

Appendix 7-A

Cultivation Ideas

Explore these cultivation ideas to help nurture relationships with your donors and prospects—and other constituents, too. Some may be generic cultivation activities directed to all, whether donor or collaborating organization or even your clients. Some of these ideas focus more specifically on donors and prospective donors.

Adjust some of these ideas to serve as personalized cultivation for a specific donor or prospect.

1. Ask for advice from your donors (and other constituents). Get their opinions and perspectives.

Asking people's opinions engages them in your organization. Asking for opinions creates interest, builds ownership, enhances relationships, and strengthens support.

- Maybe you have lunch and ask for advice about something specific. Maybe you conduct interviews, surveys, and focus groups to learn more about the interests and concerns of your donors. The act of conducting research—learning more about your donors—also is a great relationship-building strategy.
- Brainstorm ideas with individuals and groups. Probe for their interests, motivations, and aspirations. For example, meet with individuals to get their ideas about how they want to be recognized. Convene a group of donors and brainstorm recognition ideas. Ask individuals and groups why they give in general and, more specifically, why they give to your organization.
- Test-market a specific idea or offering with selected constituents. Invite constituents to attend a focus group and get their reaction to something. For example, present the key messages from your draft case statement. Find out what works and doesn't work about these messages. Review your new recognition program and get their reactions. Thinking about a new special event? Put together a focus group and test the idea.
- Include a “nongiving call to action” in your newsletter and even your acknowledgment letters. Enclose a quick-response card with one to three easy check-off questions. For example, ask what they think of the newsletter. Ask them to rate particular articles. Get their reactions about gift club names. Ask their reactions to your new cultivation ideas.

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2. Connect personally with your constituents.

This really is the most important cultivation strategy. Do this face-to-face if you can. Or via telephone or social networking tools.

- Chat informally with constituents. Do this a lot! Set yourself a goal—perhaps two different people each day. Give them a piece of news. Share an idea with them. Thank them for something. Certainly call your board members, fundraising volunteers, and donors regularly. Reach out to new people, too.

Take this opportunity to learn more about them. Use this opportunity to increase their understanding and awareness.

- Every day, eat breakfast or lunch with someone you need to cultivate—perhaps a staff colleague or a board member, maybe a donor or prospective donor, or possibly a colleague in another nonprofit/nongovernmental organization (NGO), one you're trying to partner with.
- Create ad hoc task forces. Set up task forces that meet two to three times to brainstorm a particular topic or identify ways to address a specific issue. Then the task force ends.
- Use existing committees and teams well. Make sure your committees and teams include people who do not serve on the board. Make them large enough to encourage diversity and welcome many constituents. Change membership often enough to produce vitality while maintaining continuity.
- Go to every board and committee meeting early enough to mingle. Some of your members will arrive early, and you can take this opportunity to talk informally.
- Create short-term as well as long-term volunteer projects. Volunteers have different interests and needs now. Find out what people want by convening a brainstorming session. Talk to people informally about their interests and disinterests. Identify tasks for groups and individuals. Then test-market your ideas with a focus group.
- Host cultivation gatherings and tours at your agency. Encourage your board members to host cultivation gatherings at their homes and workplaces, as appropriate. Remember, don't ask for gifts at these gatherings. Instead, focus on relationship building.
- Cultivate relationships at your programs and fundraising events. Make sure that board members and staff mingle with guests rather than socializing with friends. In addition to general mingling, assign board members and staff to cultivate specific individuals at events.

3. Use communications effectively to build relationships.

- Make sure your newsletter and regular correspondence follow the guidelines for effective communication. Include a call to action as often as possible. And that doesn't always mean asking for money.
- Write personal letters about their particular interests to a targeted constituency or constituent.
- Provide insider updates to targeted constituents.

4. Acknowledge and recognize your donors of money and time.

- Make donor (and volunteer) thank-you calls. Don't ask for a gift! Instead, thank donors for past gifts. And if they are receptive to your call, ask a few questions to help you get to know them better. For example, ask why they give. Ask how satisfied they were with their most recent contact with your organization. Find out what kind of special events they like. Ask if they want more information about something.
- Make all your thank-you letters more personal. Review the guidelines for effective communication. Talk about specific programs. Tell your donors how the money will be used.
- Create special thank-you letters. For example, if you're a youth organization, maybe the kids draw pictures for donors. Or if you work with animals, perhaps you send a picture of an animal that was saved because of that donor's gift.
- Send more than one thank-you letter. Send the official one from the organization. Ask the volunteer solicitor to send a personal note. If it's a major gift (and not anonymous), ask several board members to send personal notes.
- Host donor and volunteer recognition parties. Find a local restaurant that likes your organization. Ask the restaurant to donate the food and service. Offer a cash bar with receipts going to the restaurant.
- Develop a recognition program for donors. Decide what criteria you will use. For example, many organizations—but not all—recognize donors by gift size. The smartest organizations recognize donor loyalty, too. Decide if you will provide benefits for various gift levels. Try brainstorming ideas with your donors before you finalize your recognition program. What do they value as recognition? Outline program components and test them with a focus group of donors before implementation. By the way, how about including volunteers in your recognition program?
- Create interesting recognition gifts. For each major donor, frame a drawing by one of your youth clients. Include the name of your organization, the donor, and the artist. For a capital campaign, feature a photograph or rendering of your facility. Give a piece of original art. Give a book.
- Keep postcards or note cards on hand. Write a quick note when someone spends time with you on the telephone. Send out a quick thought or just a "hello."
- Clip and send interesting articles. Perhaps something about your organization. Perhaps a topic of interest to the constituent.
- Send New Year cards to your board members, key volunteers, and key donors. Include handwritten notes, or write the whole thing by hand.