

Donor Research

Before asking for gifts, it is very important to research prospects in order to gain a better understanding of their needs and motivations. This research enables you to communicate with donors appropriately, which results in increased connection to, and involvement with, your organization.

When asking for major gifts, such as grants or planned gifts, specific information about the foundation, corporation, or individual should be collected and analyzed before making contact. Sources of information for each include:

Foundations

- View their website for publications, guidelines, and other information.
- Obtain a copy of their most recent tax return through The Foundation Center's Website (www.fdncenter.org). This lists the grants that were made, the amount of the grants, and the names of organizations that they supported.
- Call a program officer and pitch your idea. Get feedback and suggestions.

Corporations

- View their website and look for their community involvement section. If they don't have a separate section for charitable activities, it might be found in the investor information section.
- Obtain a copy of the corporation's annual report, which communicates the company's values, goals, and financial position.
- Obtain a copy of the company's Hoover's or Dun and Bradstreet report for key executive staff names, details about products and services, and financial information.
- Read articles about the company in newspapers and trade journals.

Individuals

- Usually individuals who are approached for major gifts have a personal connection to the organization. They, or someone close to them, may have benefited from your programs. Have a conversation with the people within your organization who know such individuals in order to get ideas about the donor's interests and values.
- Go online and type the person's name in a search engine to learn about their history, achievements, and affiliations. Read magazine or newspaper articles that feature them.

When asking for smaller gifts, it is more effective to group donors according to demographic, socioeconomic, or personal characteristics and conduct research on the group as a whole. This grouping process is also referred to as segmentation.

Donors can be segmented according to...

- Level of participation in your programs and services
- Giving history – the frequency and amount of past gifts
- Income/wealth – their ability and willingness to give
- Age, gender, or culture
- Hobbies and interests