

EFFECTIVE  
**DONOR**  
**ENGAGEMENT**  
FOR CHURCHES





# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The foundation of my relationship with a donor, like the foundation of my relationship with any friend, is what we call “acknowledgment.”

In your interactions with this person, you acknowledge his or her value as a human being by giving attention to life details, activities, opinions and values. You also acknowledge a donor’s generosity and *affirm* the role he or she has already played in the ministry of the church. Gratitude and appreciation are core to the relationship. When you send a message of genuine thanks for the donor’s time, you build credibility.

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## So how do we apply this concept inside the church with our givers?

- 1 Team thanking.** First, consider your staff - all your staff - as a team in this approach to your donors. Whether you’re a large, multicampus church or a staff of two or three part-time employees, have the conversation about donor gratitude and how everyone can be involved in thanking your givers. Set a goal of making sure your consistent, recurring donors hear from you with an occasional handwritten thank you card, a phone message or a personal email. While the thanks of the pastor is critical, your staff reaching out at times throughout the year to thank tithers and consistent donors sends an important message of their value.

**2 Team thinking.** No matter the size of your church, involving key volunteers in thanking donors can also have a significant impact. The adult volunteers who chaperoned the youth mission trip could divide up notes and photos to those who contributed to make it happen. Your worship or board volunteers could tag team occasional notes to your significant contributors just to tell them how their support impacts the ongoing work of the church's ministries.

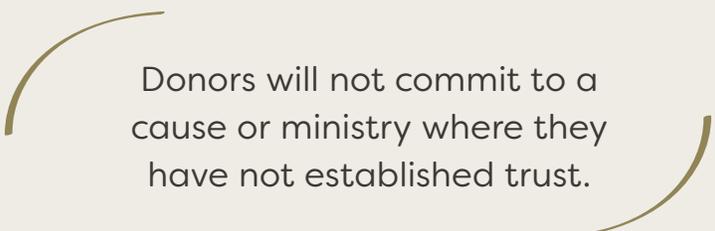
**3 Strive for tangible, specific examples of impact.** Use your broad "team" of staff and key volunteers to generate a list of all the specific and tangible things your givers make possible with their tithes and offerings. How are your donors advancing the Kingdom work on a day-by-day basis in your congregation? Refresh this list at least a couple times a year and keep it in the forefront for your acknowledgments and donor communications. This is one area where the church could most learn from nonprofit organizations, who often share with donors EXACTLY what gifts at certain levels help accomplish. Use your budget and your ministry outcomes to be as specific as you can with givers about their impact.

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Acknowledgment is the crucial foundation on which an authentic donor relationship and any eventual larger request for funds must be built. One might say I must "earn the right" to present the case for support for future projects. If I have acknowledged the donor and his or her impact adequately, I can eventually present a case for greater support with confidence that I won't be violating the values of the donor, or unintentionally devaluing the donor.

# TRUST-BUILDING

Trust-building means something a little different for church givers than for donors to a cause or nonprofit charity, where they are typically less directly connected. For pastors and church leaders, this trust-building phase IS the relational phase of ministry. This is where we intentionally discover a donor's passion and where it connects to our church's work.



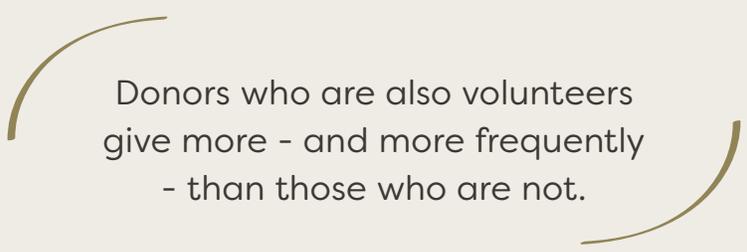
Donors will not commit to a cause or ministry where they have not established trust.

The importance of this phase of donor relationships cannot be overstated. No less than 80 percent of the time we spend with a donor will involve the trust-establishment process. If there is a single core to ministry-based fundraising, this is it. You don't hound, pressure, manipulate, or 'emotionally inspire' a contribution from someone; you build trust so that a contribution becomes the natural outflow of the relationship.

The church has a massive advantage here. We're blessed with established connections in and community among members, who each have reasons for being involved. But too often I see the church taking these for granted in not asking members why they attend, what keeps them in the congregation and what inspires their giving.

It can be helpful to consider occasional surveys to members or subsets of your donors. The act of asking for feedback - through intentional staff conversations or surveys - is in itself a trust-building effort. Short, targeted feedback surveys that combine both quantitative (such as Likert scale) questions with a few open ended ones can provide tremendous insight to member attitudes or how your various communications or programs are perceived. This also can give your loyal members a sense of agency and ownership in the ministries they're supporting with their gifts.

