

# Beyond the Event: Building Lasting Donor Relationships



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# Introduction



Your fundraising event is much more than a single night of impact. It's the launchpad for lasting, meaningful relationships with your donors. The days and weeks following your event are crucial for creating and sustaining those connections. This guide explores actionable strategies to transform event attendees into lifelong supporters, ensuring your mission thrives.

## Cost of Fundraising Events

The average cost to raise one dollar through special events is approximately \$0.50 of gross proceeds. It's a significant investment, underscoring the importance of extending the impact beyond the event itself.





# The best events don't end when the lights go down

**A well-executed event should be like a great first date—buzzing with connection, possibility, and the spark of something meaningful. Innovative fundraisers don't treat the days and weeks after an event as an afterthought—they treat them as the start of a thoughtful, intentional journey to turn a one-time guest into a lifelong supporter.**

With events costing an average of 50 cents for every dollar raised, no one can afford for the event just to be a standalone fundraiser.

You've got to plan post-event follow-ups with the same care and attention as the event itself. The goal? Build a relationship with donors that leads to a living room conversation about a transformational gift.

The best fundraisers start with the end in mind: sustained, relationship-based engagement that leads to loyalty and larger gifts.

***A great event isn't just a night out—it's the "first date" in what could be a beautiful relationship.***



# Using storytelling post-event to deepen donor relationships



**After an event, enthusiasm can fade quickly unless you nurture it. Sharing powerful, mission-aligned stories in the days and weeks following keeps the emotional connection alive. It reminds attendees why the cause matters—and how they can make a real difference.**

Example: Sending a follow-up email that tells the story of someone impacted by the funds raised—linking that outcome directly to money raised that night—creates a direct line between their attendance, their gift, and the real-world impact it had.

Great storytelling is like catnip to donors. It's the key to your event and post-event success because it makes donors care and opens the door to action. When attendees are moved by a story, they're more likely to say yes to the next step—whether that's making a gift, joining a giving circle, having a one-on-one conversation about a major gift, volunteering, or making a legacy gift.

## **The first 72 hours: Why timing matters**

Here's a scenario we know all too well: We attend a fundraising event, bid generously, win a silent auction item—maybe a weekend getaway or a happy hour for ten—and then? Crickets. We follow up to clarify the fine print—when does it expire?—only to be met with a bland run-of-the-mill out-of-office reply. Every. Single. Time.

## **What donors are thinking immediately after an event**

If your event went well, your guests are still glowing—literally and emotionally. They're feeling that warm, bronzy "I just did a great thing!" post-event giving glow. Your storytelling moved them. They gave. Now they're daydreaming about that vacation getaway they won.

It's like they just had a great first date. They're feeling happy, content, hopeful—and yes, their wallets are still open to the possibility of more.

Don't let their first post-event experience be a generic autoresponder. This is your moment to validate their generosity and start something real.

**Timing is Everything** A prompt follow-up within 72 hours is critical to maintaining donor goodwill, ensuring that your supporters feel appreciated and eager to stay connected.



## Engineer an emotional peak

But this window of generosity and goodwill doesn't last forever. You've got a mere 72 hours. The clock is ticking! Your goal? Validate their decision to give.

We don't want any buyer's remorse; you need to deliver buyer delight.

Don't let their first post-event experience be a generic autoresponder. This is your moment to validate their decision to give, reinforce the connection they felt in the room that night, and lay the groundwork for something lasting.

Show them how much you value and appreciate them with a personalized email or text to validate their decision to give and maintain momentum in your new relationship.

Momentum isn't guaranteed. You have to build it.

## How post-event personalized follow-ups strengthen donor relationships

Speed = value. A personal email, text, or call within 24–72 hours says: "Your gift mattered—and we noticed."

When donors feel recognized, valued, and confident in their gift, they're far more likely to stay connected—and say yes the next time you ask.

### The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling isn't optional; it's essential. Emotional connections fostered through meaningful stories are proven to boost donor retention and deepen their commitment to your cause.





## Post-event messaging that boosts a donor's giving glow

Here are four strategic ways to build donor affirmation into your post-event messaging—so you reinforce that “I just did a great thing!” feeling and pave the way for deeper engagement:

### 1. The auction-win-follow-up text

Pro-tip: Reference something specific. For example, *“You lit up during the live auction! We can't wait to hear about your trip. Thanks again for making that bid—a win for you and a big win for the Girl Scouts.”*

### 2. The connect-their-gift-to-immediate-impact text

*“Because of your generosity, hungry families will have access to fresh meals this week. That's the power of one night—and your gift.”*

### 3. The ‘You're-a-part-of-our-tribe’ text or email

Pro-tip: Share an event photo to make them feel part of a movement and your family, *“Together we raised...We couldn't do it without you!”*

### 4. The teaser-for-what's-next text or email

*“We'll be in touch with ways you can see your impact in action—and we'd love to invite you to a behind-the-scenes tour next month.”*

The way you follow up says everything about the kind of relationship you want. When donors feel seen, proud, and appreciated, they're far more likely to stick around—and give again.





