

How Board Members Can Help Deliver What Donors Want

This document augments *Boards on Fire*, page 80

Rigorous research indicates that donors would give us 1) larger gifts, 2) more times per year, 3) over more years, if they got what they're longing for -- but not getting -- from the nonprofits they support. Board members can do a lot to increase retention and gift size by offering donors what they're looking for. Here's what that could look like.

Donors want to feel appreciated for what they've done on our behalf, whether that's time, money, in-kind gifts, sponsorship, auction items, or advocacy. They want to feel seen, and heard, and known and valued by the organizations they support. Board members could:

- Write hand-written notes on thank yous
- Call donors to thank them by phone
- Make a point to have a conversation with a donor at a gathering, and listen to their stories of connection
- Ask a donor to share a quote or testimonial about why they care about the mission, which could be used on your website, in your newsletter, in your social media, or at an event

Donors want to understand the impact of their gifts. They want to know whether their support is moving a dial, making a difference – and if so, in what way. They don't need big success stories. It's best to mention small day-to-day successes that can be repeated easily and have them be about one person at a time, not many people, and not using statistics.

- Mail a card with the story of a beneficiary hand-written on it
- Mail a one-page document with 2 or 3 brief stories describing what difference donor support made to an end-user, and write a personal note in the margin
- Forward by email some inside information about a victory or new development with a personal message, saying, “your gift made this possible”
- Send photographs of the donor's money at work
- Invite the donor to come see their support in action

Donors want to feel a sense of belonging -- to feel like insiders who belong to something bigger than themselves. They want authentic experiences that connect them to the mission.

- Invite a donor to participate in some task that propels the mission forward, like conducting citizen science, reading scholarship applications, building or painting or landscaping something, writing or editing, taking photographs, meeting with lawmakers
- Invite a donor to participate in a focus group, task force, strategic planning conversation, discussion of a book, article, or TED Talk, salon or Jeffersonian Dinner
- Invite a donor to have a visceral experience, like sitting in the middle of the orchestra during rehearsal, meeting your research scientists in the lab, engaging in a poverty simulation, experiencing a day in the life of a client or shelter animal, or walking the land