Getting your members involved and working on the front lines in your ministry is another foundational trust-building strategy.



Donors who are also volunteers  
give more - and more frequently  
- than those who are not.

This is another area where the church has an edge over other charitable organizations in terms of the kind of experience we should be able to provide givers. Leverage your staff and your key volunteers in really being intentional about honoring your loyal volunteers, spotlighting them, helping share their story and inspiring others with it. Consider how your staff or key volunteers can help you communicate your ministry's impact and outcomes more effectively.

# PRESENTING A CASE FOR SUPPORT

In the church, the case for support most often looks like one of three things: a capital campaign, an immediate need fundraiser, or the annual stewardship campaign. No matter where you find yourself as a church in this season, the practical tools here will help you prepare to make the best possible case to your donors.

In the philanthropic development world, when we present a case for support to a major donor, it always has four essential components. There is a problem, a solution, a strategy and an invitation to partnership to solve the problem.

While those four components are most translatable to a campaign or immediate need effort, we should be able to articulate it even for our annual stewardship campaigns. What problem is the tither solving with their tithe? Instead of the appeal you typically generate during your stewardship campaign, consider reframing your approach to see the giver as the partner or hero in your church's story. Tell the story from that perspective.

### **Here's an example:**

*Each Wednesday, 30 high schoolers and 20 middle schoolers experience a time of fun, service and spiritual formation together. Their parents have a time of fellowship, Bible study and connection. These 50+ families are nourished and energized to be Christ's hands and feet each week during their Wednesday night gathering. Your gift makes it possible for us to underwrite the \$750 weekly cost of food, supplies, facilities and staff time. Without you, we would not be able to offer this important time for our families, which over the last months has also attracted new prospective members. Thank you for partnering with us in this important ministry.*

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That Wednesday night session might be something you've offered for some time - it's on autopilot and it's not a new program looking for funding. But in truth, it has a hard cost and your loyal donors are funding it. It has a value for your members and your outreach. Seek to frame the impact of your ministry - especially those parts people might take for "granted" - in a way that shows the donor as the central protagonist of your church's story.

The more you and your staff can be specific about that donor impact, the better prepared you will be to launch an annual pledge drive or a campaign for a project. Be transparent and work hard to name those tangibles that donors can underwrite with their generosity.

When we're building authentic and trust-filled relationships, we can't take shortcuts, rush the process or manipulate donors, even when we feel pressure to hit our budget or campaign goals.

# MAKING THE ASK

When preparing our case for support, we've outlined how that appeal should always include four essential components: a problem, a solution, a strategy and an invitation to partnership to solve the problem. This is true whether our ask is a personal one of a major donor or a broad appeal during our stewardship drive.

In a broad appeal, the invitation to be a partner in the solution needs to be very clear. It should show the giver how he or she can play a role in solving the problem you've presented and how they can be a partner in your church's mission and ministry. Be as specific as you can. Again, this is where churches can learn from charitable causes who give donors "dollar handles" - or specific gift amounts that speak to what giving at that level helps accomplish. These help givers visualize the kind of impact they have with a pledge or commitment.

## **It could be as simple as statements like:**

*"It takes 10 members giving \$1500 annually to support the salary of our part-time youth pastor. It takes 20 members giving \$100 a month to fund the costs of our worship music, instruments and sound system."*

After you have acknowledged and affirmed your donor, built trust, and presented your case for support, it is time for the ask!

**Here is an example of language to use when it seems like the right time to transition from presentation to ask:**

*‘Tom , based on the information I’ve shared with you here, do you have any concerns about this project? Any questions I could answer? No? Would this be a good time to share with you what we’re going to need financially? This is a \$55,000 project. We’re looking for three donors of \$10,000 or more. Would you be willing to take one of those positions, to be one of those partners?’*

**If you’re unsure about the specific dollar amount that a donor might give – let the donor see the total need, and let the donor set the bar:**

*‘Here’s the project, here’s what we’re trying to do. It’s going to cost \$250,000. We’ll need a donor to give \$50,000, and four donors to give \$25,000. We’ll then ten donors to give \$10,000 each. I’m excited you have a vision for this. Where would you see yourself in this project? Do you see yourself as the top donor? Or somewhere else on the chart?’*

The donor will probably set his or her own bar by mentioning an amount.

Always keep in mind the long-term goal of authentic, trust-filled relationships with your givers. Some will be passionate about a project and others will not. Let the donor - and God - lead you to where donor passions intersect with ministry needs.

TIMOTHY L. SMITH



# Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

## **The know-how you need from experts you trust.**

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

## **Tools and support to strengthen churches.**

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

## **Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.**

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

## **A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.**

We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

## **We believe in YOU!**

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

## Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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