

Getting started on major gifts

Association of Development Officers

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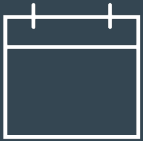


Why major gifts?



Donors are waiting.

Throughout our community, individuals, families, foundations, and companies are proactively *looking* for ways to invest into important missions. Major gifts—or relationship-based fundraising—is rooted in this spirit of philanthropy: that when we combine forces, we can change the world. When you prioritize major gifts, you are providing a *service* to the philanthropic community around you: You're making it easier to make a difference.



Now is the time.

Americans are limitlessly generous. In times of crisis, we rally around each other and look for new ways to get involved in the causes we care about. Donors are increasingly eager to give *directly* to the missions they care about—no big events or fancy technologies involved. Just simple conversation about their goals, your work, and the alignment between them. If you've been wanting to try major gifts, there has never been a better time.



Highest returns.

Fundraising is time-consuming, and because it is time-consuming, it is expensive. As fundraisers, our success depends on putting our most precious resource to the highest and best use, and that resource is *our time*. Decades of professional fundraising has demonstrated that we raise the most net new revenue for our missions—as much as 80-90 cents on the dollar, compared to 30-50 cents for events—when we work directly with our donors.

How to build momentum



Get organized.

You've heard major gifts described as 'all about relationships.' That is true—but it is actually relationships built with *intention, rigor, and pace* that will bring results. Working one relationship at a time or working reactively will not yield the revenue you need for your mission. To succeed, you need to build *many* relationships at the same time, work *quickly* between interactions, and continually *advance* conversations toward asks. For that, you need to be organized.



Get focused.

Organization will help you focus on the right donor in the right way at the right time—providing donors an exceptional experience and keeping your fundraising program growing as quickly as possible. The key to sharpening your focus is to shift your mindset from what *is* to what *could be*. Your lens should be *potential*. For all your current donors, what is the gap between their current giving level and their giving potential? What would it take to open conversations to explore that potential for greater giving and greater impact?



Get going.

Like much of what we do in life, there is never a perfect time to start major gifts. If you're waiting for all your events to be done, mailings to be out, data to be cleaned, volunteers to be on board...you will wait forever. The way to start is to start. Yes, undertake organizational projects. Yes, cultivate a culture of philanthropy. But most importantly, start *today*. Pick 5, 10, 15, 20 donors. Put them on a list. And every day, make a little progress toward learning about their interests, sharing their impact on your organization, and talking about the future.

Building blocks

Case for support

There are many ways to tell your story. When you build your case for support for philanthropy, you are building the case for *investment*. That means you are telling the story of why you do what you do, what you've accomplished so far, where you want to go next, and what returns—in terms of mission impact—a donor can expect from their gift. A persuasive case speaks to donors on an emotional level, casting a vision of the future and helping the donor envision their role in bringing about that future.

- [Webinar – How to build your case for support in the current environment](#)
- [Workbook – Case development](#)
- [Guide – Casting your vision](#)

Organize your list

Lists are the heart of fundraising. When you invest a little time upfront to organize your lists, your fundraising will become much simpler—and much more effective. As you organize, keep that lens of *potential* front and center so that you not only prioritize donors who are already major donors, but also create space in your priorities for those that can *become* major donors.

- [Webinar – How to organize your list](#)
- [Workbook – Organizing your list](#)

Create a donor engagement plan

Major gifts fundraising involves highly individualized donor engagement—which requires a lot of time per donor. To free up that time, we first need to create a systematic donor engagement plan that elevates the 'baseline' donor experience for all donors and simplifies the delivery of touchpoints. With that plan in place and turnkey, it becomes easy—and exciting—to layer on additional special experiences for the prospective major donors we are engaging.

- [Webinar – How to create your engagement plan](#)
- [Sample – Donor engagement plan](#)
- [Template – Donor engagement plan](#)

It's your time to thrive.

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