



## ASK *the experts*

# Secrets of Sustaining

*There's no magic to a monthly giving program. Here are tips for success.*

**Q:**

What's the best way to launch a monthly giving (sustainer) program? And how do we keep these sustainers once we recruit them?

**A:**

First, choose a name for your monthly giving club. Many organizations simply call the club "Pledge Partners" or "Sustaining Members." Others create a name that reflects the organization's mission—a better choice, in my view.

Next, design special letterhead, envelopes, and statements for the program. This adds to the program's "special membership club" feeling.

At Mal Warwick & Associates, we usually recommend recruiting sustainers on the telephone. Often, we'll suggest a lead letter before going on the phone. This letter consistently results in less than 1% opting to join the sustainer program. But once on the phones, anywhere from 10-15% of those contacted will join.

Be sure to select prospects carefully. We've seen success with donors who've just made their first gift—as well as with ongoing donors who have given many gifts. We recommend limiting prospects to donors whose highest-ever gift is \$10 to \$99.

The secret to retaining sustainers is to recruit as many as possible on electronic funds transfer (EFT). If you choose to accept monthly checks, ask the check writers every month to convert to EFT—or even to credit card. Studies indicate that attrition rates are much, much lower for those who make monthly gifts via EFT. You'll lose up to 35% of check writers and 25% of credit card users each year—but only 5-15% of those who use EFT.

There are two more reasons to promote EFT over credit card and check users. It costs money to mail monthly statements, and credit card companies keep up to 3% of each donation.

We encourage every organization launching a sustainer program to outsource its monthly EFT and credit card processing to a company that specializes in this service. It's just not worth the time and frustration of doing it in-house. Vendors tend to make fewer mistakes, have fewer modem crashes, and process on the same day every month regardless of staff illness or vacation.

In addition to promoting EFT, you can improve retention through cultivation activities. Cultivate sustainers the same way you cultivate relationships with your major donors: A quarterly letter from the executive director, accompanied by an informational insert or small token gift (lapel pin or bookmark, for instance) will suffice.

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*For more fundraising secrets, see Mal Warwick's Newsletter: Successful Direct Mail, Telephone & Online Fundraising, from which this article is adapted. Contact Mal Warwick at the above address or call 800-217-7377. Also see articles on EFT in Fundraising and Resource Development Leadership Series, available from the Society's Resource Center, [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org) ■*