

The Art of First Impressions

How to Combine Strategy, Analytics,
and Creative to **Captivate New Donors**
and **Keep Them Coming Back**



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Introduction

In this age of Zoom meetings and social media followers, it can be easy to forget that there are real people on the other end of your digital interactions. At the end of the day, your donors are humans who want to positively impact a cause they feel strongly about. The motivation is simple enough: helping others makes us feel good. So, as a fundraiser,

it's your job to ensure every interaction—starting with the first one—reinforces that your donors are achieving amazing things through their generosity.



First impressions leave a lasting impact. Inside these brief initial interactions, so much happens that determines how the future unfolds. These are literally make-or-break moments. Make a good impression, and the relationship moves forward. Create a lackluster impression, and the connection breaks before it ever has a chance to blossom.

For nonprofits operating in a mixed economic landscape, making a strong first impression with a prospective donor is essential.

Despite inflation slowing down, donors and organizations alike have tightened their belts and are focusing on where their dollars can make the biggest impact. We're seeing individuals give to fewer charities and instead focus on the one or two that most deeply align with their values. This is when first impressions matter most—nonprofits can use their data to craft an experience that meets the *donor's* case for support.

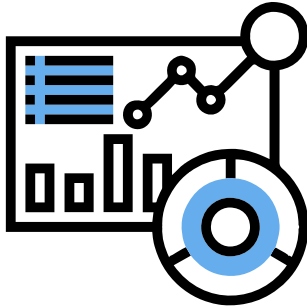
Because the cost of acquisition is so expensive (and getting more so by the day), lean times may tempt nonprofits to scale back these efforts. But they do so at their peril: numerous studies show pausing acquisition for even a year can set your organization back three years.

This puts a lot of pressure on nonprofits to deliver not just a *good* first impression, but a *phenomenal* one. You want to provide a memorable, meaningful, and resonant experience that compels the individual to act and makes them want more. On top of all that, you must do this quickly, before they lose interest.

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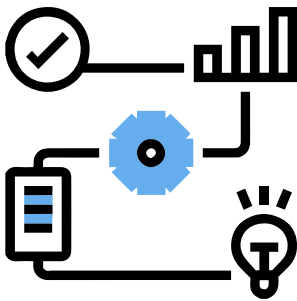
Acquisition is all about first impressions. So, how can you create exceptional ones that keep people coming back?

At **Allegiance Group + Pursuant**, we take a three-pronged approach to lay the foundation for increased support today and greater loyalty tomorrow. For this approach to work, all three elements must be applied effectively and in tandem:



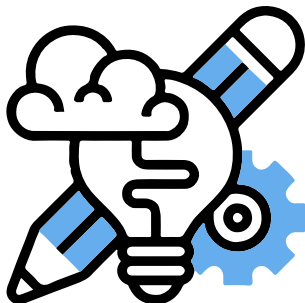
DATA

Understand your donors better and create the best acquisition models by utilizing internal, first- and zero-party data plus external third-party data from a tool like GivingDNA.



STRATEGY

Combine tailored insights from existing donors with the motivations of potential donors to define a collective experience that aligns with your brand.



CREATIVE

Use storytelling to inspire emotional momentum and action in your donors.

In this resource, we'll break down each of these key components—**data**, **strategy**, and **creative storytelling**. We'll also share proven tips on how you can optimize them within your acquisition efforts to make meaningful first impressions with donors and drive loyalty to your mission.

Part I: Data

It all starts with **you**. That may seem like a strange thing to say when we're talking about acquisition and building donor loyalty. But, when it comes to using data in your acquisition, focusing on your organization is where you need to begin.

Before you can start meeting donors and developing relationships that flourish, you must first have a strong sense of who you are and what you're looking for. You must be able to sell yourself. For instance, if you had 30 seconds in an elevator with a donor, you should be able to talk about the unique value you offer in a quick, concise, and compelling way.

You must understand what makes your organization unique and different from other organizations if you're going to *target and engage the right audience* who will support you for the long haul.

To get a full, clear, honest, and accurate picture of your organization and the unique value it offers, start by spending some time with your leadership team, volunteers, and the people who know your organization the best: your current donors.



Answer these questions:

- » **Why do your current loyal donors love and continue to support you?**
- » **What do you do as an organization that no one else does?**
- » **What would happen to your mission if your organization didn't exist anymore?**

Data Unlocks Your Organization's "It" Factor

The answers to the questions above will help you determine what "it" is that makes your organization so unique and special. Once you identify your unique value, you'll want to capture and build it into your marketing. You can then use it like a magnet to attract the people you're looking for to your organization and your cause.

Data is the key to unlocking your organization's "it" factor. Rather than having an idea about what motivates donors or guessing what might inspire them, you have access to real data and analytics that can provide the answer.

5 Ways to Use Data to Accelerate Acquisition

To determine how your organization can use your unique value to connect with donors who have the greatest potential for long-term loyalty and giving, follow these steps:

1. Find Your Sweet Spot

Once you know your unique value, you must find the intersection between that unique value, what donors say they're passionate about, and what they *actually do*. That intersection is your organization's "sweet spot" for connecting with donors. Every organization has a sweet spot—and data can help you find it.



"What donors say they're passionate about" is data captured directly from donors through things like survey research, monitoring social media, or gathering feedback. What people say is often the best way to get at their motivations—why they're attracted to your organization, why they give to other organizations, etc.

However, what people say and what they do are often two different things. That's where the second data set (*"What donors actually do"*) comes in. This data contains behavioral data, showing actions from things like tracking —how recently they gave, how often, how much. However, these are outcomes of individuals' actions; what they don't reveal is the *why* behind those actions.

Taken by themselves, neither data set tells the whole story. You must go deeper.