# Turn one-time donors into repeat supporters

When you help donors feel proud, seen, and appreciated right after giving, you dramatically increase the chances they'll stay engaged—and give again.

## Map event attendees into long-term engagement paths based on their behavior

Not all attendees are the same. You likely had a smattering of these guests come to your event:

- Prospective major donors who have given before
- Mission curious guests who are first-time attendees
- Auction enthusiasts who bid but may not have any connection to your mission
- Social guests invited by a friend, but have low engagement
- Board guests/host guests who are attending as a favor to someone else

Want them all to come back for more? You need personalized follow-up plans that meet them where they are.



## Using event data to make personalized follow-up paths based on a donor's interest level and giving capacity

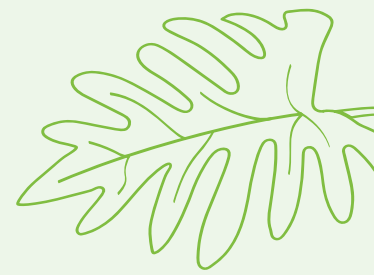
Reaching your fundraising target at your event is just one of many goals for that night. Think of yourself as an undercover agent observing attendees for interest and wealth clues, like:

Giving capacity:

- [Generosity and wealth screening insights](#) you gleaned from your CRM
- Past giving history (if returning donor)
- Size of [auction](#) bids or paddle raise gift

Interest signals:

- Conversations with staff members or board members at the event
- Questions asked during the program
- Follow-up emails or social media engagement
- Auction item types (a trip vs. a mission-aligned experience)
- Response to mission messaging during the event



## Custom engagement paths for first-time donors and major gift prospects

### First-time donors

**Goal:** Make them feel valued, reinforce their decision, get to know them better, show them the impact of their gift, steward them and invite them to make a second gift (or monthly gift) after 90 days.

#### First 1–4 weeks:

##### • Within the first 72 hours:

- Send a personalized thank-you (email, note, or call—bonus if it comes from someone they met at the event, like the Executive Director or Board chair, for example)
- Make sure you mention how much their generous first gift means and welcome them to your donor family.
- Let them know how they'll hear from you next, for example, "P.S. Watch your inbox for some heartwarming updates on how your gift at <org name> is already at work!"

##### • Within the first week:

- Share a quick impact story describing how their gift makes a difference.
- Include a photo of a beneficiary looking directly at the camera.
- Include a question in your P.S. that relates to your mission to magnify their positive feelings of connectedness to you, for example, if you were the National Audubon Society you might ask:  
"Where does your love of birds come from?"  
or "What's the most beautiful bird you've ever seen?"

##### • Within the second week:

Send a light-touch survey with 2-3 questions:

1. "Why is <insert your mission here, for example, empowering girls or feeding seniors healthy meals> important to you?"
2. "What causes are close to your heart?"
3. "What was the most satisfying gift you ever made to a charity?"

##### • Within the third week:

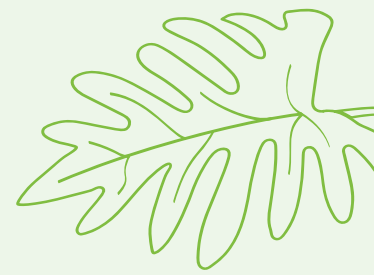
- Invitation to a low-barrier follow-up, like an open house, coffee with the ED, program tour, mission moment tour, or a donor thought circle.

##### • Within the fourth week:

- Celebrate their one-month "Donorversary" with a video email, postcard, email, or letter that touts, "One month ago you made your first gift. And already [insert impact of gift here.]"
- Use video or photos that show the target beneficiaries being impacted by the gift, like homebound seniors being delivered fresh meals, a rescue who just got adopted, or Girl Scouts earning a badge.

#### Month 2:

- Send them a welcome series of 3–4 emails (one a week).
- Convert to a second gift (or monthly donor) with an email appeal series.



## Major gift prospects

**Goal:** Build a personalized relationship and move toward a meaningful, long-term investment.

### Immediately post-event (within 72 hours)

- Make a personal call or write a note from the Executive Director, Development Director, or board member
- Invite them to coffee, for a site visit, or to one-on-one meetings. Download this [“Get the Visit, Nail the Ask”](#) guide to help.

### Months 1–6:

- Share info at regular touchpoints based on their interests—like insider updates, personal notes, comment on an article about them, or share one.
- Ask for a visit by saying, “Every donor has a story. I want to know yours.” Then use these [sample discovery questions](#) to do great discovery.
- Acknowledge milestones in their life.
- Call them with a personal project update on what they funded.
- Invite them to a [donor thought circle](#), behind-the-scenes tour, or [cultivation event](#).

