

Finding Value and Income Where You Least Expect It

What seems like a loss can be an unimaginable gain.

By Karen Eber Davis

Imagine learning that one of your donors just made a six-figure gift to another nonprofit. What would you do? How would you react? Here's one approach that can work wonders.

Look for the opportunity

A museum's director of development (we'll call him Bob) discovered that one of the museum's members had recently contributed \$200,000 to a nonprofit that serves children in the community. When he checked the records, Bob found that this donor hadn't used the museum tickets she'd received as part of the museum's membership package. He contacted her and proposed that the museum provide her unused tickets to the children served by the other nonprofit.

The delighted donor agreed. By helping the donor, Bob earned the opportunity to better understand the donor's interests and explore how the museum might partner with her in the future.

Help donors achieve their goals

Nonprofits often have pockets of overlooked value. By leveraging them, you can help your donors, community, and nonprofit.

If you have a membership program, collect data like Bob did to discover unused membership benefits. Even if you're not a membership organization, you can adapt Bob's approach with the following steps:

1. Identify value. Look for unused or underused resources. Expect to find some.

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nonprofit briefs

Raise More Money for Your Organization

Most of us have been taught that talking about people's finances is impolite, so we find it awkward to ask them for money. But nonprofit organizations need money to carry out their missions. *Train Your Board (And Everyone Else) to Raise Money* by Andrea Kihlstedt and Andy Robinson (published by Emerson & Church, emersonandchurch.com) is designed to help reticent fundraisers get comfortable with raising money.


2. Explore who might benefit from the unused value. Consider if the value might benefit:

- customers
- donors
- foundations and grant-giving entities, like clubs
- business leaders
- government agencies.

3. Obtain data. To collect useful data, Bob changed the practice of mailing museum tickets as part of people's membership packages. Instead, he asked members to pick up their tickets at the museum's front desk. That way, he could easily see who hadn't used their tickets. That gave him the chance to put the unused tickets to good use.

4. Try it. List the next small steps you'll need to take and the timetable to get them done.


5. Repeat, and institutionalize successes. Not every attempt to share value will be embraced by your recipients. Learn from attempts that fail. Do more of what works. Over time, the mindset of looking for value will bring amazing dividends.

When a donor in your community makes a large gift to someone else, rejoice. Use the opportunity to help people—and your organization—achieve the greatest possible goals. 



Karen Eber Davis (karen@kedconsult.com) is an expert in maximizing philanthropic impact and the author of 7 Nonprofit Income Streams: Open the Floodgates to Sustainability! Sign up for her free newsletter “Added Value” at kedconsult.com.

The book offers a variety of exercises to overcome obstacles to fundraising and clarify each step of the process. You needn't be a professional trainer to lead these exercises, which are extremely detailed and helpful.

While intended primarily for board members, the exercises will also help others—such as development committee members—increase their fundraising skills. Developing a training regimen with a set of exercises is especially useful for volunteers of an annual or capital campaign. If you want more people to help raise money for your organization, this book will prove invaluable. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler