



Finding Donors: Understanding Who Might or Will Give

By Dr. Lilya Wagner, CFRE

Generosity is not culturally specific, nor is it confined to certain populations or religions. Many people like to and want to give, for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, the single most important reason why people don't give is because they are not asked!

Before you look at the possible donors and prospects for your program, identify some of the key concepts for this step in fundraising.

First, overdependence on one donor, or even a few donors, is risky. The donor might quit giving, move away, change interests, or even die. The best idea is to diversify your donor pool as much as possible, keeping in mind that the fundraising team can also ensure they have enough human and financial resources to steward the donors effectively.

Second, it's vital to take into account all possible donor markets. In theory, any person or organization could or might give to your cause, but you need to determine qualities about the donors that might make them receptive to your funding requests.

Third, acquiring donors requires a mix of human relations skills as well as technical expertise, because such relationships are based on good communication and relationship building. This activity also needs the technical support of record keeping, preparation of materials and reports, and activity tracking. In order to find a diverse donor pool, at first consider all possible donors. At this point, never say: "Oh, I don't think they would give to us." Consider the possibilities. In making a list, include those listed below. This list encompasses many possible donors to organizations.

Individuals (who give more than 80 percent of all donations in developed countries).

Foundations—local, national, and international. Often a community foundation can be a good source of advice. Foundations usually have specific areas of interest or geographic limitations for giving. PSI can help you with foundation search if you do not have a local resource, or can help you do your own research for this type of funding.

Businesses—local, national, and international. Businesses often give because it's good for business. Businesses are not required to give away their profits but many business leaders recognize that this is good for the community as well as good

for attracting customers. Organizations can consider what influence their cause has in the community, what linkages can be developed between their members and the business interests, and how a business can benefit from being philanthropic.

Government agencies--for particular projects. As with most donations, giving by a donor to an organization is a matter of a contract between the donor and the organization, whether the contract is simply a promise made that the money will go to a specific cause or aspect of a project, or whether it's an extensive written contract. This is certainly true for government funding. If the wording of the contract extracts promises that the organization cannot or does not want to agree to, then the money is declined. Government contracts are often far more interested in outcomes promised by the recipient of funds than in restrictions, although the latter may be expressed sometimes. Because government funds come from citizens, they can also benefit the general population.

Associations, groups of professionals in a certain field, such as insurance agencies or physicians, who may at times, wish to help projects.

In-kind gifts can be a great resource. If a building campaign is underway, supplies can be donated. Or, a piece of land might be offered or professional services, without charge. However, all in-kind gifts must be carefully assessed.

Once a list of all possible donors has been compiled—and this should have input from board members, staff, other volunteers, and friends of the organization—it's time to determine which prospects will most likely give. Is the prospect capable of making a donation and, if so, how much? Equally important to consider: is the prospect likely to give? While we appreciate all gifts, including the proverbial widow's mite, we need the large gifts. Asking for the appropriate amount is also important in a funding request, and this evaluation will aid in preparing for such a request. Above all, please avoid overdependence on one source or donation. Ample examples exist of organizations that rely too much on too few donors. Besides, such practices do not build ongoing relationships and involvement with a broader base constituency.

A key element in identifying the best prospects is to determine motivations for giving. While cultural, regional, or religious differences do occur on occasion, most human motivations for giving are surprisingly universal. Some of these are to:

- Make a difference.
- Be involved in something larger than one's self.
- Accomplish more than just one person can do.
- Have a sense of belonging.
- Give back to a cause or type of organization that once helped the donor.
- Fulfill a religious obligation.

Many more motivations have been identified through research. Once motivations have been identified, they are one more element on which to base a relationship and make a case for support.



Find out some information about prospects—what interests they have, who knows them well, what is an appropriate amount to ask, why they would want to be involved, and other information, making sure it is used ethically and only in preparing a funding request.

A good database is highly essential and is the beginning of the development and use of such technological support. Even if the congregation and the campaign are small in size, recording of information and donations as well as capability of reporting is necessary. Assistance in determining just what technology is accessible is readily available through PSI.

