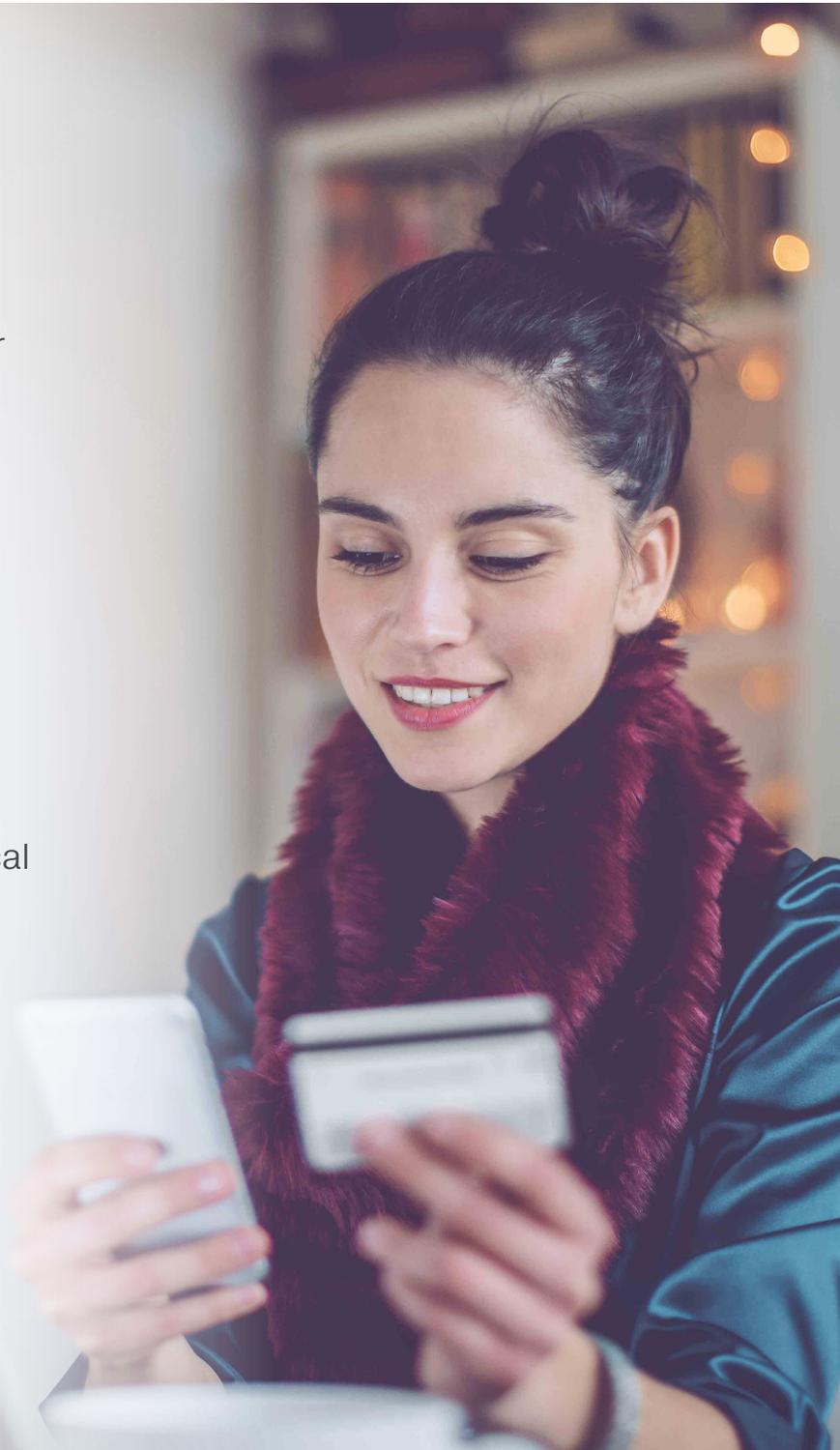


Five strategies to prepare for a successful year-end giving season

Throughout 2020, we've seen inspiring examples of advancement teams overcoming extraordinary uncertainty in an effort to support students, engage alumni, and foster a culture of philanthropy. We have witnessed institutions evolve their strategies and focus on meaningful partnerships to persist through these challenging times.

As we approach the year-end giving season, how can institutions effectively engage donors, respond to community needs, and continue to endure through this age of physical distancing and societal change?

Read our five strategies to optimize your institution's year-end fundraising efforts.