- Surprise and delight them by letting them know you’re thinking of them, with a “Saw this, thought of you ...” article or text.

**Long-term goal:** Ask for a major gift within 6–12 months



# How do I expand engagement beyond giving?



**There's a saying in fundraising, "Ask for money and you'll get advice. Ask for advice and you'll get money." Inviting donors to give their *time, expertise, or opinion* can help them become more emotionally invested and more likely to give again.**

One nonprofit assembled a "dream team" of local technology leaders tasked with envisioning a new computer lab. They asked these leaders to use their knowledge of industry trends to imagine what the organization might need 3-5 years into the future. Asking potential donors to contribute their unique expertise can make them feel needed and appreciated, and more likely to give.

Instead of having your top gift prospects stuff envelopes, consider what kind of [VIP volunteer opportunities](#) you can create to let donors feel your mission, whether it's fun, eye-opening, or emotionally gripping (especially if it includes a brief moving testimony from a client you've served).

Is there a role you can cast them in to feel close to your cause? I cast mine as college admissions counselors whose task was to tell 150 middle school girls they'd just been accepted into an Ivy League university for our Take a Girl to College Day event.

What social and digital touchpoints can you use with donors?

- Private social groups (like a Facebook or Slack group for mission updates and community stories)
- Text updates from the field
- Live virtual sessions or Q&As with staff, volunteers, or program alumni

## Use data to create a donor retention strategy

A data-informed retention strategy doesn't just ask "Who gave last year?" It asks:

"Who's showing up, leaning in, and expressing how much they care—and how can we deepen the relationship?"

### Donor Retention Indicators

Retention is driven by consistent engagement. Donors who open emails and attend events are more likely to remain committed over the long term, highlighting the importance of holistic engagement strategies.





## What engagement signals predict long-term giving?

Forget the checkbook for a second. The real signs a donor will stick around? They open your emails. They show up. They click, share, forward. They read your impact stories. Maybe every once in a while, they ask a question or two. Maybe they tell a friend about you or bring friends to your events.

These are the love notes of long-term loyalty. These quiet behaviors say, "I care. I'm listening. I want more." Catch those signals early to quickly deepen donors' affinity, giving, and undying loyalty.

## How can I use AI to segment?

AI tools (like those built into Bloomerang's giving platform) can now analyze patterns in donor behavior to identify **commitment-based segments**:

- **Loyalists:** High consistency over time, great prospects for legacy giving
- **Sprinters:** New donors with high early engagement are prime to cultivate and visit
- **Lapsed:** Previously active, now disengaged—need reactivation strategy
- **Champions:** High capacity and high engagement—ready for face-to-face ask

## How the Bloomerang integrated giving platform creates an ecosystem of engagement

Because Bloomerang [tracks both donor and volunteer activity](#) in a unified giving platform, it enables you to:

- See the *full picture* of a supporter's involvement
- Identify new giving opportunities from highly engaged volunteers
- Personalize communications based on their engagement levels
- Trigger automated touchpoints based on behavior (like thanking a volunteer who just donated, or inviting a donor to a volunteer opportunity they may love)

This integration means you're not managing donors in one silo and volunteers in another—you're cultivating *community*, which is the key to long-term retention.





# Don't ghost the guests: Make your event the start, not the end

You just threw a fantastic event. Congratulations! People laughed. They cried. They clapped. They gave generously. Wonderful!

But here's the thing: events don't build donor loyalty—follow-up does. What happens after the applause fades is where long-term loyalty and generosity are born.

You want to turn your guests into advocates? Give them a goosebump story to share.

Consider letting your donors do the talking. After the event, get a quote, a photo, a "why I gave." Nothing builds trust like a donor telling another human, "This matters to me." That's your best marketing.

Want to keep them past the next annual gala? Make it personal. Make it frequent. Don't disappear for 11 months. Send thank-yous that sing. Send updates that matter. Send reminders that their gift is still alive and kicking. These touchpoints—small, human, authentic—are what turn one-time guests into lifelong believers.

The cycle of generosity isn't magic. It's a series of well-timed, heartfelt nudges that say: You belong here. You made a difference. Let's do more—together.

## **The Cycle of Generosity**

Personalized follow-ups are a critical driver of long-term donor loyalty. When donors feel noticed and valued, they're more likely to continue their giving, year after year.



# The purpose-built giving platform

**Donor Management**

**Volunteer Management**

**Online Fundraising**

**Event Management**

**Peer-to-Peer Fundraising**

**Auction Fundraising**

**Payment Processing**

**Email Marketing**

**Reporting & Analytics**

**Integration Hub**