

# How to Foster a Positive Relationship with Corporate (and Other) Donors

Receiving support is just the beginning. Here's how to create a long-lasting relationship.

By Marlynne Powell

**A**t a fundraising workshop several years ago, someone asked, "What would cause a corporate donor to discontinue funding a nonprofit?" The speaker, an expert on corporate relations, replied, "Forget to say thank you."

Communicating gratitude after receiving corporate support is just as important as the proposal itself. The same is true for grants, individual donors, and all other types of funding.

Why? Because it's this expression of appreciation that your supporters will remember when it's time to renew funding.

Sending a thank-you letter is important. But by itself, it may not be enough.

What corporate funders will most appreciate is for you to spread the word about them. Tell the community how valuable their support



is. Convey them as true partners in charitable work. Here are seven ways to achieve this goal:

## 1. ANNUAL REPORT

Your annual report is an unparalleled opportunity to acknowledge your supporters. Include a section dedicated to donors. Mail those donors copies of the report before you send it to the public or post it on your Web site. It's a simple but powerful gesture that won't go unnoticed.

## 2. PRINT NEWSLETTER

Even if you have an e-newsletter, there's still great value in mailing printed copies to community members. Consider sending printed newsletters at least quarterly. Include information about the progress of your funded programs. List donors, and provide information about them to keep their names associated with your organization.

## 3. INTERNET-BASED E-NEWSLETTER

Use your print newsletter and your e-newsletter in different ways. Your e-newsletter can be more informational than journalistic. You can send it out through a listserv as often as you wish. It's a great way to communicate gratitude for funding immediately on receipt.

## 4. DONATION ACKNOWLEDGMENT CARDS

Nothing shows appreciation better than a professionally designed card or certificate stating the funder's name and the project they funded. While a letter is an initial "thank you," it can't be framed or encased for display as effectively as a donor recognition card or certificate.

## 5. EVENT SIGNAGE

Consider adding a contributor's logo or name to any signs or promotional items involved with a project. Suppose, for example, that you're hosting a read-a-thon. On signs throughout schools promoting the event, add the names and logos of all businesses donating money or books.

“Communicating gratitude is just as important as the proposal itself.”

## More Ways to Communicate Gratitude & Cement Bonds

See these and other fundraising articles from the Society for Nonprofits' Library at [www.NonprofitWorld.org/members](http://www.NonprofitWorld.org/members):

**How to Energize Your Thank-You Letter** (Vol. 26, No. 2)

**Relationship Marketing: Guaranteeing the Future** (Vol. 14, No. 5)

**33 Top Tips for Building Donor Bonds** (Vol. 26, No. 1)

**Making the Business-Nonprofit Partnership a Win-Win** (Vol. 22, No. 1)

**Deeper Donor Relationships = Increased Contributions** (Vol. 26, No. 4)

**The Challenge of Sustaining a Grant-Funded Program** (Vol. 28, No. 6)

**The Care and Nurturing of Corporate Friends** (Vol. 14, No. 1)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development ([www.NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute](http://www.NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute)).

“A letter can't be framed as effectively as a certificate.”



## creative fundraising ideas

### Throw a Party with a Purpose

What's known as a "parlor gathering" has all the trappings of a party. There's food and drink, and guests are made to feel at home. Unlike a party, though, the gathering is tightly scripted. After a brief period of socializing, the host (a well-connected person who may be a board member, major donor, or volunteer) requests the guests' attention for a brief program. At the end of the program, pledge cards are distributed, and guests are invited to fill them out.

Look for presenters who are persuasive and able to convey an emotional message. The speakers must be able to answer these key questions: Why this initiative? Why now? Why are you the right people to help carry it out? What will you as a donor receive in return? (For example, "Thanks to you, the world will be different.")

The timeline might look like this:

- Appetizers and drinks, 30 minutes.
- Welcome speech by the host, 2-5 minutes.
- Welcome speech by the CEO, focusing on the organization's history and mission, 2-5 minutes.
- Testimonials by program clients and volunteers, 5 minutes.
- Inspirational talk on "How You Can Be Involved," 5 minutes.
- Host's thank-you to guests, 2-5 minutes.
- Wrap-up in which pledge cards are distributed and collected, 30 minutes.


Be sure to send thank-you notes to everyone involved. Such a party is a cost-effective way to convey your organization's impact and raise an impressive amount of money.

— adapted from *The Nonprofit Fundraising Solution*, [www.amacombooks.com](http://www.amacombooks.com)

### 6. BANQUETS AND LUNCHEONS

Many organizations host luncheons and banquets to recognize volunteers and other significant people. Invite funders to these events, and acknowledge their support. It's a very useful and well-received way to say "thanks."

### 7. ONGOING MEDIA COVERAGE

Whenever media sources approach you for a story, be sure to include statements such as "With funding from . . ." or "This program is in partnership with . . ." Such acknowledgment will help publicize your funders, highlight their relationship with you, and solidify their commitment to your organization's success. 

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