

AmPhil

A GUIDE FOR NONPROFIT LEADERS:

The Ultimate Guide to Accelerating Major Gifts



Major gifts are critically important to the success of your fundraising program, and they can be extremely frustrating.

WE ALL WANT MAJOR GIFTS FUNDRAISING TO BE A SCIENCE— BUT IT'S A DELICATE ARTFORM.

In the past, fundraisers anticipated seeing 80% of campaign gifts come from 20% of all donors. Today, nonprofits raise closer to [90% of their funds from roughly 10% of their donors](#). And when a major donor makes a huge donation to a fundraising campaign, smaller donors are more likely to follow suit.

Numbers aside, major gifts fundraising is all about the art of forming authentic human relationships. That should be your major gifts pole star: forging deep bonds with your donors.

Let's talk about how to form the long-term, mutually fulfilling relationships that will inspire ongoing generosity in your donors.

What makes a successful major gifts officer?

IT COMES AS A SHOCK TO MANY NEW MAJOR GIFTS OFFICERS JUST HOW TRICKY MAJOR GIFTS FUNDRAISING CAN BE.

Research, travel, cold-calling, and connecting with strangers is a lot of work. **If you're going to master major gifts, you have to have the right mindset, and you have to develop four crucial traits:**

1. Authenticity.

The old adage holds up well: people give to people. And people with lots of money give to people whom they trust, not fundraisers who treat them like an ATM full of thousand-dollar bills.

2. Humility.

Another sage fundraising adage: "If you ask for advice, you get a gift. If you ask for a gift, you will get advice." The donor has more to offer than just money; build trust by listening.

What makes a successful major gifts officer? *continued*

3. Prudence.

Prudence for MGOs centers on two things: patience and attentiveness. All relationships take time to gel, so don't be in a rush to get to the ask.

4. Persistence.

Don't smirk when a big gift comes in, but also don't get discouraged when an ask is denied. See every "no" as a chance to learn, and to cultivate the donor relationship.

Even in a rocky economy, don't give up on major gifts!

Economic times are tough, and that makes major gifts fundraising tough, too. **Here are a few tips on how to weather the storm:**

1. **Stay the course.**

When the world is going mad, stick to your plans. Get your direct mail out the door. Get your meetings and events done. Get your newsletter and annual report out. Keep seeking renewals and upgrades.

2. **Stay “near, dear, and clear” with your major donors.**

Near: stay in touch. **Dear:** draw them closer to your mission.

Clear: communicate stability—that you are staying the course, all thanks to them.

3. **Keep cultivating.**

The number one way to move from “no” to “yes” is to get closer to your high-value donor. How do you do this? Never stop cultivating.

4. **Don't stop asking—but be sensitive.**

How do the vast majority of nonprofits bring in revenue? *Charitable donations.* **Keep asking your donors for donations during uncertain economic times.**

Should your major donors receive direct mail?

IN A WORD, YES.

Most major donors start out by making smaller gifts. If your letters and emails convinced these donors to upgrade, why would you stop communicating with them now? Your VIPs deserve to keep hearing from you.

Instead of quarantining your major donors from direct mail and email appeals, **take these steps to jazz up these communications with the special, personalized treatment your high-dollar donors deserve.**

- 1. Develop a “VIP” direct mail package.**

Make your high-level donors feel like part of an exclusive group.

- 2. Adjust ask amounts and frequency.**

Ask amounts should be based on past gifts, and a donor who just gave \$10,000 shouldn't be asked to give again right away.

Should your major donors receive direct mail? *continued*

3. Include a handwritten note with your next letter.

A short, handwritten note is an easy way to convert a “mass-produced” solicitation letter into a personal appeal—again, make your major donors feel special!

Direct mail and email aren’t substitutes for building ongoing, face-to-face relationships with your major donors. Direct response fundraising and personal cultivation should go hand in hand. **Together, they can deepen donors’ commitment to your organization and your cause.**

One key thing to bear in mind . . .

AS MUCH AS WE MIGHT TRY TO BREAK DOWN MAJOR GIFTS FUNDRAISING INTO “SCIENCE,” IT ELUDES THE ATTEMPT.

IT IS ULTIMATELY THE ART OF FORMING AUTHENTIC HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS. THAT’S THE TRICK WITH MAJOR GIFTS FUNDRAISING: RELATIONSHIPS.

Remember:

People give to people. Donors are not wallets to be exploited to meet your annual revenue goals. Rather, they’re valued individuals with whom you should cultivate real, deep relationships that will last in the long term.



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STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

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