need to invest your personnel time and resources.

Research

Prospect research is an extension of the identification process. It adds pertinent information so that you can create a strategic plan for engaging the donor in fulfilling the mission the organization.

Research involves understanding the motivations and interests of your prospects to determine whether you and they share an interest in the same objective.

One of the best way to collect research is in a donor meeting, by asking open-ended questions:

- How did you first become aware of us?
- What do you want your gift to accomplish?
- Do you agree with our mission? What do you think of our programs?

- How do you want to get involved?

Strategic Planning

Based on your research, you have an idea of whom those people are, what the prospect is interested in, and roughly how much they could give, if compelled.

Since giving is something that comes from the heart, you must get in touch the emotions of your prospect and illustrate how their gift can have a meaningful impact on the lives of others.

You must make a plan with action steps that will cultivate the donor and bring them closer to the mission.

Understand that the plan is dynamic, and after each interaction with the prospect, the plan may be changed, revised, or replaced with a new plan. Most importantly each plan will reflect the interests of your donor.

Cultivation

The process of cultivation enables donors to learn more about the organization, its leadership, its vision for the future, and the efficacy of programs. This process takes time.

Cultivation is a two-way street. You need to know your prospects just as they need to know you. Some examples of cultivation include: face-to-face meetings, invites to events, visiting program sites, leading a tour of the facility.

Solicitation

1. State your case.

Tell the prospect why you are there to see them -- to ask for a meaningful gift in support of a program in which you both share a common interest. Tell them what the program will accomplish, when it will get done, how you intend to finance it, how you will monitor its success, and what you would like them to do.

2. Listen.

Learn to listen to the voice, interpret the facial expressions and body language of your prospect. Hear what they are telling you (and not telling you) about their interest, their capacity, and the timing of this request. Once you have stated your case, let the prospect respond.

3. Ask for the gift.

Ask for a specific amount. Then keep quiet. Don't say anything. Wait for a response.

4. Say thank you.

Once a reply is given, whatever the outcome, say thank you. This person gave you their time. Appreciate it. Write a letter of appreciation when you return to the office. Say thank you often.

Stewardship

Once a gift is made, it is important to report to the donor on how the gift was used. Inform them of your program's success in delivering the service for which you solicited the gift.

Find innovative ways to continue to tie your donor to the cause.

Renewal

The ultimate goal is to retain the donor as a lifelong supporter. To earn a donor's repeat generosity, you must first do an outstanding job of program delivery. Secondly, you must continue to build your relationship with the donor. That is why stewardship is so important. Continue to involve them in the work of the organization.

So stewardship leads to renewal that leads us back to identification of prospect donors, and the solicitation cycle can begin again.