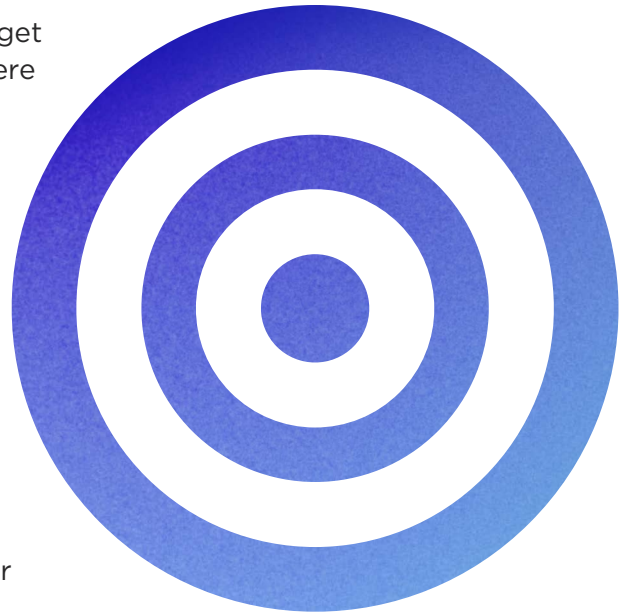
Traditional Recency, Frequency, Monetary Value (RFM) behavioral tracking is a great way to identify those donors most closely aligned with your organization. However, overlaying additional data from GivingDNA and internal giving analysis takes it a step further. You're able to fill in the gaps and get a clearer picture of the donor who is the most passionate and the most motivated to give. When you align that analysis with your unique value proposition—who you are as an organization—you can identify that sweet spot of your target audience and **communicate what makes your organization unique to the donors most motivated to engage.**

2. Identify Who to Engage

Let's go a layer deeper with understanding your target audience. While there are several ways to do this, here are a few key methods for using data and analytics to develop your acquisition strategy:

Start by Examining Your Current Donor Profile

What do you know about your current donors? Do you have an easy way to see the data about your different groups of donors and therefore understand the profile of each group? If you can quickly model the data sets on your different donors, then you can use those data points to identify and understand the best non-donors in your file. GivingDNA is the ideal tool for this.



Do any of these non-donors look like your most engaged donors? Move them into an acquisition segment that's warm but has yet to donate. Then, use what your data tells you about them—their likes, motivations, philanthropic priorities, and communication preferences—to convert them.

Reflect on Your Organization's Acquisition Goals

What are you looking to achieve with your acquisition campaign? What are your goals? Does your donor audience need to look different to support those goals? If so, who might these potential people be? Think about those whose motivations align with your cause but who may not be in the obvious places.

**MARKET RESEARCH
IS A POWERFUL TOOL
THAT CAN HELP YOU
MEET YOUR GOALS.**

For instance, third-party data found through GivingDNA could reveal quality candidates for a one-time donation drive. Or it may show that event volunteers for a similar cause would make great monthly giving prospects for your organization.

Finally, conduct a market opportunity analysis to uncover where and how you can reach more potential donors. Market research is a powerful tool that can help you meet your goals. **An organization like Allegiance Group + Pursuant can develop a market research strategy driven by data and based on your goals to ensure you're targeting the right audience.** Consider exercises like a S.W.O.T. Analysis—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats—as well.

Survey Both Donors and Non-Donors

Even if you know your current donors, it's still essential to understand the “why” behind their actions. The best way to do this is to ask them. Take a sample of that group and ask why they gave, what other organizations they gave to, and what would make them give again.

Survey warm non-donors as well. Find out what motivates them to be involved with your organization—and what would drive them to make a financial contribution.

After looking inward, you should then survey a sample of the general population. Start with questions about awareness to understand how much they know about your organization and whether they give to similar causes. Use this approach to create a profile of your most likely new donor and understand what creative and messaging they might respond to best.



Use Social Media Analysis to Identify Groups of People Who Are Already Talking About Issues Important to Your Cause

Search for the topic that makes your organization unique and sets you apart. Who's talking about that and in what channels? Do you have any influencers in that group? Cultivate influencers around that topic to promote your brand, then use that to target your online advertising and messaging. Social listening tools make this option accessible for organizations with a wide variety of budgets.

3. Learn How (and When) to Engage Donors

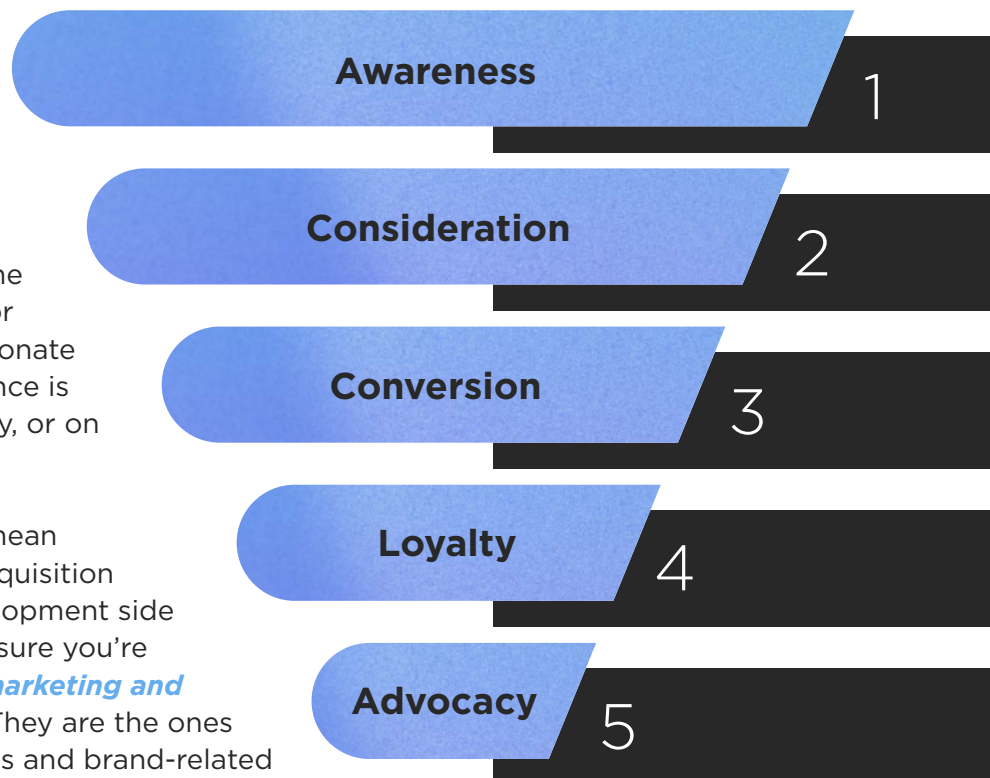
Once you know your potential donors, you must think about when and how in the life cycle you want to acquire them. Many fundraisers have been trained to be hyper-focused on the “Conversion phase” of the funnel (*what is going to get them to make the gift*). But if the first impression and decision to support are being made earlier—as new research shows—then that thinking needs to shift.

A **COHORT3 study** on donor decision-making found **94 percent of prospects choose their preferred charity in the Awareness stage**, rather than lower in the funnel in the Consideration or Conversion stages. In fact, findings revealed once a donor moved beyond Awareness into Consideration, the charity’s influence through ads or promotions in getting them to donate is quite low. At that point, influence is primarily driven by friends, family, or on their own.

So, what does this information mean for fundraisers developing an acquisition campaign? If you’re on the development side of the house, you need to make sure you’re in **close partnership with your marketing and communications departments**. They are the ones responsible for driving awareness and brand-related communications in those crucial early stages.

