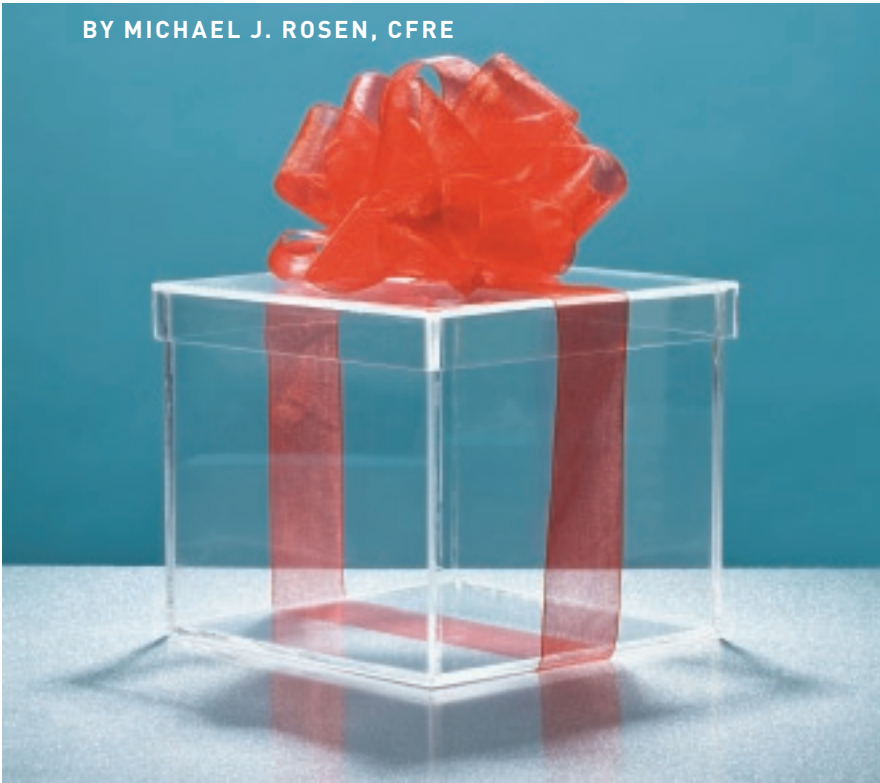


Effectively Cultivating Prospects at Little or No Cost

BY MICHAEL J. ROSEN, CFRE



There has never been a better time for nonprofit organizations to seek planned gifts. The challenging economic situation makes planned giving more attractive to prospective donors, the population is continuing to grow older and the largest inter-generational wealth transfer in human history is in its early stages. Nevertheless, despite the enormous opportunity for nonprofits, the sector is not doing enough to capitalize on current circumstances. Consider the evidence:

- Only 37 percent of those over age 30 say they are familiar with the term “planned giving” (2009 *Stelter Donor Insight Report*).
- Only 22 percent of those over age 30 report that they have been approached to consider a planned gift (2009 *Stelter Donor Insight Report*).
- Only 5.3 percent of older Americans have made a charitable bequest commitment, while 33 percent are willing to consider such a gift (Dr. Russell James III and the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University).
- Only 1 percent of Americans have a charitable remainder trust, while 5 percent are willing to consider one (*Planned Giving in the United States 2000: A Survey of Donors*).

Clearly the nonprofit sector can and should be doing more to bridge the gap between what has been achieved and what is possible with planned giving. However, before you can secure planned gifts, your prospective donors need to understand that such giving options exist and what a planned gift can mean to them and the organization.

Fortunately, there are a number of relatively easy options at no or little cost that organizations can use to create greater awareness of a new or existing planned-giving program.

Widespread messaging. Development professionals need to understand who planned-giving prospects are. While everyone is actually a planned-giving prospect, those most loyal to the organization will be the best and should get extra attention. Prospective planned-giving donors can be found at all giving levels, among all demographic groups and throughout an organization’s database. For some organizations, viable prospects might reside within the community, but not in the database. Therefore, planned-giving messages should be pervasive.

