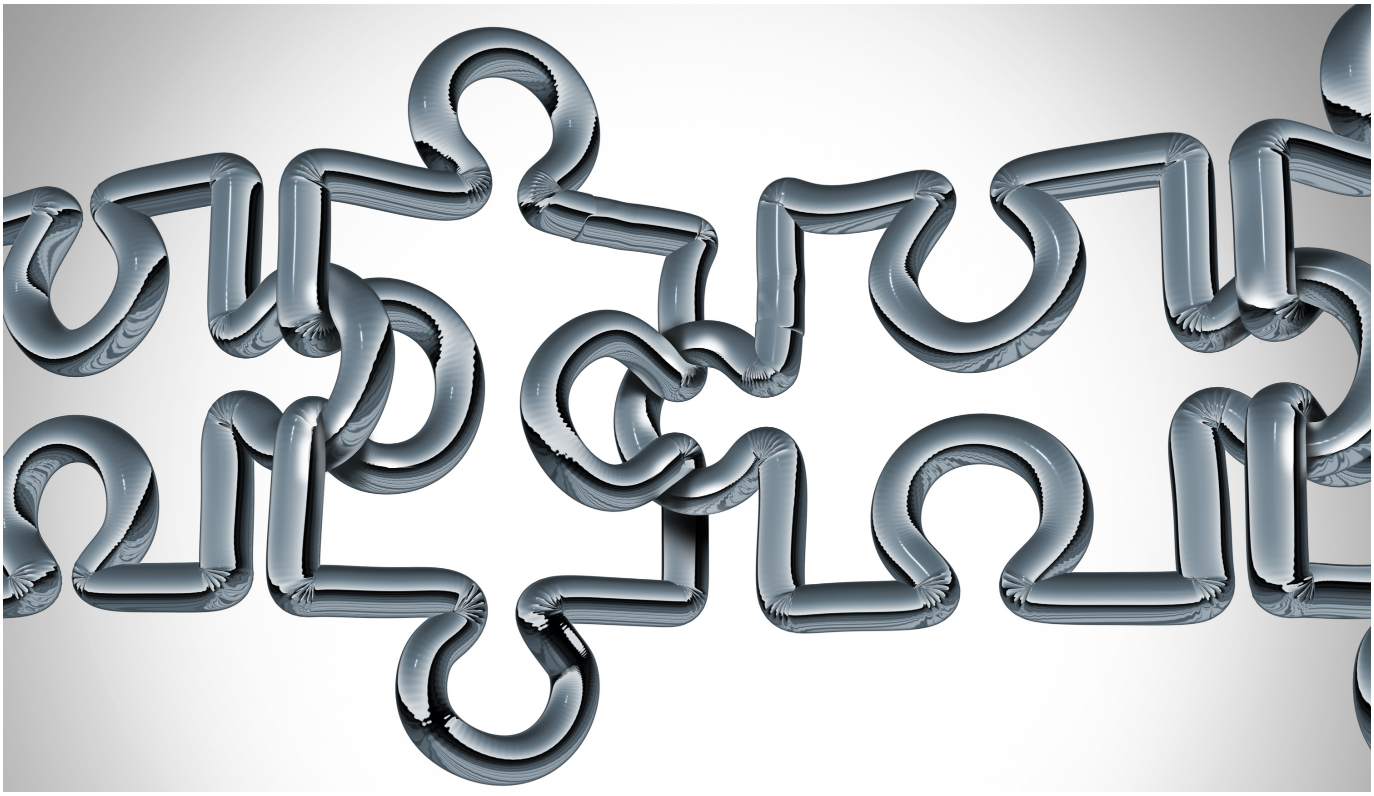

Get Closer to Supporters than Ever Before: How to Make Connections & Boost Action

These four doable methods will help you have more meaningful connections with the people who matter most.

By Nancy Schwartz

There are proven ways for your organization to strengthen relationships with the people whose support, loyalty, and actions you want — donors, volunteers, and even staff (who are often overlooked as important supporters). Using these approaches, you can get to know your supporters, focus in on what's important to them, and keep in touch at receptive times. Here are four specific things you can do to create strong, lasting bonds:

1. Launch a Marketing Advisory Group

Begin by identifying your target audiences. Prioritize segments of each audience that share similar wants, needs, and preferences. Then put together a marketing advisory group that includes at least one person from each segment. That way, you'll have access to many different perspectives and you'll have the right person to turn to whenever needed. This group will provide a solid diversity of opinion when you solicit input on a specific campaign or message. If you don't have people in mind that represent all the perspectives you need, ask colleagues for recommendations.