From a fundraising perspective, you should be thinking, *What must we infuse in those awareness messages to educate potential future donors about our organization so they give down the line?* That all comes back to your unique value proposition as an organization.

Potential Donors Make Decisions Early



4. Communicate Your Unique Value

The first impression is now made much earlier in the donor life cycle than previously thought. Traditionally, we think about acquisition taking place when the first gift is made. We now know donors are making up their minds based on perceptions they have *before* an organization invites them to act.

Because the decision to give comes so early in the process, your organization should be proactive in clearly communicating your unique value from the get-go, across all aspects of your brand. First, identify what you do better than every other organization. Then, use data to align that value with your prospective donors' cases for support. Even though you don't know these individuals well (or at all), you can draw some inferences based on profiles you've built in your database of different donor personas.

Center Your Acquisition Efforts and Communications Around Your Unique Value

With for-profit companies, this type of thinking is common. They tell consumers what their product does that no other products on the market can do. *This phone has the longest battery life, the fastest performance, and takes studio-quality pictures.* Nonprofits need to apply that line of thinking to their communications.

DONORS ARE MAKING UP THEIR MINDS BEFORE AN ORGANIZATION INVITES THEM TO TAKE ACTION.

Let Donors Know What's in it for Them

As human beings, we innately want to know we're getting something in return when we're spending money—even when we're donating it. Now, this is a little trickier with fundraising because what we give people is a sense of meaning or accomplishment (a “warm glow”). Your unique value as a philanthropic organization is bringing positive impact and change; it's what your donors are bringing to the world. Make sure they know that and make them a part of it.

Don't Be Afraid to Take a Stand

Organizations need to own their unique position and be comfortable taking a stand for who they are and who they are not. The work you do to define your unique position should be leveraged to show how you rise above the noise in a crowded market. This can be uncomfortable and somewhat scary for some organizations because they risk alienating some people. But alienating those whose values and passions don't align with your mission isn't going to hurt you.

5. Create the Ideal Donor Journey

Finding and acquiring the individuals who are most likely to stick with you over the long term is critical—but you can't stop there. You must figure out how to make sure they stick around. This is where the experience becomes important.



You Must Provide Great Experiences

Experience is evaluated by the

- » Value it delivers
- » Effort it requires
- » Emotion it generates

For every channel, give thought to these aspects of the experience: *Is it easy for the donor to give? Is it an enjoyable experience? Did it deliver something of value to them so they feel like they have made an impact?* Every touchpoint is an opportunity to impact those first impressions that will shape expectations and how the donor talks about your organization.

You Must Work to Build Trust

Donors want to know your organization will

- » Live up to its promises
- » Provide the services specified
- » Not let the donor down

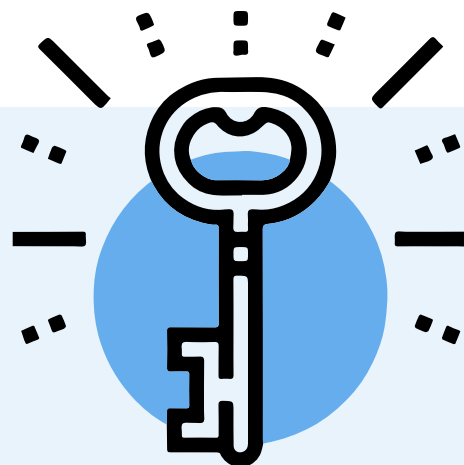
Trust drives decisions and has a strong influence on loyalty. Donors want to make sure the organization will live up to what it promised, provide the specified services to the beneficiary, and not let the donor down. Answer this by acknowledging their gift and sharing the impact it has made.

It's also important to remember that trust isn't just influenced by the organization; it's also impacted by how trustworthy philanthropic institutions are seen in society. This is important context as you're thinking about attracting new donors and the role your organization plays in the larger philanthropic landscape.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Part I Key Takeaways:

- » Use your current most loyal supporters to find out why they engage with your organization. Capture that unique value in your marketing.
- » Use the for-profit approach to acquisition, focusing on the thing you do differently or better than anyone else.
- » By overlaying your unique value with data showing what donors say they're passionate about and what they do, you can identify the "sweet spot" of your target audience.
- » New research shows donors are making support decisions in the Awareness stage, which means fundraisers should partner with marketing earlier, at the brand-building stage.
- » Finding individuals who are most likely to be loyal donors isn't enough. You must provide great experiences to ensure they stick around.




“BY FINDING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN WHAT ORGANIZATIONS CAN UNIQUELY OFFER WITH WHAT DONORS SAY THEY WANT AND ARE MOTIVATED BY—AND BY TRACKING HOW PEOPLE ACTUALLY BEHAVE—WE CAN TRULY MAKE AN INCREDIBLE DIFFERENCE FOR THAT ORGANIZATION’S MISSION.”

—MATTHEW MIELCAREK, SVP, ANALYTICS, INSIGHTS & EXPERIENCE

Part II: Strategy

The relationship between donors and fundraising is like dating. It's a courtship process that's all about building a relationship. And as that relationship deepens and expands, you continually move on to the next step. Think about it:



The donor journey begins with a “first date.” An individual encounters your organization through a marketing campaign, your website, or a fundraising effort. They check you out to see if you’re a good fit, sharing their passions and ideas. If they like you enough, maybe they decide to take a small step forward by donating or signing up for your email list.

From there, the relationship deepens. There may be more “dates” (website visits, mail packages, emails, Facebook likes); and, if all goes well, they might decide to further the relationship by making a second donation or even signing up for monthly giving. At some point down the line, a commitment is made, and your organization becomes a philanthropic priority.

Of course, there may also be bumps along the road. At any point during the journey, they may become disillusioned with you and lapse. In that case, you must make it up to them and bring them back into the fold. If the relationship can weather these ups and downs, you might have something special.

Envisioning the donor journey like a romantic relationship might seem a bit silly, but it's a useful reminder of the delicate nature of relationships. A few good dates don't equal happily ever after. Understanding your donor and what motivates them to give to your organization is key to creating an experience that will take a prospective donor from first impression to committed supporter.

So, how do you employ a strategy to grow and cultivate donor relationships for ultimate loyalty and lifetime value?

6 Guiding Principles For Your Acquisition Strategy

There are dozens of different factors to consider when you want to acquire new donors. If you don't think about anything else, remember these six principles:

Principle #1: MINDSET

Just like when you're starting a new relationship, going into acquisition with the right mindset is important. You must constantly think about the person on the other side of the relationship—and be committed to making the experience a good one for them. The donor experience cannot be an afterthought.

