



THE 7 FACES OF PHILANTHROPY

Tailoring Board Communications with Donors
to Donor Type

BoardSource®

THE SEVEN FACES OF PHILANTHROPY

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Board members, due to a discomfort with fundraising, might be inclined to use one, carefully crafted case for support when communicating with potential donors. Unfortunately, this can work against us because it doesn't take into account donor personality and giving motivation. When we take the time to learn about our potential donors and why they give and then personalize our communications accordingly, we are more likely to succeed in securing donations for the missions we care about.

Russ Alan Prince and Karen Maru File, through their research, segmented donors into seven classifiable types in their book, *The Seven Faces of Philanthropy*. The idea behind the book is that any given donor probably falls under one of these categories, giving us key information to use when communicating with him or her. Though the book is now quite old (originally published in 1999, re-released in 2001, and now available in a Kindle version and in paperback), its insights remain valuable to anyone who is communicating with donors.

Susan Howlett, a consultant who spoke at the 2015 BoardSource Leadership Forum, gave her interpretations of the seven donor types in a supplement to her book, *Boards on Fire! Inspiring Leaders to Raise Money Joyfully*. We share them here, as well as communication dos and don'ts tailored to type that were prepared by the GIFT Center Proposal Writing Team at The University of Arizona Foundation. Before you read on, however, keep in mind that people are complex beings and most often do not fit neatly into any one category. While Prince and File's categories are helpful in guiding how we communicate with donors, they do not necessarily define who our donors are.



THE COMMUNITARIAN

Communitarians give because they want their community to benefit. They may not even benefit personally, but they want the people they live among and care about to thrive. Howlett heard a woman say that even though her children attended a parochial school, she still gave to the neighborhood school's PTA because her kids played with those kids and she wanted them to thrive too.

It's incumbent upon board members to listen carefully to how communitarians define their community. Do they belong to the LGBT community? The African-American community? A particular neighborhood? Or profession? Or religion?

When communicating with donors who display the characteristics of a communitarian, consider the following dos and don'ts:

Do:

- Discuss how their community will benefit from their support.
- Show how a gift to your organization could meet the needs of their community.
- Discuss your organization's history of supporting their community (if it has that history).
- Provide an opportunity for personal involvement with your organization in addition to giving.

Don't:

- Focus on the greater world or on a constituency the donor doesn't connect with.

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Devout donors give out of devotion to a particular cause or group.

Again, we must watch for what they've indicated devotion to through their volunteerism, their prior giving, etc. Different generations manifest devotion in different ways. The World War II generation often has given devotedly to one organization throughout their lives, such as their alma mater, their church or temple, The Humane Society, etc. Baby Boomers often give devotedly to an issue or a cause, such as the environment, or the arts, or social justice, or education. And younger donors often give to organizations where they are involved as volunteers and advocates. Many devouts feel they are "called by God" to contribute; others are encouraged by their religious principles.

When communicating with devout donors, consider the following:

Do:

- Acknowledge their devotion to an organization or a value system.
- Show that you respect their devotion.
- Link your giving opportunity to their devotion.

Don't:

- Focus on gift-giving that does not relate to their devotion.
- Overemphasize how your organization goes about its work and is ensuring its success. The Devout are the least likely of all categories of donors to evaluate a nonprofit before giving.



If you think of the most famous philanthropists in our country's history, you'd probably come up with such names as Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford. They were dynasts, but it doesn't necessarily take as much money to be one. Dynast donors often come from families that have been philanthropic for generations. They want to have breadth of impact and to leave a legacy that extends beyond their lifetime. Think of Carnegie libraries in towns and cities throughout the country. More recent dynasts, such as Bill and Melinda Gates, want to have the same broad impact on world health that Carnegie had on access to information.

When communicating with dynasts, keep the following in mind:

Do:

- Acknowledge their tradition of giving.
- Illustrate how a gift to your organization will make a lasting difference.
- Be aware that dynasts often have relationships with several nonprofits. Focus on how support for your organization aligns with their other contributions.
- Emphasize how your organization will achieve its goals. Dynasts tend to carefully evaluate nonprofits before giving. They care about your effectiveness.

Don't:

- Focus on the fact that they should give. Dynasts are already committed philanthropists.
- Expect emotional appeals to work easily.
- Focus on what the gift will do for the dynast personally. Dynasts want to see nonprofits focus on mission impact, not their donors.

