HOW TO DISCUSS PLANNED GIFTS

If you want to attract planned gifts to your organization, you need to know how to discuss this meaningful gift opportunity with your donors. Who should you approach for this? How do you prepare for these conversations? By learning about what is important to your donors, you can be better prepared for what to say. This section of the toolkit aims to answer those questions, demystify what is involved, and hopefully motivate you to just do it!

Find Your Main Audience

For many fundraising professionals planned giving is only one of their many responsibilities. That is why it is important to identify the target audience and prioritize with whom you should be building relationships. In the presentation Profiles, Clues and Cues of Planned Giving Donors (see section Resources), you will learn about the attributes typically associated with planned giving donors. These include the nature of their affinity with your organization as well as the demographics, financial profiles and giving behavior associated with increased planned giving inclination. Lastly, the presentation also provides some conversation clues and cues that would indicate a donor's possible suitability for different planned gifts.

As you review this presentation, start putting together a list of your top 10 to 20 candidates who meet a lot of the described attributes, prioritizing those you already know well. These will be the donors whom you should prioritize visiting and getting to know even more deeply. Do not worry if you list more than 20 donors whom you do not have the time to meet given your other responsibilities. You can ask other people in your organization to help cultivate relationships with these donors. In addition, you can engage these donors in other ways such as through donor surveys, webinars, and digital and direct mail appeals about planned giving, which are discussed in the section Marketing to the Masses.

How to Prepare

You don't have to be an expert in planned giving to prepare for these conversations. Most planned gifts are made through charitable bequests and beneficiary designations, vehicles you learned about in the section on Accepting Bequests. What is more important is your ability to convey the case for long-term support, credibly present yourself as a trusted liaison for your organization and learn about what is truly important to the donor.

In the presentation How to Prepare for Planned Giving Conversations (see section Resources) you will learn about the elements to consider when building a case for long-term support and the importance of telling your own personal story – what makes you unequivocally committed to your organization. Since seniors are a major part of your audience, you will also learn how to build trust with donors and effectively respond to some senior preferences and culture. Finally, you will also learn the different dimensions of donor discovery and suggested questions for learning about the donor's personal history, charitable giving motivations, family concerns, financial situation, and legacy concerns.

Another resource is the Osborne Group's Strategic Questions for Gift Planning (see section Resources), which provides additional questions for exploring your donor's motivations, world view, giving interests, attitudes, values and readiness for planned gifts. All these questions will help you engage your donors in meaningful conversations about what is important to them and enable you to discern how a planned gift can align with their deeply-held values and goals.

How to Talk About Planned Giving

Once you have built strong relationships with your donors and they have affirmed their desire to help your organization, then you can start introducing the idea of a planned gift in your conversations with them. There are many ways to introduce this topic. In the presentation How to Conduct Planned Giving Conversations, you are provided with the scripts for 12 Planned Giving Conversation Starters. These are very natural ways to introduce planned gifts to donors who already trust you. If the donors are open to exploring these planned gifts further, the presentation also provides instructions on how to conduct a planned giving solicitation visit from the recommended structure of that meeting to suggested language for soliciting bequests, IRA beneficiary designations, charitable remainder trusts, gift annuities, etc. All these scripts incorporate the recommendations from Dr. Russell James' research "Words that Work," which revealed which words to use in presenting planned gifts to elicit greater positive responses. These scripts take the mystery out of these conversations and can help you engage more confidently.

Ethics

Planned giving discussions should be informed by the highest standards of ethical practice. You need to serve the best interests of the donor and your organization and your actions should reflect your organization's long-held values. These include values such as professionalism, accountability, transparency and adherence to donor intent. Lapses in ethical practice can lead to the loss of donors' trust, long-term harm to your organization's reputation and even expensive litigation. The Donor Bill of Rights and The Model Standards of Practice of Charitable Gift Professionals include principles that should inform your interactions with donors.

DISCUSSION RESOURCES

- Powerpoint: Profiles, Clues and Cues of Planned Giving Donors
- Powerpoint: Preparing Yourself for Planned Giving Conversations
- Powerpoint: How to Conduct Planned Giving Conversations
- Sample: Strategic Questions for Gift Planning from the Osborne Group
- More Information: Donor Bill of Rights
- More Information: Model Standards of Practice for the Charitable Gift Planner