For best results, zoom out and start with awareness. Before someone can become a donor, they must know you exist. Just because someone follows you on Facebook doesn't mean they know who you are and what you do. Engage with your followers and find ways to connect with them that only focus on building awareness. Work with your marketing team to create a top-of-funnel marketing strategy that will eventually feed individuals into your fundraising pyramid.

The donor relationship may begin with the first gift, but today's donors have high expectations for what comes next.

Modern donors have relationships with the Amazons of the world that have collected data points from their first purchase to provide better communication and a more personalized experience. Because of those relationships with for-profit brands, today's donor now *expects* you to get to know them better through active listening and engagement and show you know them through meaningful communication.

From your initial interaction with a donor, you should be thinking about the journey beyond the first gift. This is where a good relationship with your marketing team comes in. Have a series of welcome emails prepared to nurture the constituent and increase their awareness of your organization. Include a short survey asking about their interests and values. This will help you judge their potential as a donor so you can determine your next steps. Plus, by collecting data about the prospect early in the relationship, you can provide a more personal experience sooner.

Focus on being donor-centric (people-focused) rather than organization-centric (program-focused) by breaking down relationships in these cycles:



First, welcome people in, then listen to them. Equip them with information and, finally, activate them. Activation could look like many things, from volunteering and donating again to being an advocate and participating in or attending events.

Principle #2: BUDGET

“You have to spend money to make money.” This old saying is often-repeated because it’s true—at least when it comes to fundraising. **Many organizations engage in acquisition without fully appreciating the investment involved. Acquisition isn’t a short-term loan; it’s an investment in the future.**

When developing an acquisition strategy, make sure you first establish these three things:

1. Your Investment Tolerance

It’s important that everyone up and down your organization agrees to the risk and understands the expected return on investment (ROI). Acquisition won’t pay off overnight. In fact, it may take years to reap the true rewards of your efforts. Have a clear and patient understanding of that reality—especially in these current times of economic uncertainty. You may see investment tolerance drop, so be prepared to defend your acquisition efforts.

**“WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT
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FUNDRAISING, YOU NEED
TO THINK ABOUT THE
EXPERIENCE RIGHT OUT OF
THE GATE.”**

**—MATTHEW MIELCAREK,
SVP, ANALYTICS, INSIGHTS &
EXPERIENCE**

2. The Types of Donors You Want to Reach

Before you start your acquisition efforts, it’s critical that you know the audience you’re targeting and have alignment in this area. You may want to acquire the same kind of donors you currently have, or this may be an opportunity to acquire a new demographic or utilize a new channel. Depending on your focus, the approach and expected results may look very different.

3. A New Donor Conversion Strategy

Make sure you have a plan for the new donors you acquire. You need to protect your investment in acquisition by ensuring you have the necessary strategies in place to create an experience that will bond your new donors more quickly to your organization and secure that all-important second gift. This may require you to invest more time, money, and effort—but it will pay off in the long run.

Principle #3: CASE FOR SUPPORT

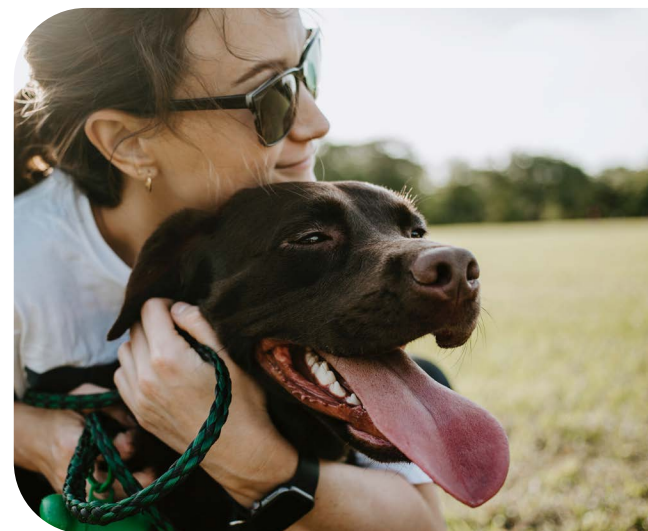
Why should I stay in this relationship? Your organization must be able to answer this question—ideally before your donor ever asks it. You must strongly and clearly articulate your case for support. Remember the unique value only your organization provides? Use it to demonstrate why donors should choose your organization over another.

Far too many organizations have a difficult time answering the (seemingly) simple question: “Why are you raising money?” Perhaps it’s because organizations do a lot of good work, which can’t be easily distilled down to one simple call to action (CTA). Or perhaps not enough attention has been paid industry-wide to this critical component of fundraising.

Either way, it’s difficult for prospective donors to decide whether your organization is worthy of their contribution—and their loyalty—if they don’t understand *why* you need them.

Every day, you’re competing for the time and attention of prospective new donors. When they receive your communication, they are going through an evaluation process and asking questions like:

- » **Why do I need to care about this?**
- » **What’s my role in helping to fund the mission?**
- » **Why should I support this organization and not another?**



When you think about your organization’s case for support, does it answer these questions? If it doesn’t, you need to do some work before investing in acquisition. If it does, are there ways you can make your case clearer, simpler, and more compelling for your prospective donors?

Your Case for Support VS *Their* Case for Support

More important than communicating your case for support is understanding your donors’ case for support. Why do they give? Use their survey responses to learn why they care about your organization or a similar cause. By getting to the heart of what matters to prospects, you can tailor your case for support to align with their values.

Leveraging your data can reveal their case for support. The rich insights in your donor database can support your strategies and uncover opportunities to build relationships. What are people responding to? If they’ve previously donated, what drove that decision? As you analyze your data, stories about your constituents will emerge that will help you deliver a customized experience built around what the donor wants to achieve through their charitable giving.

Principle #4: DIVERSIFICATION

From mail, digital, and social to mobile, events, and TV, there are many different channels you can use for acquisition. So, how should you choose your channel diversification? That decision largely comes down to a couple of key factors:

Audience: Understanding which target audience you are trying to reach should drive which channels you invest in. All channels are not created equal, so you want to go where your people are. Tools like GivingDNA help you understand the channels potential donors are responsive in, so you know which channels to prioritize.

Budget: Your investment tolerance and goals will also drive your decisions when it comes to diversification. Certain channels have a steeper cost-to-enter than other channels, so that may be a factor as well.

Communicating through diverse channels offers greater opportunities for reaching more prospective donors more effectively, but it also comes with its own set of challenges. They include:

Pathways: Communication is further complicated today because there are different pathways for each channel. For example, on the phone, you can communicate via calls, texts, mobile platforms, etc. You need to make sure you're considering all the pathways available and offering the ones that best meet your target audience's preferences.

