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The Nonprofit Marketer's  
Guide to Donor Reengagement:

# Unlocking the Mysteries of Donor Psychology

What motivates some donors to give more than once, while others make one donation and never return? What kind of messages and images improve engagement rates? How much money should an organization ask for, and from whom?

If you have asked any of these questions, you are not alone. Psychologists have been studying donation behaviors for years, and while their findings cannot provide definitive answers, they can generally help improve your organization's initial fundraising and reengagement efforts. This section offers a few useful findings to help guide your journey.

## General Donor Motivation

While the decision to donate is a highly personal one, at a macro level, we know what motivates donors to give again or stop giving to an organization they have supported in the past.

### Why Donors Keep Giving

- The donor believes the organization is effective.
- The donor feels appreciated and receives a prompt thank-you.

- The donor feels heard by the organization.
- The donor sees himself or herself as being important to the cause.
- The donor receives information about how the money is helping.

### Why Donors Stop Giving

- 5% – Thought charity did not need them
- 8% – No info on how monies were used
- 9% – No memory of supporting
- 13% – Never got thanked for donating
- 18% – Poor service or communication
- 36% – Others more deserving
- 54% – Could no longer afford

## Give Donors What They Want

If your goal is not just to attract new donors but to retain and reengage existing donors, you need to shift the mind-set of your organization from simply explaining what you do to explicitly meeting your current donors' needs. Research shows donors want to know how their money is being used, to feel appreciated, and to see themselves as making a real contribution to change. Make sure your organization's communications do the following:

- ➡ Regularly report on outcomes and victories
- ➡ Thank donors quickly and regularly
- ➡ Survey donors about what they care about most
- ➡ Provide donor-centered content
- ➡ Remain segmented and personalized

## Create Connection

If you are looking for advice on what kinds of content work best, here are some key lessons from successful nonprofits that are harnessing the latest research to get results.

**Focus on individuals.** – It is easy for us to imagine a single person but impossible to imagine millions. The evidence suggests that donors are more generous to individuals than they are to groups. This

is why groups such as Feeding America, whose food bank network serves over 46 million people each year, use single beneficiary stories on their home page.



Research indicates that feelings of emotional distress significantly impact donor decision-making. Using individual images and stories is an important way to build this emotional bond. This “identifiable victim effect” is even more effective when potential donors are given the person’s (or animal’s) name and other important details about his or her life and situation.

No matter what your organization does, personalized storytelling should be at the forefront of your funding efforts.

**Capitalize on affinity groups.** – Social psychology has shown that it takes very little differentiation for people to show favoritism or allegiance to “their group” as well as bias against or prejudice toward “others” who are outside that group. The key, therefore, as a fundraiser, is to make your potential donors feel like they and your constituent base are part of the same group so that they feel more compelled to help.

Look at your donor personas and try to find examples of people in your organization who will connect with them, even on the most superficial level. Gender, nationality, age, and religion are all good places to start. Coupling this strategy with data-based retargeting or segmented landing pages can yield even better results.

**Highlight direct connections.** – Which of these donation appeals are you more likely to say yes to?

Fundraiser A	Fundraiser B
“Hi, I am volunteering with the American Cancer Society. Can I take a few minutes to tell you what they do to help?”	“Hi, I am volunteering with the American Cancer Society because I personally knew someone who passed away from cancer last year. Can I take a few minutes to tell you how they helped the family?”

If you are like most people, you would be much more likely to spend a few minutes listening to Fundraiser B, because he or she has shared a personal connection with the cause, triggering an emotional response that makes you more receptive to wanting to help and less likely to say no for fear of being disrespectful.

The advocates who volunteer their time for your organization are likely to have personal reasons for doing so. Sharing why your work matters to them personally—whether it be in person or through an appeal letter—can boost the effectiveness of your campaigns.

Images Matter

When it comes to producing the marketing materials for your organization, whether print or online, make sure to use the best practices for the medium and to include your own images vs stock photography images whenever possible.

Fans and followers are 44% more likely to like and share social posts that include images. Try some of the following things:

- Real-impact images
- GIFs
- Quote images
- Short videos (30–45 seconds, can be viewed without sound)
- Emoticons (Posts with emojis are shared 33% more and liked 57% more than those without.)
- Images taken at events
- Campaign-related images
- Images submitted by constituents/supports/volunteers