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THE INVESTOR

Return on investment (ROI) summarizes what investor donors want out of their relationship with a nonprofit. They want to see a strategic plan or an audit. They often ask about deliverables and metrics and costs per person served. They want to hear what statistics, data, and research are used to make decisions. And they love to hear statements similar to this: “It costs less to engage these low-achieving youth now than it will to incarcerate them or have them on public support five years from now.”

If donors display the above characteristics, consider following these dos and don'ts when communicating with them.

Do:

- Speak to them on their terms. Be business-like. Indicate why the gift makes good business sense.
- Be meticulous about how exactly your organization will use the money and measure its impact. Share data that speak to your mission success, to the return on the donor's investment.
- Be attentive. Investors tend to like both private and public attention.

Don't:

- Focus on any association your organization may have with the government. Investors often give due to the tax incentives and would rather have some control on how their money is spent, as opposed to handing it over to the government as taxes, thinking government may spend it unwisely.
- Over-emphasize the moral or emotional imperative of giving. Investors do not give because they feel morally compelled to do so.



THE REPAYER

Repayer donors contribute to organizations that have benefitted them or someone they know or care about, such as schools, youth programs, medical charities, etc. Repayers are expressing their gratitude by making a gift.

When communicating with repayers, keep the following in mind:

Do:

- Make empathetic connections to the specific experience that caused the donor to have gratitude, if you know it. For example, if a repayer gives to a university because she received a fellowship that

contributed to her success, mention that fellowship.

- Use emotional appeals and language. Repayers give because they care deeply about the organization's mission.
- Share information about how the gift will affect others' lives. Repayers want to ensure that others will benefit, just as they did.
- Emphasize the responsibility to carry on the work by giving.

Don't:

- Focus on how the gift will benefit them. While repayers want to be valued and kept informed, they want the focus to be on those who will benefit from their gift going forward.

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THE SOCIALITE

Socialite donors like to contribute in public — somewhere where they can be seen with the “right” people in the “right” venue, where they might get public recognition or see their name or photo featured in the media afterward. They love giving while having fun. In Howlett’s experience, socialites are expensive donors to attract and renew because they require events, which cost more to produce than other fundraising methods, and because their gifts may not be as tied to the mission as they are to the occasion.

When communicating with socialite donors, consider the following:

Do:

- Emphasize who else gives to your nonprofit and what their priorities are. Being a part of a group with a shared cause is important to a socialite.
- Mention and highlight events and gatherings related to advancing your mission that they may attend.
- Focus on what benefits they’ll get out of their association with your organization.
- Discuss mission impact. Socialites want to be affiliated with impactful organizations.
- Use emotional appeals. Socialites believe that giving is a part of their personality.

Don’t:

- Ignore the socialite’s need for personal attention. Make it clear that you share their vision.
- Focus on giving details about how you will use the gift. Socialites tend to focus on the nonprofit in general and its fundraising activity.
- Treat the socialite in a vacuum. He or she has deep connections and likely respects and follows the giving and advice of others.



THE ALTRUIST

Altruists give because it’s just the right thing to do. They give unselfishly. It’s in their DNA. They don’t stop to think whether their gift benefits them or not.

Do you have a donor who is truly selfless? If so, here are some tips on how to communicate with them.

Do:

- Use emotional language and focus on the moral imperative of the gift.
- Place more emphasis on the character of your organization and its work than on your track record.
- Acknowledge and applaud the motivation to give but not the ego behind it.
- Use personal, less-formal language.
- Align your purpose with the altruist’s.

Don’t:

- Focus on giving them any public recognition for their gifts. Altruists may even resent this gesture.
- Overly focus on details explaining how you will utilize their gifts; this is not their concern; they trust that you will use the money well.
- Emphasize the importance of their gift. Altruists believe your mission is more important than the gift.

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In conclusion, Howlett says, “Board members need to understand what the donor types are so they can watch and listen for clues, and meet the other person’s emotional needs as they approach them for support. Use words and methods that suit your donors, and tailor your case for support to them, rather than using a one-size-fits-all message and approach. If you don’t know what type someone is, sprinkle words suitable for each category into your conversations or communiques, rather than using standard language. Simply using words like ‘invest,’ ‘devoted,’ ‘community’ will evoke a more engaged response.”

And remember, as the proposal writing team at The University of Arizona Foundation, tells us: “People are complex, and don’t often fit perfectly into boxes. Use the seven faces as a general guideline and then use your gut for the rest. In other words, be strategic by understanding your potential donor type but adapt your communications to take into account the complexities we all display.”