Consistency: No matter what channels you ultimately choose to use for acquisition, it's paramount that you deliver a consistent brand experience across the board. After all, donors use multiple channels every day, and you have no control over how they toggle between them to consume your content. For instance, if a donor interacts with your brand through a mail piece and then moves to your website, the experience should be seamless—with the same branding, language, and messaging reinforced.

PRINCIPLE #5: TESTING

ABT—Always Be Testing. The great thing about direct response is the ability to test, read results, and then use those data points to evolve your program. This lets data be the diplomat in making decisions on everything from copy and design to the best time of year for a mailing.

Testing can come in all shapes and sizes; however, all tests are not created equal. Here are some key things to remember when you're testing aspects of your acquisition program:

Have a Goal: With your testing, it's important to specify a goal you're trying to impact: response rate, average gift, frequency, retention, etc. You should not test unless you know what area of your program you hope to affect. Develop your hypothesis and use it as an anchor to create your test.

Focus on One Variable: Always test only one thing at a time. If you change multiple variables, it's difficult to ascertain which variable drove the improved response or decreased performance. *If you have the budget, you can consider engaging in multi-variate testing—but you would need an analyst to set up the testing and interpret the results.*

Aim for Significance: Because there's a cost and risk associated with testing, it's critical to set up your testing appropriately so you have results that are statistically significant and can be acted upon. Universe size will be important. The larger the test sample, the more statistical confidence you will have in your results. It's also important to establish a control panel of similar make-up (volume and segmentation) so you can measure the test results against it.

**THE GREAT THING ABOUT
DIRECT RESPONSE IS THE
ABILITY TO TEST, READ
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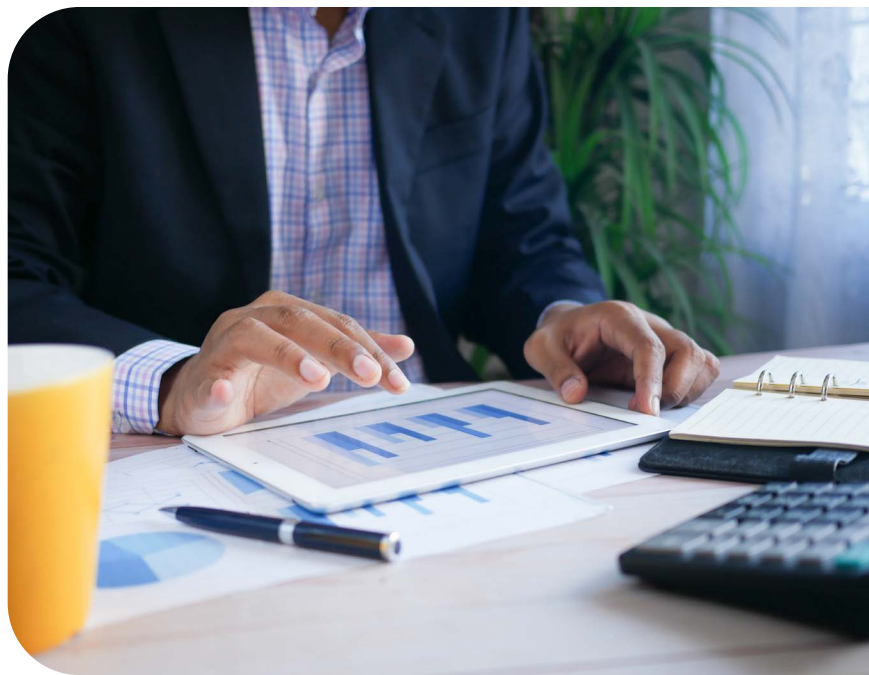
Account for Cost: When evaluating results (especially on a net impact), be sure you're using rollout costs since test cost per piece can be much higher. Also, there are different ways to approach testing depending on your budget and your hypothesis:

- » **Low-Cost, High-Impact Testing:** This is done within the same housing of the control package and can be as simple as a gift array test (if you're trying to drive up average gift size). This is low-cost to implement, and if you hit and it works, you've essentially increased your average gift without additional cost.
- » **High-Cost, High-Impact Testing:** This type of testing typically results in a breakthrough. It costs more to do it, but if/when you beat your control package, then the upside is fairly significant.

Go Digital: Testing within digital has its advantages when it comes to cost and speed-to-market with learnings. You can A/B test an array of variables like CTA, donation button placement, imagery, and the fields in your donation forms.. Use digital as an inexpensive testing ground. Learn from your results and let them guide your other efforts.

Don't Be Afraid to Lose:

Keep in mind, not every test will be a winner. In fact, the test often loses. But testing is still worthwhile because, when you do find a winner, the positive impact on your program can be exponential and may even be extrapolated across more than one campaign.



Principle #6: METRICS

When you communicate with your leadership and board as you're seeking investment in acquisition, it's useful to be armed with key metrics that will help you make your case. These metrics include:

Cost to Acquire: Cost to acquire will help you determine how much you're willing to invest to acquire a donor.

Long-Term Value: The long-term value of a donor can change depending on how long they stay engaged with you after acquisition. If you're tracking results by lists, you can see which sources drive the highest long-term value for your organization.

Cost Per Dollar Raised: How much is it costing you to raise each fundraising dollar when it comes to your acquisition efforts?

Payback Period: This tells you how long it takes to recoup your initial acquisition investment and when a donor starts to contribute net revenue to your organization. First-gift size and cost of subsequent marketing efforts will drive this metric.

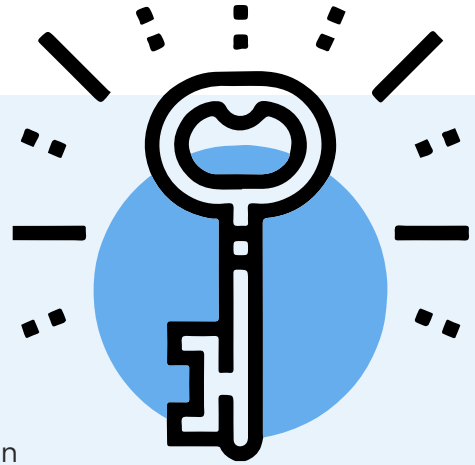
Coverage Ratio: This metric is important in keeping track of the overall health of your program. Coverage ratio lets you see if you're keeping up with the natural attrition of your file by adding new donors, retaining donors, and reactivating donors. A coverage ratio of 100% or higher indicates stability and that you are poised for growth. A coverage ratio below 100% indicates your file is shrinking and you might need to infuse acquisition or other strategies to help retain or reactivate donors.