Eight simple words. To help create broader awareness of planned giving, you can include eight simple words in your e-mail signature, on your business cards, on your letterhead and elsewhere: “Please remember [organization’s name] in your will and trusts.” This simple reminder will help create awareness and get some people to even consider such a giving opportunity.

For more information, visit www.afpnet.org. Search: Planned Giving



In the news. Most organizations publish a newsletter, e-newsletter, magazine or some combination of these. When writing an article about how the organization is fulfilling its mission, include a sentence or two about how a certain program was made possible by a planned gift. For example, in an article about scholarship recipients, you could say, “This year’s scholarships were made possible thanks to a generous bequest from Jane Doe.” A simple line like that, when repeated in other stories, will go a long way toward educating readers about planned gifts and the impact they can have on those the organization serves.

Donor profiles. Another way to promote planned giving in an organization’s publications is to print stories about planned-gift donors. However, you must be sure to present stories about diverse donors over time. Most people think that planned gifts (i.e., bequests or trusts) are something that only rich people do. By the way, no matter how wealthy someone is, a donor is more likely to consider him- or herself “comfortable” rather than “rich.” So show people that anyone can be a planned-gift donor by not focusing exclusively on the largest gifts from your wealthiest supporters. When telling the story, spend little time discussing the gift vehicle and more time discussing what inspired the donor and how the gift will help those served by the organization.

The big picture and benefits. If you do articles specifically about planned giving in your publications, do not focus on how a gift mechanism works. For example, rather than doing an article that goes into great detail about how a charitable gift annuity is structured and works, mention that this type of gift will allow the donor to support the organization’s mission while providing him or her with an income for life. Save the details for a later discussion with the prospect, and focus in the article on

what such a gift can do for the donor and the impact the gift can have. Keep articles brief and donor-centered. Each article about planned giving should benefit the reader.

Online options. Another low-cost way to build general awareness of planned giving is through your organization’s website. Have a page, or several pages, dedicated to gift planning. As with articles, keep the material simple and of high value to the reader. Instead of having a button that says “Charitable Gift Annuity,” have one that says “Income for Life.” Keep the message simple and focused on the prospect. Also, be sure to include plenty of inspiring, real stories about diverse donors. This will move prospects, as well as further engage those you are writing about.

Easy to contact. Whether in e-mail, print or online, make sure that prospects and donors can reach you easily. This means you should include your name and all of your contact information. People are more likely to make an inquiry to you than they are to some faceless institution’s general telephone number. Keep it personal and simple. No one is going to go hunting for your e-mail address or telephone number.

Easy to read. Regardless of the electronic or print medium used to communicate with prospects, the material should be readable. While this sounds obvious, it is sadly not common prac-

tice. Remember, planned-giving prospects are almost always over age 40. Use a font size of no less than 10 points. Use a serif font, i.e., Times New Roman, rather than a sans serif font, such as Arial. While perhaps not as clean and attractive as sans serif fonts, studies show that serif fonts are actually easier to read. Do not use reverse type (white lettering on a dark background) because it is more difficult to read and not easily photocopied, printed or faxed.

Events. There are a number of ways events can be used to promote gift planning. For example, at a donor recognition event, be sure to specifically recognize those who have made a planned-gift commitment. You will solidify the support of your planned-giving donors while inspiring others to consider a planned gift. Look for creative ideas for engaging and recognizing planned-gift donors in ways that cost little or nothing. You also can offer estate-planning seminars. However, the seminars should focus on the prospective donor rather than the organization. In other words, seminars should not be about the variety of ways one can donate to the organization, but rather about how estate planning can benefit prospective donors and their families. When inviting prospective planned-gift donors to events, remember that many will be elderly and will not drive after sunset if they still drive at all. Schedule events earlier in the day for seniors and consider helping to arrange transportation.

By spreading the word about planned giving and how it can benefit donors, organizations will be better positioned to go out and ask for planned gifts. ☛

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