1 Share your appreciation and communicate the impact of a gift.

Advancement teams should be going back to the basics by focusing on their constituents and the importance of relationships. Take time to personalize acknowledgement letters and deliver messages of gratitude with the same enthusiasm and urgency in your request. Think beyond traditional opportunities to recognize donors in fresh new ways. **Most importantly, show your donors the impact their gift made and the effect it will have on your institution.**

Work on connecting donors with their beneficiaries and have them directly deliver impact. Talk to donors about their philanthropic passions as the economy and their personal situation may have shifted their perspectives. Take the time to discover your donors' passions, then communicate with them about those initiatives to keep them engaged. As we all know, personalized touchpoints go a long way to establish and maintain lasting relationships and loyalty.

2 Pay attention to loyal donors.

Now is the time to take a hard look at how we do business and ask ourselves, "Is this the time for us to acquire new donors or focus on our loyal alumni and supporters?" Too often our focus is on meeting monetary goals by gaining new donors and securing large gifts. When this becomes the sole focus, we often neglect to acknowledge the importance of long-time donors, the endowed funds they support, time spent as a volunteer, and allegiance to the institution.

Dedicate time to recognize individuals, families, corporations, and foundations who have been donating \$10, \$25, or more each and every year.

Instead of prioritizing the next "mega gift", connect with your loyal supporters, remind them of your gratitude, and show the effect their gifts have made over the years.

3 Focus on the metrics that matter.

Fundraisers are facing increasing pressures to secure gifts during this period of extreme economic hardship in higher education. However, many advancement teams have not evaluated their performance metrics or made necessary adjustments to become successful in today's climate.

Ask yourself these questions:

Does the traditional concept of a campaign still apply? Are your development officers incentivized when their donors contribute to an established fund? How is your Annual Fund staff adjusting their priorities and goals? Are there metrics around retention and donor relations and engagement not just dollars?

Instead of focusing on output or arbitrary quantitative goals, metrics should be a measurement of activity that drives meaning to your institution and your constituents. Ensure fundraising teams are focused on the behaviors and activities that donors need and stimulate action that is aligned with your mission and strategy.

4 Reallocate funds to address pressing needs.

Unfortunate events such as layoffs, closed campuses, reduced academic offerings, and the elimination of athletics programs typically occur due to a sudden drop in funding. When institutions start taking measures to curb the lack of funding, thoughts turn to innovative ways sustain business continuity.

How long has it been since your institution audited its endowed funds? *Is your institution better served by repurposing unused endowment funds? Are there unmet funding priorities that could be matched to an existing fund? Are there funds that may never be used due to outdated language and stipulations that could be revised alongside the donor or heirs to match current priorities?*

Now may be a good time to go back to your donors to show gratitude for their gift and reallocate those charitable funds to address the philanthropic needs of your community. Unused and unspent funds are all too commonly unaddressed problems in our industry and now is the time to fix them.

5 Prepare for societal change.

Never has there been a more compelling time for philanthropy to play a vital role in advancing the mission of higher education. Institutions and foundation boards across the country may be faced with the difficult decision to reduce endowment payouts while still ensuring the needs of students, faculty, and the university community are met. Meanwhile, donors are being pulled in multiple directions as they evaluate the role of philanthropy in assisting with COVID-19 response and important societal issues.

During an election year, it is important for institutions to anticipate how the outcome of this significant national event might affect donor motivation and fundraising efforts. As James Langley points out, **“...donors don’t want to give to schools merely to keep them afloat; they want to give through schools, to create a better world.** Philanthropy is the means by which we seek and often succeed in improving the human condition.”¹ Offer inspiration to your constituents as they seek to fulfill their philanthropic goals, support the causes that matter most to them, and make a difference in the world through the power of charitable giving.

¹ *Why Fundraisers Need to Be Excellent Beat Reporters.*

August 30, 2016. <https://www.academicimpressions.com/blog/why-fundraisers-need-to-be-excellent-beat-reporters/>

About Ellucian CRM Advance

Build and grow a strong culture of philanthropy at your institution with Ellucian CRM Advance, a robust cloud-based solution that lets you track and manage donors throughout the lifecycle. By incorporating data-backed insights into your advancement strategies, you can enhance your fundraising efforts to reach institutional goals while cultivating and maintaining stronger relationships with your constituencies.

➔ Visit ellucian.com/crm-advance to learn more.

About Donor Relations Guru Group

Lynne Wester and her teammates at the Donor Relations Guru Group lead with gratitude and partner with nonprofits on a variety of initiatives from assessment through implementation. Her work motivates and inspires countless fundraisers to do more for their donors and create amazing donor experiences.

➔ Visit donorrelationsguru.com to learn more.

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