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{Acquired} \\ \text{Donors} \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \text{Reactivated} \\ \text{Donors} \end{array} \right) \div \begin{array}{c} \text{Lapsed} \\ \text{Donors} \end{array} = \boxed{\begin{array}{c} \text{Donor} \\ \text{Coverage Ratio} \end{array}}$$

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Part II Key Takeaways:

- » Today's donors have higher expectations when it comes to the experience they'll have with your organization. They expect it to be personal and meaningful.
- » Make sure you're aware of your investment tolerance, who you want to reach, and a conversion strategy before you launch an acquisition campaign.
- » Your organization must have a clear, strong, and compelling case for support so prospective donors understand why their donation matters.
- » Your audience should be the primary driver in determining the channels you use for acquisition. Your brand experience should be consistent across all channels.
- » Always Be Testing. Testing different data points can be incredibly valuable to your program and your organization.
- » Know your key metrics.



Part III: Creative

Acquisition and *modern* dating have a lot in common. Potential donors “swipe left or swipe right” very quickly, making snap judgments about whether you’re worth their time. In these instances, they ask themselves:

- » Do I like the way they think?
- » Do I share the same emotions?
- » Do I share the same values?

Like dating, the one thing prospective donors are looking for is to see where you align. *Does this organization share the same ideas, hopes, dreams, and passions that I do?* With any type of acquisition—whether you’re trying to acquire names, emails, or donations—the job of your organization is to communicate shared values.

Donors develop almost instantaneous perceptions based on just a thin slice of your organization. What’s in that slice holds a lot of weight.

“Thin slicing” is a real phenomenon—we make a judgment about a person or issue using only a small sample. We take a mental snapshot of a person or organization, and we guess at their competence, confidence, likeability, etc. in a split second. Scientists say this could be a survival mechanism we use to quickly determine if someone is a friend or foe.

The reality is organizations don’t have much time to make a first impression. The good news is humans respond very well to stories. And nonprofits have an advantage when it comes to storytelling.

Storytelling is critical to our industry. It’s how we make connections with people who don’t know anything about us. It’s how we form emotional bonds.

We must be mindful that we are an uninvited guest in someone’s mailbox or inbox. We are an intrusion on people’s private time. Therefore, our figurative goal with acquisition is to make people glad we stopped by and be welcomed back for another visit. To do that, we must intrigue and captivate—through stories.

So, how can your organization use creative storytelling to connect with prospective donors during an acquisition campaign in a way that opens the door to a relationship?



4 Tactics to Inspire Action With Your Creative

Follow these proven steps to craft your acquisition campaign creative in a way that grabs the attention of your target audience and deepens their interest.

1. Have a Point of View

It pays to have a point of view—particularly when you know potential donors are only going to be focusing on that thin slice of information or experience to make their initial judgment. By having a strong point of view, you can direct a donor’s attention to the piece of your narrative you know they’re going to slice off in those seconds or milliseconds when the impression is made.

Here are a few examples from the for-profit world of brands delivering a very specific and effective point of view through their marketing:



Lowe's: "People Love Where They Live"

Lowe's isn't telling you they're the best hardware store around with the best "this" and best "that." They're telling you they're the place that helps people "love where they live." That's a particular perspective that appeals deeply to a specific type of person, and it helps set them apart from their major competitor.



REI: "we believe a life outdoors is a life well-lived!"

REI isn't telling you they have the lowest prices for outdoor gear; they're appealing to a fanbase of co-op members who agree emphatically with the mission to spend as much time outside as possible.

The bottom line is this: You must stand for the things that are most important to your organization. That is critically important in your acquisition efforts if you want to make a memorable and meaningful impression on donors.

2. Unleash the Power of Empathy

Once you have a point of view, how can you use it to connect with people? That's where empathy comes in. You need to put your donors' desires first. It's not about *your* needs; it's about *their* needs. Find ways to structure and tell your story so everything you do makes them the hero.

You can do this in a variety of ways, such as through drama, personification, shared experiences, and nostalgia. These are powerful ways to recall things that matter to donors. It's also important to do something that stands out in the donor's mind. **Simply put, you want to change the way the donor sees things. Do this, and they'll be inspired to act.**

Here are a few examples of nonprofit creative efforts that get attention for the right reasons, communicate unique value, and inspire donors to "swipe right" and continue the journey:





MISSION

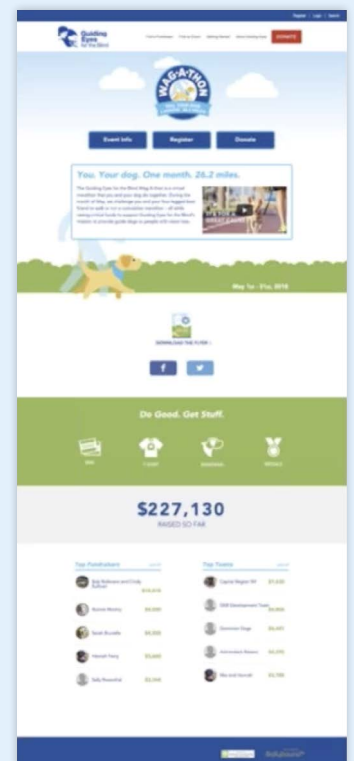
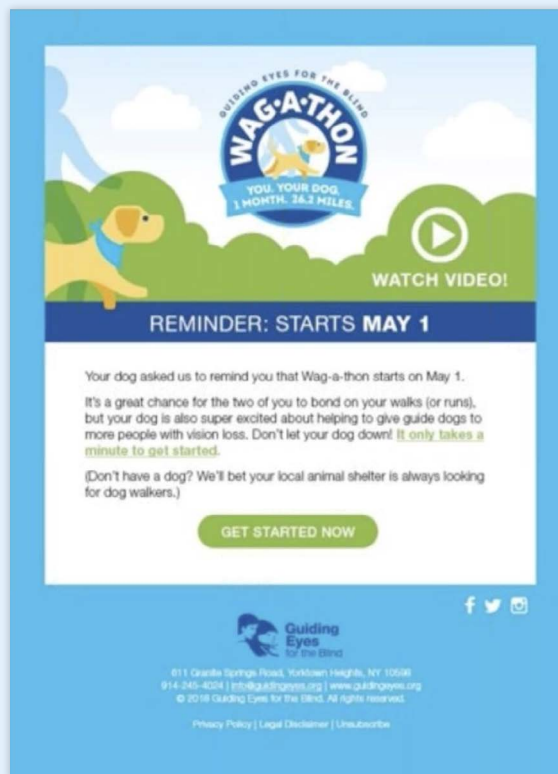
Provides guide dogs to people with vision loss

EFFORT

Since the common denominator between everyone involved with this organization—from volunteers and donors to staff and recipients—was love for dogs, they launched a unique peer-to-peer fundraising event. The Wag-a-thon was a virtual marathon that people could participate in with their dogs. Rather than running 26.2 miles, you and your dog would walk it over the course of a month to raise money for the cause.

