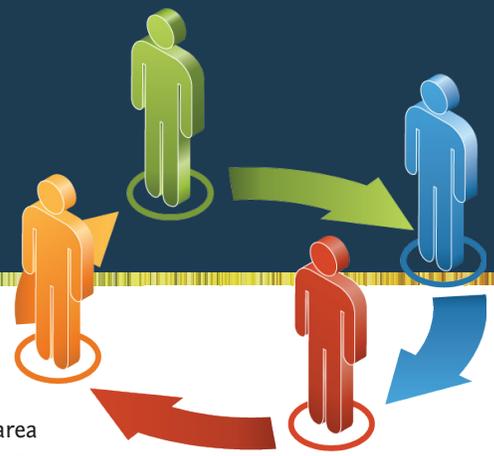


Building a Major Gifts Program from the Ground Up

Blackbaud Tip Sheet | by Kristen Fulks



Developing a solid major gift program is possible with thoughtful planning and consideration. Typically, a donor won't make a major gift unless your organization takes specific action to ensure that the contribution will significantly impact the donor's specific area of interest within your mission. That's why successful programs include detailed and thoughtful plans for each action development professionals should take. This tip sheet shares straightforward advice for anyone who is developing a major gifts program. (And it can serve as a tool to help successful programs become even more successful!)

Here are some basic tips for building your major gifts program:

- **Define your major gift threshold.** Every organization receives major gifts; the main difference between the many major gift programs out there is how "major" is defined. Evaluate all of the gift amounts your organizations receives from smallest to largest, then compare those amounts to the volume of gifts you receive. You can determine the amount that qualifies as a major gift for your organization by taking a look which gift amounts you received the fewest of. As we know, nonprofits receive few major gifts, but major gifts usually represent the majority of the amount of money raised.
- **Classify your donor and prospect pools.** When developing a new major gifts program, it is important to identify donors who are already giving and prospects who have the capacity to give. These are individuals that your organization is interested in asking for a major gift. This process should occur continually, and it should consist of evaluating all of the new donors and prospects that are always trickling in, and then feeding appropriate individuals into the major gifts program. This also facilitates in combating the effects of attrition over time.
- **Assign solicitors and build portfolios.** Solicitors are staff members or volunteers who have taken on the responsibility of building relationships with donors and prospects with the intent to get them to give more. Once solicitors are identified, you can build their portfolios by assigning them to specific donors and prospects. Some organizations identify solicitors by geographical regions, some by interests or areas of business, and others simply assign the next available solicitor. Once these assignments are made, solicitors can build cultivation strategies and focus on developing relationships with donors and prospects.
- **Identify stages of solicitation.** For every major gift solicitation, there are stages of solicitation. At a minimum, these are stages such as identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship. While the semantics of the name of each stage are not important, it is important to know where you stand with a specific ask. This gives you the opportunity to make it known exactly where you stand in the process. And, it provides others with an idea of what asks are in the pipeline and have the potential to be fulfilled.
- **Track your actions.** Each task you complete during the major gift solicitation is an important part of the story behind how gifts are acquired. Whether it took a few actions or many, it is important to record these and track the amount of effort put into the solicitation. Phone calls, meetings, and other actions are also an important way for a major gift officer to further develop relationships and acquire new information.
- **Show your appreciation.** As in the case of any donation, remember that acknowledging gifts or donations is the first step in cultivating another gift. Solid stewardship and acknowledgement activities promote retention and always lead to other opportunities.



Kristen Fulks joined Blackbaud in 2002, bringing with her a broad range of fundraising experience and a thorough understanding of all levels of nonprofit operations. Prior to Blackbaud, Kristen served as executive director of the Gateway Charitable Foundation in Chicago, Illinois. She also worked for the Chicago Historical Society and Providence-St. Mel School. During her time at these organizations, she held a range of positions in development, membership, and general management. At Blackbaud, Kristen specializes in assessment, systems implementation, strategy development, business process improvement, and tactical administration of The Raiser's Edge®. She has served in principal consulting and project management capacities on some of Blackbaud's largest projects.

Blackbaud®

800.443.9441

solutions@blackbaud.com

www.blackbaud.com

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Blackbaud, Inc.
2000 Daniel Island Drive
Charleston, SC 29492