When you invite people to join your advisory group, be sure to specify your expectations. Don't ask them to help more than once or twice a month, and ask for no more than five to 10 minutes at a time.

The things you ask of your advisors will vary depending on the task at hand. Ask a few of them for input on drafts of messages or website improvements. Or ask all of them to complete a brief online survey to share their perceptions of a new program and the gap it will fill.

Ask with thought, and don't overburden your advisors. Most important, thank them frequently and often.

Try using your advisory group for six months, refining the group over time. You'll be amazed at how the insights you receive will help you connect with your audiences.

2. Listen to Social Conversations

There's so much being said online about your organization, your cause, and organizations you compete with for donations that you'll learn a lot by just listening. By

> **Facebook has several advantages as an audience research tool.**

monitoring social channels for conversation on relevant topics, you'll see what resonates and why, enabling you to better engage *your* people.

Keep in mind that with this kind of social listening, you won't know who's talking and how that person maps (if at all) to your targets. Nonetheless, if there's a groundswell of conversation on a topic important to your organization, you want to hear it.

Social monitoring options range from free tools like Google Alerts to paid services such as Mention, and social listening services, which enable you to focus in and listen to your people (those in your donor management system, e-news subscribers, volunteers, and others).

Case Study: American Friends Service Committee Uses Social Listening to Connect

A few days after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), noticed a significant shift in focus on social media to the hashtag #Ferguson. They could quickly see that terms such as "police" started trending, nationally and among supporters in AFSC's database (CRM).

AFSC created a saved search to see exactly who in its CRM was talking about Ferguson on Facebook and Twitter. Next, they invited those supporters to a Google Hangout that resulted in record-high participation and 74 donations. That's incredible targeting!

3. Ask & Listen in Your Social Communities

If your organization has an active community on Facebook, Twitter, or other interactive platforms, you have a focus group ready to roll. But before you just ask, and ask, and ask again, prioritize what you want to know. Also, decide how to filter and weigh what you hear since your social communities may not map exactly to your donors and prospects.

Facebook has several advantages as an audience research tool:

You can easily run your organization's donor or e-mail list against Facebook subscribers who have "liked" your page. That makes it easier to map responses to your prioritized audiences.

The Facebook Live Video tool is an excellent way to gather quick feedback on a draft logo, design, message, or e-mail format (anything, in fact, easy to view via an online video) *if* you have a huge and active following on Facebook.

Polling on Facebook is super easy to set up, and it's easy for people to respond.

4. Ask Folks as They're Leaving a Program or Event

This technique is ages old but works well, as long as you ask just one or two quick questions. If your question is brief, ask verbally. If you want to gather names or have a couple of questions, then have pens and printed mini-surveys or tablets on hand for responses. If the event is online, pop up a quick survey before the finish.

Put Your Findings to Work

You can use the insights you glean from these four steps to build connections and boost action. But that will happen only if you log, share, and analyze what you learn, then act on it.

Go one step further by adding these insights to supporter data. That's your path to getting closer than ever before to your people and activating them to move your mission forward.

Nancy Schwartz (nancy@smartmedicare.com) is a medicare coach who is well known for her blog and newsletter "Getting Attention."

> **It's easier to gather quick feedback if you have an active Facebook following.**

Expand Your Reach

Create more bonds with tips in these articles (NonprofitWorld.org):

Empower Your Employees to Be Mini-Marketers (Vol. 25, No. 6)

Are You Using the Double Power of Focus Groups? (Vol. 14, No. 5)

How Mobile Marketing Can Work for You (Vol. 32, No. 4)

Quick & Dirty Research (Vol. 19, No. 3)

When Should You Conduct Surveys? (Vol. 28, No. 1)

Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success (Vol. 35, No. 3)

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

A Better Brand = More Loyal Supporters (Vol. 38, No. 4)

Three Keys to Building Relationships in Life (and with Your Donors) (Vol. 38, No. 1)