



## When Should You Give Up on a Nondonor?

How much time and effort is worth spending on a nondonor?

**Q:** I'm the development director for a university. How many appeals do you suggest we send to nondonors before we stop soliciting them?

**A:** Good question! But there are at least two flavors of nondonors, and the answer is very different depending on which you're talking about.

First, there are nondonors who have truly never given you money—unresponsive alumni, for example (in your case). Since groups like this represent a limited universe—and since people's attitudes may change over time—there is value in maintaining contact through the years. Unresponsive younger alumni may become major donors or legacy donors when they're older. But there's little value in continually resoliciting them when they're young if they don't respond after several tries. Once a year should suffice, whereas you may solicit responsive alumni half a dozen times during the year.

Second, there are formerly responsive donors who have failed to respond for several years. Of course, these aren't nondonors, technically speaking, but they

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might as well be. They're "lapsed" donors, if they've been unresponsive for up to two or three years—or "former" donors, if they haven't responded for, say, three years or more. These folks are worth a great deal, especially if you're dealing with a strictly limited universe of potential donors, such as your alumni. It's worth continuing to pursue these lapsed or former donors. It makes sense to send them custom-tailored appeals that reflect their status—special versions of your appeals that address the lapse in time since they last gave. You might include special contents in these appeals, such as a brief questionnaire inquiring why they're no longer giving. ■

*Mal Warwick, Chairman  
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## Must You Divulge Your List?

Are you required to provide your membership list on request?

**Q:** We have received a request from a for-profit organization for a membership list from our 501(c)(3) charity. We have always guarded this list against use for any purpose other than our mission. I'm greatly concerned that this membership list will be used to solicit business for the company that is requesting it. Are we required to provide our list?

**A:** No. Nonprofits' membership or donor lists are generally not public information. Some significant First Amendment litigation has been fought over

an organization's right to keep its lists private, even in the face of court subpoenas.

Members of nonprofit corporations normally have the right to get a list for a proper corporate purpose, but use for private commercial activity would not likely be considered a proper corporate purpose. Although it's hard to enforce, some organizations make it a condition of membership to keep the lists private and will take action to discipline or expel members who use the list for improper business. If you're going to distribute the list to your members generally, be sure that you specify any limitations on its use. ■

*Don Kramer  
Nonprofit Issues  
www.nonprofitissues.com*

Be sure to specify any limitations on your list's use.

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