

## Individual Giving Programs: Lessons Learned from the Field

On November 17, 2016, Thurlow/Associates' Amber Ginsberg moderated a panel discussion on individual giving at the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Greater Los Angeles Chapter's Regional Philanthropy Conference.

Cathi Chadwell, executive director, public affairs, Huntington Hospital; Blythe Cotton Maling, chief development officer, St. Anne's; and Carol Horvitz, executive director, Children's Burn Foundation, participated as members of the panel. These respected professionals shared tips for the launch, strengthening and enhancement of individual giving programs.

For the more than 100 session attendees, key takeaways included:

- *It's about relationships.* Yes, we know you've heard this before, but it bears repeating and remembering, according to our panelists. With only a small development department, for example, Carol's organization has developed a robust individual giving program — thanks to personalized, hands-on engagement with donors.
- *Never underestimate the importance of other personal touches.* Handwritten notes are becoming an endangered species, but there's little doubt about their impact. A well-crafted handwritten note can convey special appreciation and a personal touch that donors appreciate. Blythe described such notes as her "secret sauce"!
- *Manage return on investment (and time).* For many fundraisers, managing a major gifts program is one of many items on a long daily to-do list. It's important to prioritize carefully. If you don't have time to manage 100 prospects, you may feel like giving up — but do you have time to manage 20? Or 10? Develop a manageable shortlist that takes into account your time and other available resources. Rather than becoming discouraged, spend your time and resources on these top prospects/donors — and do it well, panel members recommended.
- *Focus on donor retention.* Strong donor retention is a key indicator of success in any development program. (Imagine if you convinced several new donors to give to your organization this year, but lost all your past donors!) If you haven't been tracking retention, now is a perfect time to start.
- *And speaking of tracking and evaluation...* Cathi recommended that development officers also work to identify other indicators that can help evaluate performance *and* inform future success. She noted, for example, that a donor who has made three gifts to her organization is statistically more likely to become a lifetime donor. When it comes to managing your time (see above), doesn't it make sense to track this kind of information and then focus on actions that can convert one-time donors into donors for life?
- *Be an active listener.* Even if a prospective donor says "no" to your ask, you can make the experience a positive one if you're able to gather information that helps you with future requests. Ask whether there's anything your organization could do better that would encourage this person's support. The input you receive can help with outreach to this prospect and others, moving forward.

We extend our sincere thanks to the AFP Greater Los Angeles Chapter for inviting us to moderate a lively and informative discussion — and to our panelists who so generously shared their expertise and experience.

*For information about how Thurlow/Associates can help your organization launch, strengthen or enhance an individual giving program, contact us for a no-cost consultation. You can reach us at*

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