



## Cultivation Made Easy!

Cultivation consists of all the relationship-building steps that lead to someone being a lifelong donor to your organization. And cultivation continues as part of a stewardship program once gifts are made. Through cultivation, you learn more about donors, and they learn more about you and your program. Over a window of time, the donor establishes trust and rapport with the organization 'through' the person(s) they engage with. Each comes to view the other as a member of the family and a true partnership is formed.

We are always having a conversation with our donors. It is going on constantly, whether or not we realize it. Every time the donor is touched by the organization — from fundraising letters to e-mails to telephone calls — an impression is formed, good or bad. Insuring that the entire organization understands that donors are always 'looking' and 'listening' helps there be consistent quality messaging coming from all departments.

### Six Key Things to Remember in Effective Cultivation

**1. Every donor is special.** Every donor is a mini-campaign and deserves special focus on their unique interests and potential. Be observant during face-to-face meetings and conversations and be sure that each donor profile contains more than just numbers. Prepare and follow a cultivation strategy for a years' worth of engagement and 'conversations' with a donor.

**2. Offer authentic inquiry.** Be yourself and be curious. Be ready with your personal passion statements when they ask why you are involved. Some open ended questions to ask over time are:

- Why are they interested in your organization?
- What about the work of your organization excites or intrigues them?
- If the organization could do more of \_\_\_\_\_, what would it be?
- Who do they see as a leading partner for the organization to work with (could be a person, business leader, government agency)?
- Is there any part of the work of your organization that they think could be done differently or better?

**3. Keep it fresh.** Donors should hear from a variety of people. Keep it exciting and fresh with newsletters and email messages. Tell a lot of stories about your organization. Do a lot of listening! People connect in different ways, and they appreciate variety.

Here are some ways to connect with a donor and the more you know about them, the easier it will be to offer steps that are meaningful.

- Sending personal, handwritten follow-up notes after a meeting or phone conversation.
- Scheduling a one-on-one lunch or breakfast.
- Sending birthday cards or holiday notes.
- Sending notes, calls, or emails about an upcoming program or event of special interest.

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- Clipping and sending an article that is known to be of interest.
- Typing in a Google alert for their name or business and sending a note of congratulations when a milestone is reached.
- Passing along complimentary tickets to cultural, sports, or academic events.

**4. Always walk away with an idea of a next step.** What is your goal for your next meeting or next 'touch' with your donor? You may aim to find a program that matches her interests and have the program officer send a note. Or you may want to find out in more concrete terms a donor's level of interest in making a gift—at what level and when. You have to keep them moving along, educated, and interested. Maybe the next step is letting them know about what happened when you reached out to the person or organization they suggested you partner with.

**5. Explain your priorities.** Now more than ever donors want to know what your priorities are so that they can best help the organization and its programs. Know what those priorities are. Try this exercise: Name three things that will NOT happen if you do not reach your fundraising goal. Those three things are your top priorities.

**6. Track every conversation and 'touch'.** Often, essential information about donors, prospects, and supporters is lost because it was not diligently recorded and stored in a database. This includes tracking the important details about your donor, be it their love of animals or their preferred meeting times during the week. Donors notice when you remembered the details like the names of their children and their sports or send a note on their anniversary.

**The most frequently asked question about cultivation is how long do you need to cultivate a donor before asking?**

Every donor is different but the number one reason people do not give is they are not asked. Inviting partnership to change the world and exchanging ideas about how this can happen is a conversation that can be had at any time in a donor relationship. What is added to the conversation at the right time is how they want to do that. Typically 3 to 5 'touches' with an organization is ample time to invite a first time gift and over the course of a year or two, one can discuss a legacy or transformational gift.

Bottom line about cultivation...stay in your heart, trust your gut, think about how YOU would want to be treated as a donor, and be patient and politely persistent!