

11 Ways to Begin a Planned Gift Program

More and more non-profits are learning the value of an active Planned Gift Program to augment their other fundraising programs. But where do you start, especially if you don't have much experience with it? Here are eleven ways to solve this dilemma:

1. Realize it's important because of its huge potential.

The largest philanthropic gifts your organization ever receives may be in the form of planned gifts. That alone makes a program a priority.

2. Make the case.

Most organizations can develop a compelling case for a Planned Gift Program. This may involve combination major-planned gifts and endowment gifts. Approach case development as you would for other fundraising programs. Enlist outside help when necessary.

3. Gain a budgetary commitment.

Without a marketing budget and staff time, it's difficult to establish momentum for planned gifts. The commitment needs to be for more than one year, as planned gift relationships take time to develop.

4. Get institutional support.

The Board of Directors of the organization needs to approve the creation of a Planned Gift Program. This endorsement is vital in keeping the ball rolling and it also opens the doors to the Board members as prospects.

5. Educate at every opportunity.

A *steady* flow of information about planned gifts is the right recipe for success. In publications, meetings, events, find ways to get the word out that your organization desires planned gifts.

6. Develop skills.

Over time, most development officers can learn the basics of planned gifts. There are many conferences available for training. There are also excellent books and newsletters to help build abilities. It's also good to establish networking with others who work with planned gifts.

7. Develop an appreciation for donor cues.

Planned gift donors resent being "sold." The typical planned gift donor is in a "legacy mode," which begins to build after age 65. These prospects are interested

in making an impact while developing a relationship with the organization. Most are willing to take their time in doing this. The development officer often becomes the face of the organization. That's why regular contact that is sensitive to donor cues is essential.

8. Begin with bequests.

About 80 percent of all planned gifts come through bequests (testamentary gifts). Many bequests are fairly small (\$5,000 to \$25,000) but some are much larger. They all add up. Bequests tend to be the easiest planned gifts to promote and secure, too. They involve a few sentences in a donor's will.

9. Ask for gift annuity commitments.

It's possible to set up a gift annuity program on your own or with the help of some banks. The gift annuity is usually a one-page contract. Donors can establish multiple annuities, too, while retaining guaranteed lifetime income.

10. Ask for paid-up life insurance gifts.

Many donors have life insurance that they no longer require for the purposes they purchased the policies. Their families are grown and on their own, but the insurance is still in force—and paid-up. It's easy to make gifts of these policies.

11. Develop a marketing plan that is focused, compelling, and regular.

Regularity is most important in promoting planned gifts. Sometimes, donors will keep information for years before acting on it. Most of the bequests you receive you will not know about in advance, too. If your marketing is focused on legacy donors, tells great stories of people served, and flows regularly, you're on your way to an effective Planned Gift Program.

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