



Major Gifts: Building an Effective, Systematic Program

Establishing an ongoing program of major gift philanthropy

Do you feel like your major gifts program is spinning its wheels? Or, are you just beginning to develop your donor pool and need a proven process for cultivating larger gifts?

Take the time to develop a systematic approach to major gifts development to maximize your fundraising return on investment (ROI).

A systematic major gifts program is a purposeful, organized, and ongoing effort to identify prospective major donors and cultivate **relationships** with them that strengthen their philanthropic engagement. Focus your efforts on the prospective donors most likely to make a major gift, whatever that level is for your organization. In doing so, you can be a better steward of your resources and work more effectively and efficiently.

Take a few key steps to move your major gifts program to the next level:

- ▶ **Focused Approach:** Concentrate your efforts on your top 10 to 20 percent of prospects. Look at other factors besides gift size that might predict a prospect's commitment to your organization—future giving potential, recency and frequency of gifts, and overall involvement with your organization.
- ▶ **Prospect Research:** Up-to-date and thorough prospect research is a key advantage. A prospect researcher can look at resources to validate instincts on a prospect's giving potential and bring to the forefront new potential donors with a connection to your organization or history of donating to similar institutions. If you cannot afford a full-time prospect researcher, consider outsourcing this function.

Bring Your Donor Data into Focus with Acuity®

Acuity, JGA's proprietary system developed in partnership with DonorSearch, forecasts donor potential and identifies the strongest individual prospects for major gift fundraising efforts. Acuity integrates your donors' financial and historical engagement data, then applies our deep professional insight to help you focus your fundraising efforts.

With Acuity you will:

1. Identify your best individual prospects.
2. Reveal untapped donor potential.
3. Hone portfolio assignments.
4. Save time analyzing your prospect base.
5. Bolster your fundraising results.



- ▶ **Relationship Management:** Assign a staff member to oversee the relationship and plan an approach to help move the conversation with the prospect from cultivation to solicitation and then stewardship. While one person needs to be responsible for serving as primary relationship manager, also be sure to help prospects develop deep relationships with others throughout your organization. Keep your prospect management assignments reasonable to focus on building relationships (75 to 125 per prospect manager).
- ▶ **Review of Assignments:** Regularly review prospect assignments and progress with staff, leadership, board members, and volunteers; also provide them ongoing opportunities for input on prospect identification and qualification. Make sure the assigned staff and the prospect still have a good fit as relationships grow and assign new prospects. Staff members should have a clearly identified goal for number of contacts. Those contacts should be spread across the relationship continuum, some being “get acquainted” visits while others are for purposes of cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.
- ▶ **Plan of Action:** Make sure contact with prospects is purposeful. Relationship managers should have well-constructed plans for each of their meetings that identify what they hope to accomplish during each call. You should also create a long-term strategy for each prospect.
- ▶ **Progress Reports:** Hold regular staff meetings to report on outcomes of contacts and propose future steps. This will help build a sense of accountability in your major gifts program and demonstrate commitment to the process. Create metrics to track your key measurements, including the number of visits, types of visits (cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship), proposals presented, and dollars raised. These metrics should be tracked by each staff member and the team to create accountability and measure overall progress to goal.
- ▶ **Full Cycle:** Make the relationship cycle continuous. Not all visits should be cultivation, nor should they be solicitation. It is a fluid, circular process. After a donor makes a gift, spend time on stewarding and further cultivating that donor before building to additional solicitation.

Not every effective major gifts program will look the same. Your organization has its own culture and needs, and you should tailor these elements to your organization’s specific situation.

You may need to start with small steps to move your organization toward a more systematic program. The effort is worthwhile and putting a system to identify, qualify cultivate, solicit, and steward donors into place now will pay dividends in the future.

DISCOVER FOR YOURSELF.

Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates (JGA) is a premier national provider of philanthropic and strategic consulting solutions for nonprofits—yet, more importantly, we are your authentic partner, empowering you to make your corner of the world a better place.