

PLANNED GIVING: BASICS FOR GETTING STARTED

You've gotten your annual giving program going and it now has a track record of success. You may have even tackled a major gifts campaign or two. You've received a few bequests but have never actively sought planned gifts. You've done some reading about the variety of ways a planned gift may be structured. You've introduced the idea of starting a formal planned giving program to the board and key staff. They like the idea; now what?

1. You may want to start by contacting your colleagues who have recently launched their own planned giving effort to see if they are willing to share materials and ideas.
2. Even if you are fortunate to be able to gather samples and ideas from other sources, you will still want to create your own customized program. Therefore, consider forming a task force to develop an action plan. The committee should include board and non-board members, which allows you to involve more individuals with a variety of expertise. Think about inviting people with marketing and public relations skills, analytical thinkers, self-starters, key volunteers and current donors. Their perspectives will be helpful, and their participation is your first step in marketing your new program.

Who are your potential task force members?

3. Identify the person(s) who is most enthusiastic and committed to the success of this effort and has the respect of the task force members and the board. Now you have found your chair(s).

Potential task force chair(s):

4. As part of your action plan, you will no doubt want to identify and interview several specialists in the area of planned giving – e.g., estate planning attorneys, accountants, financial planners and advisors, insurance professionals, etc. Ask your colleagues to refer you to those they have found knowledgeable and dependable. You will then have identified professionals

- Who are familiar with your organization and its mission
- To whom you can refer donors who ask for such referrals
- Who can help you prepare specimen documents for gift arrangements
- And whom you may want to ask to be a part of a professional advisory group you form down the road

Ideas regarding specialists:

5. Help the task force create mission/vision/values statements for the planned giving program itself. This will be a great touchstone as the group moves ahead with creating essential action steps, policies and procedures for the program – e.g., gift acceptance, investment and allocation guidelines, donor recognition, policies regarding administrative responsibilities for the gifts such as preparing proper tax reports for donors, etc.

Some key thoughts about what should be included in the mission/vision/values statements for your planned giving program:

6. Create a realistic calendar and timeline for the launch of the program just like you would for any new project or campaign. Allocate an adequate budget.

7. Create a marketing plan, to include:
- An early approach to each individual board member about including your organization in his/her estate plans
 - Identifying and targeting other prospects/donors
 - Promotional strategies, including regular seminars (you can start with a simple wills clinic)
 - Donor recognition
 - Feedback methodology

Comments:

-
-
8. Train your team. Task force and staff members who will be actively involved in planned giving should know what their specific role is and feel comfortable in it. Those who will actually be visiting with prospects and donors should role-play and learn how to cultivate the relationship as well as how and when to close the gift.

Which staff members might become part of your team?

9. Once you launch your effort, be sure you have the proper systems in place to track and manage the lists of prospects and donors. Make sure all appropriate team members are aware of the status of any prospect or donor at any given time.

10. While you are still in the process of putting the infrastructure in place for a successful planned giving program, you can do several things to begin promoting the idea of a planned gift to your supporters:

- Add the line, *“Please consider including [your organization] in your will or estate plans,”* as appropriate to items you are already printing – such as giving envelopes, newsletters, education pieces or flyers – and to your website.

To what other materials will you add this line?

- Put your organization in your will and let the board know you have done so. Write about it in a column in the newsletter. Once you learn of others who have done so, write about them too (with their permission, of course).
- If you have a bank trust officer or a financial advisor on your board, invite him or her to begin presenting a “five minute quickie” at your board meetings on some aspects of planned giving – e.g., charitable trusts or annuities, gifts of life insurance. If there is no one on the board able to

do this, invite someone from your task force or fledgling professional advisory group.

- Contact your local Community Foundation for training in planned giving. Have them educate you about how they can help you market to your donors and assist interested donors in investigating specifics about a planned gift. In addition, ask how the Community Foundation might work with you to set up an endowment fund they would manage for you, where interested donors can designate gifts for your organization.

Write down the date by which you want to have made an appointment with the Community Foundation:

- Contact your local Estate Planning Council and your local chapter of the Committee on Planned Giving to meet professional colleagues interested in charitable estate planning.

Write down the date by which you want to have contacted both groups:

It is not an easy task to monitor and maintain gifts that have not yet matured. According to Mark E. Mersmann and Arthur M. Seltzer, CPAs with Brown, Smith, Wallace LLC of St. Louis, MO:

*By definition, a planned giving program is an ongoing, long-term process. Securing a planned gift may require months or even years. After the gift is finalized, it may be several years before your organization is able to have initial access to the resources, after which management of the resources and the revenue flow [may] continue indefinitely. Accordingly, it is essential that procedures be established to track and monitor all gifts in all stages of evolution, and to strengthen relationships with donors. Neglected donors can and do change their minds and their wills! (Weisman, Carol, editor, *Secrets of Successful Fundraising*. FE Robbins & Sons Press. St. Louis, MO, 2000)*

By the same token, happy donors can and do make repeat planned gifts out of love for the organization and appreciation for the ongoing recognition they receive for their generosity. Starting up a comprehensive planned giving program for your organization, and then perpetuating it, is certainly a significant challenge. However, the long-term benefits make it more than worth the effort. Don't delay! *The best time to plant a tree is ten years ago. The second best time is today.* - Anonymous

SUGGESTED PLANNED GIVING RESOURCES¹

www.afpnet.org. This is the home page of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Click on **AFP Marketplace**, then **bookstore**. You can search for references on planned giving, read reviews of books, or request specific information from the resource library. 1-800-666-3863.

Ashton, Debra. Revised 3rd edition, 2004. *The Complete Guide to Planned Giving: Everything You Need to Know to Compete Successfully for Major Gifts*. See www.debraashton.com for ordering information. (This is known as the “Blue Bible” for planned giving professionals.)

www.charitychannel.com. Click on **Forum Descriptions and Links**, then **Giftplan**, for a planned giving forum focusing on issues of interest to U.S. gift planners. Nominal subscriber fee.

www.pgcoach.com. Florida Philanthropic Advisors, LLC provides a free weekly email service “PG Coaching Tips,” short and very useful helpful hints on marketing your planned giving program.. Also a good source for expert, affordable planned giving advisory services, plus the Donor Seminar Kit. 1-888-396-8781.

plannedgiving@yahoogroups.com. An open forum for planned giving professionals and advisors.

www.pgtoday.com. *Planned Giving Today*. A periodical that is a practical resource for education, information, inspiration and professional linkage for those interested in any area of planned giving. 1-800-525-5748.

There are planned giving software programs available – e.g., PG Calc and Crescendo – and numerous vendors for printed marketing materials – e.g., The Stelter Co., R&R Newkirk – and website marketing programs – e.g., www.futurefocus.net, www.virtualgiving.com).

¹ Please note: the resources are listed for informational purposes only. CoreStrategies for Nonprofits does not endorse any particular vendor.