



# Deeper Donor Relationships = Increased Contributions

Database technology is vital in donor relations.

By David Riley

**F**undraising is all about relationships. But how do you maintain personal connections with thousands of people at the same time?

At my organization, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), the answer is a database. With a database application, we can deliver the right message to the right people – whether it’s for 20 people or 2,000. In doing so, we’ve experienced historic increases in giving.

UUSC is in the business of people. As a nonsectarian organization that promotes human rights and social justice worldwide, we’re sensitive not only to the needs of the people we help but also to those whose contributions make our help possible. Technology has become an essential tool to track people and gifts, but many popular software applications – like spreadsheets and e-mail – fall short in the area of personal communications.

The ideal solution for us is a database called “Generations” ([www.inresonance.com](http://www.inresonance.com)). It lets us sort data to match donors with projects

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and contact them in ways they appreciate. Since it’s built on software from FileMaker Pro, we can send e-mails directly from the database and even attach customized brochures. The combination of database software with communication capabilities makes a world of difference in the bonds we create and the results we get.

### Spreadsheets are for numbers, not for fundraising

Spreadsheets are a popular way to keep track of simple information and an obvious choice for managing financial data. But they’re not adequate for effective fundraising. Using a spreadsheet to maintain donor records limits the information you can collect and the ways you can use it. Spreadsheets deal

only with immediate needs and fail to plan for developing deeper relationships with donors. Spreadsheets are static, limited in scope, and not at all useful as a communication tool. Moreover, they’re difficult or impossible to sort effectively.

A database, on the other hand, furthers long-term relationships. It’s not only a pragmatic way to collect information but also lets you sort data to find people with specific interests.

For instance, a typical donor spreadsheet includes contact information, date and amount of the gift, and maybe an area of interest. With a database, you can capture all this information plus detailed data about each donor: affiliations with churches and other organizations, relationship to other donors, interests in specific issues or regions of the world, and more.

Even if this type of information were in a spreadsheet, you wouldn’t be able to perform a complex sort. With a database, you can sort on any variety of characteristics to produce the exact set of individuals

## CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

### Tap into the \$58.5 Billion Wedding Market

More and more couples are adding charities to their wedding registries, according to a recent poll. Even when couples haven't designated a charity, many wedding guests are considering the gift of a charitable donation. Nearly half (45%) of survey respondents said a donation would be a suitable wedding gift on its own, while even more (48%) were inclined to give a small gift in addition to the donation. To register your charity for such donations, contact Just-Give at [www.justgive.org](http://www.justgive.org).

### Suggest Donations Instead of Birthday Candy

Ask your organization's board members and other supporters to plant the seed of altruism at their children's birthday parties. Instead of giving out goodie bags, have them donate money to your organization in each child's name, and give the children certificates thanking them for their donation. Those who have tried it report that the young partygoers are thrilled and their parents find the idea inspirational.

### Garner Spare Change Online

Change Round-up is a cause-marketing service that helps charities raise money online by applying the concept of the spare-change donation jar to the Internet. Change Round-up partners with online retailers to offer customers the option to "round up" their purchase price to the nearest dollar and donate the resulting "spare change" to a charity of their choice. To set up your virtual donation jar, visit [www.changeroundup.com](http://www.changeroundup.com).

you're seeking. When you want to communicate with senior citizens in Atlanta with an interest in Africa and environmental justice, you can easily find them.

### E-mail is essential but must be customized

Like all communications today, most fundraising wouldn't be possible without e-mail. While e-mail is fast, simple, and immediate, it runs the risk of being ignored or annoying. Personalized e-mail, however, is welcome, appropriate, and effective.

The database we use at UUSC lets us combine the massive reach of e-mail with customized data. We can sort data to find the right people, create a message tailored to them, and send it at the touch of a button.

For example, say a member of our staff is going to be on a Boston radio program, discussing the right to a living wage. We can use the database to find people in the Boston area interested in the topic of a living wage. Receiving a personal invitation to listen to the broadcast engages them and makes a huge difference in how they view their connection to our organization.

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Rather than just ask for money, we're sharing valuable information with them and building a lasting relationship.

### Communications need to be well-timed

By looking at people's giving pattern, you can predict the best time to contact them for a specific request. Have they just started donating? Are they approaching the point of supplemental giving? Are they nearing the gift of a lifetime? You can sort and find people with a history of giving and contact each of them at the time in their lives when a contribution will mean the most. This type of relationship is made possible on a large scale with a database.

### We have to work faster and smarter

Today's donors are more sophisticated and better educated than ever before. Mass mailings are not

only impersonal; they're no longer effective or even appropriate. People don't mind ongoing communication – they just want it to be personal and relevant.

A database-driven solution makes fundraising easier and produces better results. It also ensures knowledge transfer. Long tenure is less and less common at most nonprofits. When people leave an organization, critical fundraising information and instinct can leave as well. To ensure that information is held close, personal relationships are respected, and fundraising is successful, there's no substitute for a database. ■

### Resources

Remley, Dirk, "Relationship Marketing: Guaranteeing the Future," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 5.

Werner, Diane, "The Key to Direct-Mail Fundraising: Market Segmentation," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 10, No. 1.

These resources are available at [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org). Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development, [www.snpo.org/li](http://www.snpo.org/li).

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