EMPATHY

This was a way to reach out to people based on the shared value of love for dogs—and draw them into an organization that also shares those values.





Museum of Science

MISSION

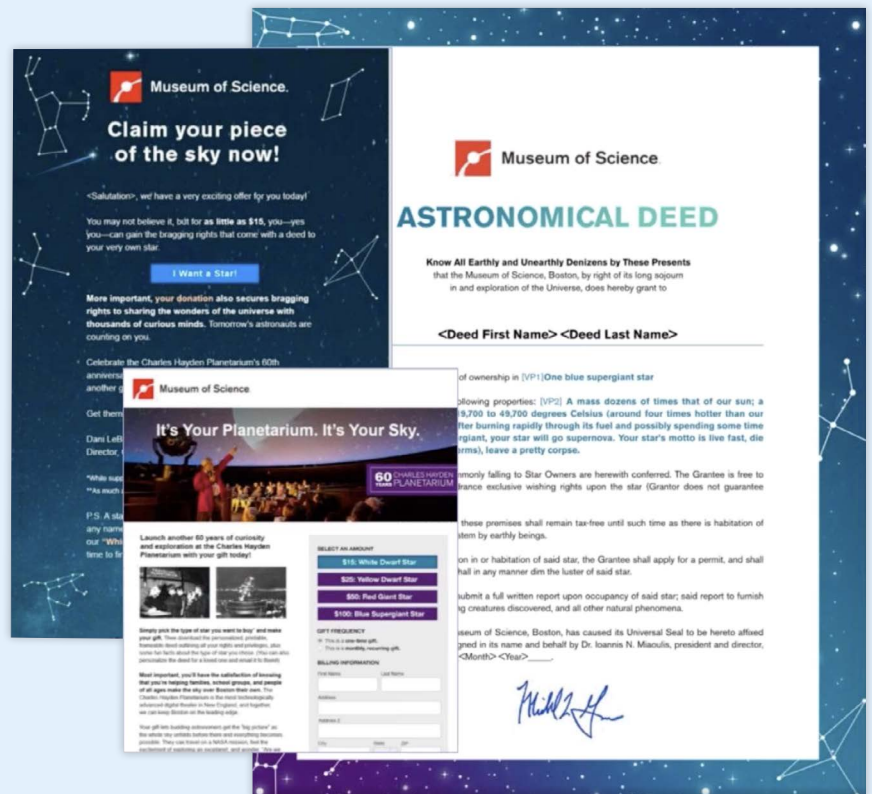
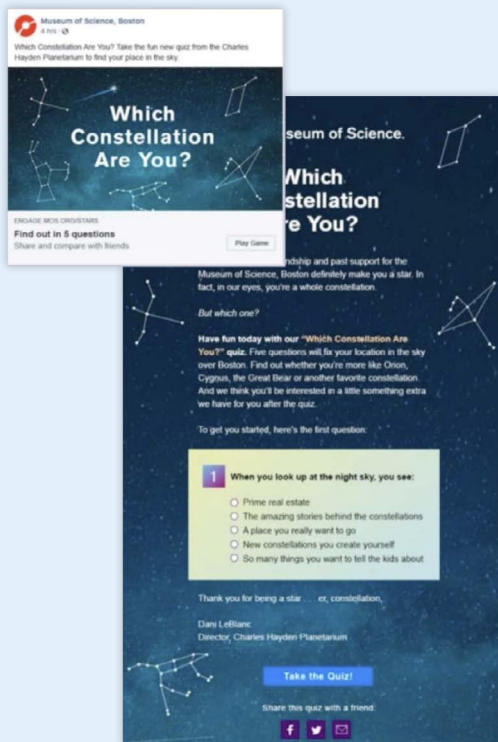
Transforming the nation's relationship with science and technology

EFFORT

To promote the museum's Charles Hayden Planetarium, it launched a fun, playful online quiz: "Which Constellation Are You?" People could answer a series of questions and then submit their email address to find out their specific answer. Participants were then remarketed with an offer to "buy a star" by donating to the museum.

EMPATHY

This connected people who expressed an interest in a key area of the museum in an easy, frictionless way to develop a relationship moving forward.



One of the most important things to remember with your creative is communicating shared values.

Let prospective donors know you believe in the same things that they believe in; that your frustrations are their frustrations. This is tough to do in acquisition when you're just scratching the surface and starting to develop relationships. But when you can pull it off, it's incredibly powerful.

**PERSONALIZATION HAS
BECOME THE NORM, BUT
HOW AND WHEN IT'S
USED IS KEY. IT SHOULD
BE A STRATEGY, NOT AN
OVERUSED TECHNIQUE.**

Turn to your data. How did the prospect end up in your database? Even if they haven't yet donated to your organization, do they support similar causes? If they responded to your welcome email series survey, what can you glean from their answers?

If nothing else, personalizing your outreach will forge a connection. For instance, using personalization in direct mail and digital builds trust between you and the potential donor. The reader feels you're taking the time to understand them and involve them in your

mission, rather than talking at them with a generic message. Personalization has become the norm, but how and when it's used is key. It should be a strategy, not an overused technique. When done properly, personalization can bring your storytelling to life.

3. Keep It Simple

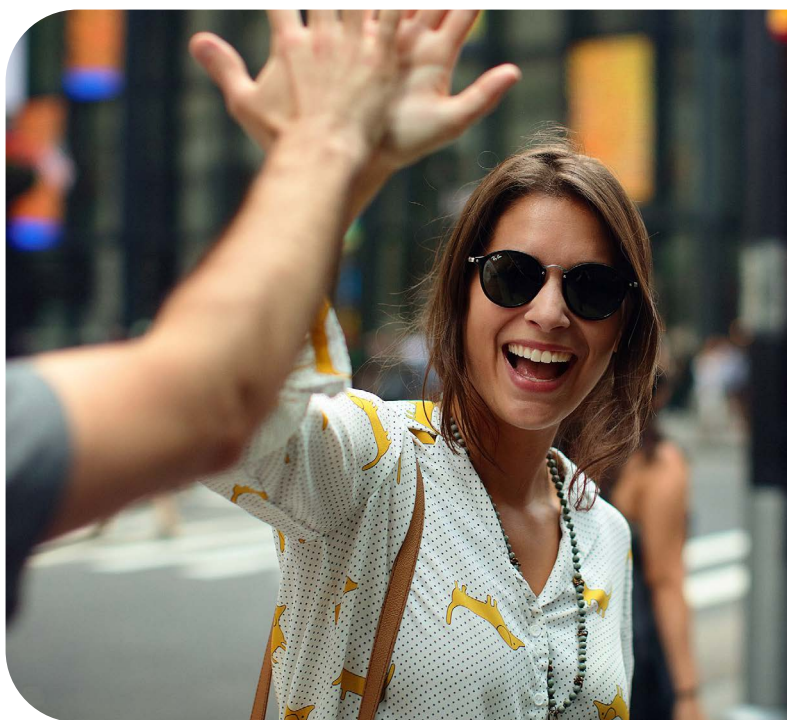
Think about the acquisition message and design like you're on a first date. You don't need to tell your date everything in that first meeting. They don't need to hear your entire family history or a detailed recounting of everything you did that day. If you pile on too much too soon, there's a good chance they'll become bored or overwhelmed. Either way, you probably won't hear from them again. The same goes for potential donors.

