

Journal of
**Donor Relations
& Stewardship**

Book 4: Communication

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Moving Mission to Message

An Interview with Kathleen Butler McDermott

Fundraising communication professionals are charged with bringing an organization's story to life. Their creativity and vision move the skeptical onlooker to become an engaged volunteer and an enthusiastic donor. But before communicators can jump into dramatic storytelling or inspiring imagery, they must delve into the heart of the organization to develop a set of clear and coherent messages that ring true to the organization's mission. These messages are then the bedrock from which all future communication strategies flow. Consistent messaging defines the organization, helping the donor to see priorities clearly and demonstrating that the organization is purposeful and deliberate in its efforts. Julia Emlen interviewed Kathleen Butler McDermott to better understand the tie between a nonprofit organization's mission and the messages it shares.

Why do you think that getting the message from organization to donor is so important?

An appeal letter sent out by a Massachusetts college a few years ago used the word “blah” 137 times. As in, “Dear Graduate, with the recent economic downturn and loan crisis, it has become even more important for XYZ College to receive your support ... blah blah blah, blah blah.” And it went on like that.

The writer's attempt at humor fell flat for most of the letter's alumni recipients, and for those of us who strive to engage and inspire with every word of our donor communication, the very idea of this letter cuts deep. The assumption that what we say to our donors and prospective donors doesn't matter as long as we send the business reply envelopes on a predictable schedule is still not uncommon among fundraisers. But when nonprofit organizations don't give careful consideration to what and how we communicate each organization's core messages, we shortchange donors by depriving them of a greater understanding of the important work we do and the impact their philanthropy can have. We do a disservice to our organizations by squandering a precious opportunity to further engage and strengthen a budding donor relationship.

Exploratory Research on Retaining and Cultivating the First-Time Donor: Effects of Tactical Choices on Perceived Organizational Reputation and Support Behavior Likelihood

By Keith B. Murray, Ph.D.

Two issues of importance in effective new donor relations are examined in this study. One pertains to determining the effectiveness of key fundraising tactics to acknowledge and cultivate new donors, including the degree of donor focus in follow-up strategies, frequency of exposures and media format. The other matter of interest is to explore the use of non-financial, surrogate measures of fundraising performance to demonstrate how fundraising impact and effectiveness can be assessed during and in advance of final and solely financial outcomes at the end of a fundraising cycle or campaign. Fundraising assessment sets regarding donors' evaluation of the organization, perceived reputation and likelihood of support behaviors are used and demonstrate consistency across experimental conditions. With respect to fundraising strategies, personalized follow-up communication is found to have strong and compelling effect on new donors; media tactics with respect to media format or frequency do not show significant differences.

Glossary

- **Personalized messages:** For purposes of this study, personalized messages were defined as ones directed to the new donor by an actual, real person, typically one who is involved in the organization's operation, near or far
- **Computer-generated messages:** Mass personalization automated through methods generally referred to as a mail merge

Annual Fund Message Delivery Sets the Stage for Donor Relations Strategies

An interview with Ann-Marie Reddy

The crossover between donor relations and stewardship and the annual fund are well known. Recently the question of how donor relations practitioners can assist in issues of donor retention has been widely discussed. This article looks at the broader context of these two disciplines, which are often separately housed but mutually dependent. The author delves into her own commitment to donor relations, which she considers a fundamental component of her work in leading an organization's annual-appeal efforts. Without consideration of how the appeals deliver the message of the organization, donor interest and retention cannot be guaranteed. From beginning to end, the annual-appeal effort is a message-delivery program that sets the stage for further donor relations strategies.

How would you describe direct appeals/phonathon fundraising in today's advancement world?

One of the things that I find interesting about development/ advancement is that people talk about how much things have changed regarding annual giving. What I believe they actually mean is that the return on investment on the big two (phone and mail) are down. The principles of annual giving have not changed — annual giving is still about donor acquisition, repeating and upgrading gifts — and creating the pipeline for major gifts and planned giving.

Although annual giving is about casting a wide and deep net, it is still about building a relationship with each of the individuals who are being solicited — not between the annual giving staff and the would-be donor, but between the donor and the institution, with the annual giving staff as the conduit. As Barry, Henze, Lamb and Swank point out in *Cultivating Lifelong Donors: Stewardship & The Fundraising Pyramid* (Blackbaud, 2010), however, “acquisition is frequently based on the sole goal of increasing the number of annual donors rather than the more appropriate goal of attracting sustainable donors.”

Donor Relations in the Social Media Age: Medium, Message, Measurement

By Leslie Imhoof

Relationship building through engagement is the foundation of donor relations and stewardship. While personal connections make relationships possible, social media increasingly enhances and creates an atmosphere in which engagement may flourish and such connections may lead to increased philanthropic behavior. This article explores how social media can create opportunities to advance philanthropy by building relationships through engagement and this process can be both efficient and effective. Included are tables of the values of social media for organizations and donors as well as a chart suggesting how social media can influence types of donor behavior.

