

How Can You Ask Monthly Donors to Make the Ultimate Gift?

By Erica Waasdorp



As a fundraiser, you're always looking to upgrade your donors to be more involved with your organization and to give more. Giving more can happen in multiple ways:

- **Give a higher amount.** Increase the donor's average gift.
- **Give more often.** Ask more often.
- **Or give on an ongoing basis.** Ask donors to become a monthly donor.

But that's not where it ends! There's one more step in the process of upgrading your donors to give even more: Ask them to

include you in their will. Research from Smee & Ford reveals that monthly donors were six times more likely to include organizations in their wills than non-monthly donors.

An interesting study on planned giving by FreeWill, which offers free will creation services, shows that donors who create wills are five times more likely to leave a gift compared to the national average.

Consider doing your own research within your organization. Look at those donors who included your organization in their will. How long were they in your donor database?

When was their first gift? What was the amount? When was their last gift? What was the amount? How many gifts did they make? How big was the average legacy you

received? What can you learn from that? If you've had a monthly donor program for a while, there are probably a few monthly donors who have included your organization in their wills. If you're just starting to grow your monthly donors, it may be too early still.

One organization I work with found that 75% of their legacy gifts in the most recent year had come from their monthly donors.

So how do you go about getting those monthly donors to include you in their will?

- By asking. Ask small—1% of the donor's estate. Don't ask for the boat, the plane or the castle!
- By making it easy. Let the donor know that a legacy gift will make a huge difference to those you serve. It's a huge gift to your organization and its constituents.
- That's why FreeWill, for example, has become quite popular. Donors think making a will is expensive and complicated. A will must be done right, but it's not necessarily cumbersome.
- Use social proof. Use testimonials from other donors like your typical donor, so they can relate. Get testimonials from "small" and other monthly donors, not your major givers.
- Give every donor the feeling they can make a difference—no matter what their current financial status. The money may not be there now, but it may very well be there down the road.
- Many Baby Boomers and those who came before them grew up valuing every penny and nickel. They may not view themselves as rich, even if they're sitting on a great retirement.

When it comes to making a will and leaving gifts to charity in that will, you must plant the seeds on an ongoing basis. Here are a few things to consider for your organization that are very affordable and cost effective:

1. Include a buck slip in the tax letter you send out every January to your monthly donors. Focus on the language the donor needs to put in the will.
2. Have a tick box on the back of the reply



form and the back of the reply envelope. "Send me more information about including [organization name] in my will," rather than using heavy words like "planned giving," "estate vehicles," etc.

3. Include a message in every e-newsletter.
4. Include a message and donor testimonial in every newsletter.
5. Send a special appeal to your monthly donors and those who have given for a number of consecutive years.
6. A tip from Richard Radcliffe of Radcliffe Consulting: Those donors who send you a change of address really care about your organization and are great legacy prospects.
7. Send an insert in every thank-you letter.
8. Help donors create their will for free or at very low cost.
9. Send a special email with the will focus.
10. Send a survey. Sean Triner of Moceanic Fundraising recommends a "Supporter Connection" survey. Those organizations that have conducted this type of survey have uncovered many gifts from donors' wills.

The number of options to plant the seeds of including the organization in donors' wills is endless, and the cost is virtually nothing. One important thing to remember: People are not typically going to tell you they are including your organization in their will.



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Even if you ask, they may not tell you, so don't look at the investment of creating a special letter or a survey as a waste of money or time. You're not going to make money on this in the short term. But you'll see it down the road.

Your monthly donors are some of your best legacy prospects. By asking them to include you in their will now, and in every subtle way you can, you'll eventually get that ultimate gift.

Erica Waasdorp is one of the leading experts on monthly giving. She is the author of the book "Monthly Giving. The Sleeping Giant." She is the president of A Direct Solution, a company serving nonprofit organizations with fundraising and direct marketing needs, with a focus on monthly giving and appeals. She can be reached at erica@adirectsolution.com.



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