(You can) launch a planned giving program

Has your organization discussed creating a planned giving program — but put it off for some reason? Perhaps you decided it would be too complicated, or too time consuming, or too expensive — or you simply felt you didn't have a strong enough prospect list? In fact, it's possible to create a basic planned giving program without a great deal of time or resources — and even without a huge prospect pool!

Planned gifts have traditionally been defined as gifts that will take effect at some future time (often, after the donor's death). The many types of planned gifts include (but are not limited to) simple bequests via a will or trust, charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder and lead trusts, assets transferred using pay-on-death or transfer-on-death documents, and gifts using life insurance.

Some forms of planned giving arrangements involve significant legal, tax or other counsel — or even require that the organization hold special licensure. Perhaps as a result, many nonprofits are leery of establishing planned giving programs. However, even small to mid-size nonprofits can generally manage the most basic of planned gifts — the simple bequest. Asking donors to designate your organization as a beneficiary in their will is easy to do (for you and for the donor) and it's practically free of cost. Donors may also appreciate the opportunity to make a greater difference while also enjoying estate tax benefits.

Remember that gift arrangements made through someone's will can be amended (or entirely revoked) in the future. This creates flexibility for the donor — and it makes it doubly important for you to provide strong stewardship. You'll want to ask donors to let you know if they've named you in their will, so you can regularly thank them and keep them informed about your work.

Once you're ready to add wills and bequests to your fund development portfolio, there are several low- and no-cost ways to let people know about this option. These include:

- *Piggyback on other forms of communication*. Include information about planned giving in the newsletter/s you send to current and potential donors. On your website, ask people to include a gift to your organization in their wills. (Be sure to provide information for a staff contact at your organization and — again — ask donors to let you know they've included you in their will, so you can recognize them appropriately.)
- *Create a planned giving brochure*. Whether you use a simple one-sheet on letterhead or a full-color brochure, what's important is to explain the importance (benefits) of planned gifts to your organization and those you serve — and to summarize how a planned gift can help donors achieve their own philanthropic and financial goals.
- *Incorporate planned gift marketing into other fundraising programs*. Include a check box on response cards in your annual appeal and other outreach, allowing donors to request more information about making a bequest gift to your organization. (Remember to ask for contact information and then carefully monitor responses — and follow up promptly!)
- *Create a planned giving tagline*. Simply adding a tagline to your email signature block, business cards and letterhead can help get the word out. A simple sentence, such as "Please remember us in your will or trust," helps remind your community about the opportunity for planned giving.

If you already have a robust list of loyal donors (those who have contributed for at least four of the past five years, for example), you might consider more targeted strategies for these folks — such as hosting a *seminar about estate planning*. Some of your donors will appreciate the opportunity to learn more about how they can provide for their families, as well as their favorite charity, through their estate. An added benefit: Putting on one of these events is a great way to strengthen your relationship with estate-planning and related professionals in your area.

Do you need support with establishing and/or marketing a planned giving program? We can help. Contact us at hello@thurlowassociates.com to set up a free consultation.