Introduction

Many participants first engage with an organization's cause or mission and then develop their personal relationship further through social media. At the same time, younger users often connect first through social media before committing to support a cause. Social media enhances their connection and can lead to more direct engagement, including giving, through good stewardship. Social media is, in other words, a low-involvement activity that can help move participants to high-involvement activities such as giving, mentoring or volunteering (Weathers, 2019; Crawford & Jackson, 2019). As Laura Quinn argues in her analysis of using technology to manage events, “[r]elationships built between individuals and the institution are solidified through recognition, engagement and communication which encourage regular involvement and giving to the highest priorities of the institution” (Quinn, 2007).

This paper explores the role of social media in advancing philanthropy in nonprofit organizations with varying missions, paying particular attention to universities and local branches of national groups. Organizations can address “multiple stakeholder expectations” and thus advance engagement and philanthropy by using social media

Developing Concepts in Donor Relations and Stewardship: A Step toward Definition and Measurement

By Julia S. Emlen

Donor relations and stewardship activities are generally regarded as important in encouraging donors to give to their highest level of philanthropy. Professionalism in donor relations and stewardship can be attributed to that centrality. Missing, however, is the development of concepts underlying the practice that could support measurement and analysis of the exact manner in which and extent to which donor relations and stewardship advance philanthropy. An example of concept development is presented using the often-used word impact. The author suggests that impact can be extended into a constellation of concepts that describe donor behaviors, which can escalate from giving regularly to bringing others along in their philanthropy.

Introduction

Across the nonprofit sector, from local food banks to international relief agencies to world-class colleges and universities, there is agreement that donor relations and stewardship activities can make the difference in bringing donors to their highest level of philanthropy. We celebrate the centrality of our donor relations and stewardship work in the nonprofit enterprise by identifying ourselves as professionals. We have not yet developed, however, the means to measure whether what we proclaim as best practice advances philanthropy. Establishing the concepts underpinning our practice can help us move forward in this effort to define our work as evidence-based and, therefore, promote our professionalism.

Concept Development and Testing

Social science practitioners, including healthcare practitioners and nurses, have been active in defining concepts as a way of capturing the essence of their practice. One method described for this process is to identify a product or service offered within the practice that is then assessed using feedback from stakeholders — fellow practitioners and

Marketing Communications for Donor Relations and Stewardship

By Alan Dittrich

Compelling communications from nonprofit organizations help sustain and even increase donors' commitment of money, time and expertise. Communications arise from a robust plan that identifies individual ways to communicate with each subset of donors. The plan allocates schedule, staff time and costs. It includes enough flexibility for changes, as the giving cycle develops; and, wherever possible, a way to measure the effectiveness of each communication. Each organization's specific messaging is unique, but all communications reinforce the importance of the mission, the progress the organization is making and the irreplaceable value of donors and volunteers.

Once an individual becomes a donor to a nonprofit organization, every subsequent interaction with that person either strengthens or weakens the connection. Strengthen it and the result will be greater commitment of time, treasure and talent. Weaken it and the donor will readily find other organizations that are more appreciative.

Everyone in the organization who sends a letter or makes a call or meets the donor in person affects the donor's relationship for better or worse. So, donor relations really is the work of every employee and volunteer who might ever have contact with the donor. The relationship cannot be isolated to a department called Donor Relations and Stewardship; rather, it must be nurtured across the organization.

And since most contact with donors will be by letter, e-mail, text, brochure, newsletter, and annual report, rather than in-person, it becomes essential that all such communications serve two crucial purposes: (a) reinforce the mission and prove the organization is fulfilling it; (b) ask donors to take additional steps in support of the organization.

This latter makes the communication a "marketing" communication because it has the goal of increasing donations and volunteerism as it reinforces the donor's commitment.

Listening: A Fundamental Component of Donor Relations

By Anne Manner-McLarty and Patricia Berry

Communication can be a two-way activity, one that involves both delivering a message and receiving and processing any response that may follow an outgoing message. Outgoing messages from a nonprofit organization set the stage for dialog with donors. Dialog is a key component in relationship building, and a sense of relationship is a critical component of sustainable fundraising. As a practice, donor relations is charged with safeguarding the relationships between a nonprofit organization and its donors. Operationalizing the means by which the nonprofit organization listens to its donors, therefore, is a task appropriate to the work of donor relations. In this article, authors Anne Manner-McLarty and Patricia Berry clarify the importance of listening as a part of relationship-based fundraising, explore the ways in which nonprofit organizations listen to their donors and suggest models for operationalizing listening activities specific to donors.

Glossary:

- **Communication:** The imparting or exchanging of information or news
- **Dialog:** A discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed toward exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem
- **Listening:** Hearing with the intention of understanding, often with an implied potential for change in response to the understanding gained
- **Relationship-based fundraising:** Fundraising approach designed to build productive relationships between the nonprofit organization and the donor; in contrast to transactional methods that rely on gift solicitation and stewardship of the gift, without building dynamic and responsive interaction with the donor
- **Reciprocity:** The practice of exchanging with others for mutual benefit; the items, ideas or actions exchanged need not be the same form or relative value