

Chloe Johnson

Love Your Donors

Why your donors deserve regular care and attention

One of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of being a fundraiser is receiving the wonderful news that someone has decided to give a gift to your organisation. It's often the culmination of many days, weeks and even years of work, but after that initial flurry of excitement, it can be tempting to just move on to the next donor. Receiving the gift is really just the beginning of what can become an incredibly fruitful and mutually beneficial relationship between funders and beneficiaries.

When we embark on the donor journey, we invest a great deal of time in telling people about our project, the goals of our organisations and the people who run them. Whatever the size of gift we are seeking, we must build trust to ensure that donors are confident that their money will be spent wisely and responsibly, and importantly, deliver real results to make things better for the public.

Having spent time getting to the stage where people are supportive of and excited about your work, you make the ask, and then the decision is in the hands of the individual.

When that decision is a 'yes, I will support your project', it is hugely elating to know that the hard work has paid off and philanthropists believe in the aims and benefits of your work as much as you and everyone at your organisation.

Of course it's important to celebrate, but all too often, after the thank you letters have been sent, donors can fall down the hierarchy of importance – they've supported the project, so what more do we need to do?

However, excellent donor care after a gift is made is crucial to establishing a strong and lasting bond between donors and the organisations they choose to support.

Not only is it essential to continue to thank people for their commitment – this is hard-earned money that they have decided to give away – but a good relationship can lead to many other benefits including guidance, involvement and further gifts in the future.

The steps needed to achieve this are simple, yet effective. Regular communication, in person and in writing, is essential. Donors want to know about the long-term impact of their gift and what's happening at your organisation, including the good news, and also what may not be going so well. Keeping conversations open and honest in this way helps donors to understand and learn about your work, and contributes to building a trusting partnership.

As well as inviting your supporters to special events and meetings, your supporters should be given opportunities to get involved in wide-ranging activities. This could be volunteering, taking part in a programme activity or inviting them to be part of a committee.

Finally, asking donors what they think ensures that they know their opinion is valued, and provides an important external viewpoint that can help your organisation grow and develop in creative ways.

As a 247-year-old institution, the Royal Academy greatly benefits from long-term partnerships with its benefactors, which in some cases transcend generations. One of our closest supporters has been involved with the RA for over 30 years. During this time, they have gained an in-depth understanding of how the Academy works and got to know the people who run it. This has led to a trusting relationship, and their valuable insight has helped us to think about things differently to ensure we are delivering the best projects. This has proved to be extremely beneficial for the Academy and ultimately led to further support.

Success with repeat gifts as a result of developing strong relationships with donors shows that it is not only the cause that makes people support a charity – equally important is the knowledge that the people behind the organisation will nurture and value a continuous partnership and value their support for many years to come.

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