

Effective Donor Engagement Strategies

School Advancement Series



After this session, attendees will be able to:

- 1. Understand that donors want to know about how your school is using their gifts, the progress made toward your goals, and the variety of projects and programs going on at any given time.**
- 2. Utilize specific strategies to foster donor engagement to create a donor-centered culture for your school's fundraising efforts.**

What inspires donors to give a first-time?

Mission aligns with interests	54%
Have been considering this cause for a long-time	29%
Recommended by family or friend	23%*
Someone asks them to give	85%*
A celebrity	<5%

Rene Bekkers and Pamala Wiepking, 2011; *Burk, P. Donor Centered Fundraising, Cygnus Applied Research 2018.*

What about specific Catholic giving trends?

Give to both parish and other causes	84%
Supplemental gifts go to social justice causes, with education, healthcare, environmental causes and politics following behind.	73%
Don't donate to parish or any cause	1%
Catholics who donate money give between 2–5% of their income	69%

US Catholic (2024)

Why donors stop giving?

Burk, P. Donor Centered Fundraising, Cygnus Applied Research 2018.

Over-solicitation	69%
Communications Focused on Asking For More Money	64%
Lack of Measurable Results	63%
No longer Inspired By Mission	62%
Overhead Costs Too High	58%

Why do people give and more importantly, why do they give again?

In a survey of 300,000 donors across multiple non-profit organizations (including schools), the majority of donors say that although recognition is appreciated, what they really want is **MEANINGFUL** information and the three things they need are:

- 1. Prompt, meaningful acknowledgment when they make a gift.**
- 2. Confirmation that each gift, regardless of its value, will be assigned to a program, project or initiative narrower in scope than the mission as a whole.**
- 3. A report on the measurable results achieved to date in the program or project they are funding BEFORE they are asked for another gift.**

Burk, P. Donor Centered Fundraising, Cygnus Applied Research 2018.

How do we create a culture of donor-centered fundraising vs. traditional fundraising?

What is the difference?

Donor-Centered Fundraising:

is a strategy used by nonprofit organizations to put their donors at the heart of their fundraising efforts. This approach aims to build and maintain strong, meaningful relationships with donors, rather than treating them merely as sources of funds.

Nonprofit Fundraising, 2023

TRADITIONAL VS. DONOR-CENTERED FUNDRAISING

TRADITIONAL	DONOR CENTERED
Donor Recognition Gifts: Pins/plaques/certificates	Impact photos/cards/thank you notes from those helped by the donation
Thank You Letters: One letter used repeatedly, segmented by level of gift	Personalized letters for all donors at all levels;
Donor Walls: Only for “top” givers	Include all levels plus creative storytelling used

10 Strategies to Increase Engagement:

- 1. Invite donors to events or create a special event :** school play, athletic event, pancake breakfast, meet and greet with the incoming kdg - outgoing seniors
- 2. Put the donor in your story:** Donor highlight in weekly school newsletter/annual report; Tag in Social Media; Share with Boards/Councils
- 3. Regularly Call or Email Donors with a personal message to share impact and show gratitude:** Engage your Board/Council/Staff
- 4. Rethink Donor Walls and Recognition:** Consider creating a “scrapbook” of donors from pictures collected at a gala and place in the entry of the school; Invite donors to write a message inside their favorite “childhood” book in the school library; How could you recognition go beyond segmented giving?
- 5. Spend more time on honing your Thank-You:** Is it timely? Does it identify where it’s being used? Does it show impact? Is it authentic?

10 Strategies to Increase Engagement:

6. Inspire Evangelists: Highlight volunteers in the same vein as you do donors, these are often your best brand advocates; value the gift of time as much as a monetary donation. Build on the “we are all in this together mindset”

7. Social Media Should Be A 2-Way Channel: Yes, it can be a great marketing tool but be sure to use language that encourages communication. Be consistent in posting and share links that connect to your landing page.

8. Measure and track your engagement BUT Compare your results with....your school: Continuous development is the goal and observing trends can help you make adjustments where needed.

9. Ask your donors for feedback in a variety of ways: treat your donors like people not wallets

10. Treat your donors the way you want to be treated

“To fulfill your mission, therefore, you must lay its foundations in a way consistent with our Christian identity; establish means appropriate for the quality of study and research; and pursue goals in harmony with service to the common good.

A plan of thought and action based on these solid pillars will be able to contribute, through education, to building a future in which the dignity of the person and universal fraternity are global resources upon which every citizen of the world can draw.”

-Gravissimum Educationis (Pope Francis, 2018)

Resources:

Burk, Penelope. Donor Centered Fundraising. Cygnus Applied Research (2018).

Crutchfield, Leslie & Grant, Heather. Forces for Good. Jossey Bass (2012)

Heyman, Darian. Nonprofit Fundraising 101. Wiley (2016)

Bloomerang Donor Engagement Guide: <https://bloomerang.co/blog/donor-engagement/>



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