Don't Try to Say Everything

Remember, people are making a judgment based on thin slices. Hit your most impressive highlights, or share details you know will resonate.

Remember K.I.S.S.

K.I.S.S. is a useful acronym when it comes to your acquisition creative: "Keep It Super Simple." The essential components of direct response fundraising are (1) your list and (2) your offer. In acquisition, keep it as simple as possible so people can instantly recognize, "Oh, they're talking to me." **If prospective donors have to weed through a dense list of points about your organization that ultimately seem unessential, your message will be diluted, and your donor will be lost.**



Entice With a Single Action or Benefit

Don't overload your prospects with too many options. After all, when faced with too many choices, people often choose to do nothing. You want to have a single, clear call to action.

Create a Sense of Interest and Urgency

At the acquisition stage, they don't need to meet mom yet. They just need to know there's a reason to be interested in you and go out with you again. At this point, it's primarily about sharing something—letting them know the urgency they feel is the same urgency you feel. **The simple understanding that you're both feeling the same thing can often be enough to move forward.**

4. Build Emotional Momentum

The goal of acquisition is to create “emotional momentum.” What does that mean exactly? **The donor sees one thing they like about your organization, so they come back for more.** Then another positive interaction brings them back again. They keep getting inspired to move forward with your cause.

Start by Surprising People

For that first positive interaction, you want to surprise and delight your prospects. Take a stand and have a point of view. Empathize with the things that are important to them to open their perspective a little bit. Once you have their attention, they’ll be more likely to follow along and share your message. This helps you reach even more potential donors.

Focus on Your “Best Constituents”

Not everyone is right for your organization. You want to make sure you’re talking to people who have the best relationship potential. If you’re a diabetes organization, the people who care the most are probably people who have been touched by diabetes in some personal way. Sure, some give to organizations just because they care, but those people are generally not going to be your best prospects for a long-term relationship. Focus your efforts on that high-potential audience. **Use the questions and data points outlined in [Part I: Data](#) of this eBook to help you identify that high-potential audience.**

Connect With the Heart

Once you’ve grabbed the attention of the right people, you want to provoke a human response—an emotional response. You want to touch people’s hearts and connect with them on a deeper level.

The goal of this process is to create momentum that can sustain you through the next ask and the next ask, helping to build long-term relationships that will benefit your organization for decades to come.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Part III Key Takeaways:

- » Prospective donors will judge your organization based on only a “thin slice” of information in only a few seconds.
- » Have a point of view. Your organization isn’t for everyone, and that’s okay. Make sure you stand for the things that are most important to you.
- » Use the power of empathy to connect with people through your creative. Show them you share their values, emotions, and concerns.
- » Keep your message and design simple; don’t overload the donor. Focus on a single, clear call to action.
- » The goal is emotional momentum. You want to create strong connections with the right people that will stand the test of time.



Conclusion

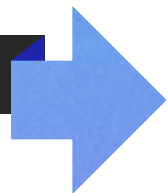
First impressions happen fast these days. Judgments are made in a snap. When a donor decides to give your organization a shot at a potential relationship, that opportunity doesn't last long. Your organization only has a few precious seconds to tell your story and make your case for support before the future is decided.

We know this sounds daunting. So, approach new donor acquisition with a clear understanding of how donor decisions are made. Bring a mindset that can put your organization in the best position to succeed. Then, that all-important first impression will start to feel exciting. Embrace acquisition and first impressions as opportunities to connect other like-minded individuals with your organization.

Embracing the Power of “The Big Three” to Drive New Donor Acquisition

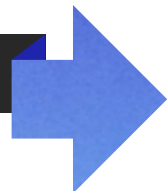
The key to acquisition success lies in the combination of data, strategy, and creative storytelling. Together, these provide support and stability for your acquisition efforts. When all three work together—pulling for and with each other—your acquisition efforts will soar to new heights.

1



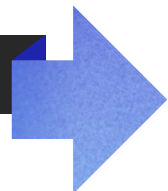
Data means digging in to understand what makes your organization unique and what makes people want to support you. It's taking a closer look at your audience with tools like GivingDNA and market research to find the people who are most motivated to give. And, it's about identifying new audiences that might add value to your acquisition efforts.

2



Strategy involves having the right budget and plans to support your acquisition efforts. It means being donor-centric and ensuring you have a clear, simple, and compelling case for support. It means intelligently selecting the channels you'll use to reach potential donors and constantly testing to evolve your program.

3



Creative is about telling stories that donors connect with and see themselves in. It's about sharing a point of view and standing for something that breaks through the noise of the world around us. Compelling creative keeps the message simple and helps build emotional momentum that drives donor loyalty.

Working together, these three elements will help you craft the best strategy to acquire the right new donors who are most likely to become lifelong supporters of your mission.



About Allegiance Group + Pursuant

Allegiance Group + Pursuant stands at the forefront of innovation, empowering nonprofits with cutting-edge, tech-led marketing and fundraising solutions. With a legacy of decades in digital, web, UX, and advertising excellence, we have evolved into the ultimate one-stop-shop for nonprofits seeking a comprehensive, digital-first partner.

Our mission is bold: to inspire action and create a lasting impact. Allegiance Group + Pursuant brings together experts in strategy, fundraising, development, creativity, and analysis. We are not just a service provider; we are your growth catalyst. From expanding your supporter base to enhancing brand experiences and leveraging custom fundraising software, we drive strategic and intelligent growth.

We utilize a proprietary wealth-screening and donor analytics platform, GivingDNA, for nonprofits. that uniquely combines your internal data with external insights to inform all areas of your fundraising strategy, from annual fund segmentation to mid/major gift prospecting and portfolio optimization.

Visit [GivingDNA.com/demo](https://givingdna.com/demo) to learn more and book a demo.

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