



STEWARDSHIP



Stewardship of planned gift donors should reach well beyond a simple gift acknowledgement or other singular event to provide a continuum of stewardship. Although in most cases, planned gift funds won't be received for many years, it is important to treat your planned giving donors as you would any major donor with thoughtful contact and relationship building. As mentioned, bequests and beneficiary designations are by far the most common type of planned gift made, and it is important to always remember that a donor can change their mind—and their bequest—at any time. Keep in touch with these donors, who have indicated they consider your organization to be as important to them as family, using a stewardship calendar to have touch points throughout the year.

Capitalize on Existing Efforts

A stewardship program does not need to be complicated or necessarily add expense to an organization's budget. Examine existing efforts within your organization and include your planned gift donors. For example, does your organization offer a tour or other programs? Publish a newsletter, annual report or impact reports? Host occasional stewardship events for annual gift donors? Add your planned giving donors to these distribution and invitation lists.

Look at the records of planned giving donors and, if your stewardship program for annual fund donors is segmented by giving levels, consider at which level you will include your planned giving donors. The inclusion of planned giving donors in major donor events provides a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness

about your planned giving group or "legacy society" among your major donors. Introductory comments at such events can welcome legacy society members and members can interact with your major donors. This interaction in turn can encourage understanding between both groups about the different funding needs and opportunities.

Other relatively simple and low-cost stewardship ideas include non-religious holiday cards throughout the year, birthday cards (only if the donor has provided her birthdate), calendars or other small, inexpensive item unique to your organization. However, be cautious with gifts, as planned giving donors are often older and don't want to collect more "stuff" or perceive that an organization is "wasting money." Ideally, plan to hand deliver such any gifts if possible. Cards might be designed and printed by your organization, or they can be purchased inexpensively and included with your other donor stewardship supplies.

As mentioned in the section on marketing, living donor stories are the most effective marketing tool to encourage planned giving by other donors. Profiling donors are terrific opportunities to deepen your relationship with your donors, expand your knowledge about their lives and their connection with your organization.

Recognize Comprehensive Giving

Regular annual fund donors are among your best prospects for planned gifts. The consistency and longevity in giving, no matter the size of their gifts, make such donors the ideal candidates for planned giving. Pull historical giving reports and consider how you might recognize long-time donors. Again, it doesn't need to be complicated or expensive. Perhaps a personalized letter from your CEO/Executive Director or a program leader, a handwritten note paired with an impact or annual report, or a phone call to thank these donors. Better yet, all three! And, be sure to include long-time donors in your planned giving marketing strategy.

If you do host donor stewardship events and print nametags, you can easily add the number of years the attendee has been supporting the organization and/or the name of your organization's planned giving group. It can be a conversation starter as guests mingle—and





quite surprising how much donors covet a particular designation or sticker!

If your organization publishes donor acknowledgment lists in its annual report or newsletter, consider how you can structure your list to provide special recognition to donors that support your mission in multiple ways. Ideas include a special recognition club or even just a simple notation, such as an asterisk, to call attention to annual fund donors who have also included a deferred gift to an organization in their plans.

Legacy Societies

When donors include your organization in their estate plans, they have elevated you to the level of family. A wonderful way of recognizing that honor is to include donors in a group or club (sometimes referred to as a legacy society). Membership in this special group is an appeal that you can incorporate in conversations that invite donors to consider planned gifts to your organization. Some planned gift donors appreciate the recognition and extra attention associated with membership in such a group. Others prefer to remain anonymous and not to be “fussed over.” A recent study conducted by Pentera and the Indiana University Lilly School of Philanthropy revealed that the average realized bequest of legacy society members was two to three times higher than that of non-group members. This seems to suggest that the focused stewardship provided to legacy society members leads to reinforced and increased giving.

If you wish to start a legacy society, the article “Reaching New Heights with Your Legacy Society” (see section [Resources](#)) provides useful guidance in this endeavor, including how to launch this recognition club, samples of membership benefits and what an annual event and other stewardship benefits may look like. (See sample Legacy Society Brochure template in section [Resources](#).)

Steward Family & Advisors

Many nonprofits are quite passive in receiving bequests and other types of planned gifts. Don't let this be your organization!

The importance of acknowledging and stewarding both family members and personal representatives, execu-

tors, or attorneys representing estates was mentioned in the Essential Planned Giving Donor Communications and Systems section, but bears repeating here. When your organization receives notice about a bequest, first, check your donor database and discover how the donor was connected with the mission of the organization, how long they had been a donor and their overall level of involvement. Then, call the attorney, executor or personal representative to acknowledge receipt of the notice and to express gratitude on behalf of your organization. Indicate the organization's knowledge about the donor, if he was a supporter, and how much his support meant over the years. If you don't find the bequest donor in your database, ask the attorney, executor or personal representative why the gift was included in the donor's will. Let the representative know how the gift will be used and the difference it will make and ask if there are living members of the family you can contact to thank, or if they would forward an acknowledgment on your behalf.

If the gift was large, your organization might consider hosting a small event, such as a tea or luncheon, with members of the family, your CEO/Executive Director, Board Chair and program director. If appropriate, offer a tour of your facility or program and talk about the difference the planned gift from their loved one will make to the people your organization serves. Be sure to ask them if they would like to receive your newsletter or other communications about your organization's work, and send any publication acknowledging the bequest to your donor's family or representative.

The person responsible for planned giving should be the one who receives mail regarding bequests and that person should always respond promptly. It is important that professional advisors, such as estate planning attorneys, recognize that an organization has the capacity and professionalism to receive and manage bequests and other types of planned gifts. Build a list of estate planning attorneys as you work with them and continue to cultivate them as well.

Meet with Donors

The best type of stewardship is to meet one-on-one with your planned giving donors. This can take place over coffee, tea or lunch, but is best when you are able to meet at your donor's home. Visiting your donor's





home is a terrific way to learn more about her, her family, interests, and connections with your organization and mission and is often welcomed by your donor. You will likely find these meetings to be at least as enriching and engaging for you as it is for your donor.

As with any other donor meeting, plan and have a written strategy in advance of each meeting, so you can thoughtfully share proper gratitude, such as the many years the donor has given, questions you want to ask them, key messaging about your organization's recent accomplishments and challenges, and the next natural step in developing your relationship. Remember, current planned giving donors are the best prospects for the next planned gift! A bequest donor may also be interested in giving through an IRA, appreciated stock, a charitable gift annuity, or other type of deferred gift.



STEWARDSHIP RESOURCES

Sample:

- [Legacy Society Brochure](#)

More Information:

- [Reaching New Heights with Your Legacy Society](#)

