

Use Data to Cultivate Long-Term Donor Engagement

Keep supporters energized with these strategies.

By Annabel Maw

After getting people interested in their cause, many nonprofits find it hard to keep those supporters fully engaged, committed, and enthused. The reason? These nonprofits lack quality data.

Collecting data doesn't seem like a huge priority because it's not front facing, intuitive, or the easiest thing to get. But data can be the gateway into understanding who your community members are and what they want from your organization. Data will give you the information necessary to create segmented e-mail lists, customize outreach campaigns, and more, so you can learn what's needed to get long-term engagement and commitment.

Imagine a Perfect World

The first step in creating a community of engaged supporters is to get a powerful data collection tool. "Powerful" doesn't imply fancy or expensive – it simply means a robust tool that you can use to your advantage. When looking for a data collection tool, start by making an "In a perfect world . . ." list, which lays out everything you wish your data collection tool could do. For instance: In a perfect world, my data collection tool would:

- **Gather** donors' first and last names, e-mails, and home addresses.
- **Have all collected data automatically transfer** into one place (i.e., MailChimp, Google Sheets).
- **Find out** if constituents are interested in donating, volunteering, or both.
- **See when volunteers are available** for shifts.
- **Collect payment information** and donations.
- **Set up** recurring donations.
- **Learn more** about constituents' interests. (Are they interested in joining the board of directors or becoming an advocate for the organization?)
- **Easily include** the organization's branding.

Once you have your "perfect world" list, start looking into data collection tools that will suit as many of your needs as possible. Since resources are limited, a great affordable go-to is an online form. Online forms were created specifically for data collection so they'll seamlessly collect any type of information you need.

Better yet, online forms are powerful and technologically advanced, so many of them, like JotForm (jotform.com),



offer customizable templates and countless integrations to choose from. Integrations include workflow apps, such as Google Drive, and payment processors, like PayPal and Square.

Online forms are easy to customize with branding and embed into your website, so if you're using Wordpress or a free website builder, it won't be a problem to have them seamlessly blend in with the design that's already in place.

A Good Experience = Better Data

Experience is everything. To get the most data possible, you must use a form that can provide a pleasing user experience. Part of creating this great experience is making sure that the form is relatable and tailored to the audience who will receive it. Each form will vary a bit, but to help you get started, we'll go over some ideas for how to create an excellent user experience with a donation form.

First of all, when you set up the form, put yourself in the donor's shoes. If you were a potential donor, what would you want to see, think, and feel before making a donation? You might want to see a photo of the people you'll be helping. You might want to think about how far each donated dollar goes. You might want to fill out the form as quickly as possible. Drawing in donors with imagery, relevant information, and ease of use will motivate them to fill the form to completion. Some ideas for building a donation form:

Choose the right questions. What type of information is your organization trying to get from donors? Do you want

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detailed demographics? Do you want to know each person’s level of involvement in your organization and interest in donating on a recurring basis? Whatever it may be, crafting good questions will assure that you collect meaningful data, define your donor base, and get more people to engage and commit to your organization.

Insert images or video into your background. Images and video are important to include in a donation form because they evoke emotion and remind constituents about why they’re donating to your cause. Visuals also capture and hold people’s attention, especially when colorful and interactive, so donors will be encouraged to fill out the entire form.

Employ the “one-click” approach. If possible, use the “one-click” approach so that donors only have to click “Submit” one time to make a donation. Forcing donors to click too many times may result in frustration and less people completing the form. Make sure you also include a well-known payment processor such as PayPal, Square, or Stripe so people feel comfortable donating online.

Use conditional logic. Conditional logic is a great way to simplify the form-filling process. Conditional logic allows you to show or hide form fields based on how a user responds to a question. For instance, if someone responds “Yes” to “Have you donated before?” another question such as “Which program did you donate to?” will appear. Those who respond “No” will automatically go on to the next set of questions. This will personalize and tailor the form to each respondent.

Brand accordingly. Always make sure your forms include your logo and brand colors. This will reinforce who your organization is and what it stands for. Having consistent branding will also help differentiate your nonprofit from others in the same space.

Put Your Data to Use

One of the biggest perks of data collection is being able to take the information collected and use it to personalize communications. When people receive content that relates to their interests, wants, and needs, they’re more likely to take action, get involved, and stay engaged.

Create targeted e-mail campaigns

The first thing to do with your collected data is to create segmented e-mail lists. These will vary for each organization, but a good rule of thumb is to segment based on constituents’ interests, such as volunteering, donating, or both.

Once you’ve segmented your lists, create e-mail content for each group. For instance, if an individual is only interested in volunteering, focus on sending them opportunities on how to get involved. If someone is mainly interested in donating, send them material on current fundraising campaigns.

To make these e-mails even more customized, address people by their first names. Using first names in greetings is much more effective than sending a general “Hi there,” because it’s relatable and personable.

Say thank you

Thank you’s go a long way in building relationships. Having access to robust data will allow you to communicate dynamic “thank you’s” through phone, text, or e-mail, which can include the person’s first name, the day they donated or volunteered, and how their money or time affected the cause. When you show gratitude toward your supporters, they’ll get a morale boost and feel emotionally tied to your organization, which will entice them to keep engaging.

Use data to show recognition

The best way to motivate people to keep giving their time and money is to show them that they’re appreciated, valued, and special. An example of doing this with data is to collect birthday information and send out “Happy Birthday” e-mails. These can include a photo or video from your staff or executive director. Sending a happy-birthday e-mail shows that your organization takes the relationship seriously and is willing to go the extra mile. 

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Raising Funds & Using Data Online

For more ways to harness technology and the web to boost support, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Using E-Mail & the Web to Acquire & Cultivate Donors (Vol. 21, No. 1)

Put Your Data to Good Use (Vol. 37, No. 1)

How to Measure Online Fundraising Success (Vol. 26, No. 1)

Beyond the Single E-Mail Message: Running Effective E-Mail Campaigns (Vol. 23, No. 3)

Online Fundraising Success Factors (Vol. 26, No. 2)

Being a Force for Good with Advanced Analytics (Vol. 36, No. 2)

Simple Tips to Nail Your Online Fundraising (Vol. 38, No. 1)

Streamline Your Organization – and Raise More Money – with Online Forms (Vol. 36, No. 4)

Two Surprising Ways to Broaden Your Reach Online (Vol. 32, No. 4)