



DONOR EXPERIENCE REPORT

National Park Foundation

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Introduction

Great customer experiences are profoundly meaningful for all of us. We expect them every time we interact with a brand. Customers rate satisfying customer experiences higher than they do price and product.

Donor experiences are no different. Donors have the same expectations interacting with a nonprofit as with a for-profit.

But what about Park Foundations?

This importance is magnified for Park Foundations, where we must deliver both fantastic donor experiences and visitor experiences.

This Donor Experience Report explores how Park Foundations across the country communicate with donors in the most critical time in their relationship—the first 30 days.





What we researched and why

This detailed analysis covers two primary areas: the online donation process and the 30-day donor journey following the gift.

This research aims to help you determine how you stack up to your peers in your space and understand how factors like your donation process, gift acknowledgment, and follow-up communications influence donor behavior and repeat gifts.

We reviewed the following areas:

- Was the donor given the opportunity to cover transaction fees?
- Were the transaction fees included without a choice?
- Were multiple payment types offered (Google Pay/Apple Pay/Venmo)?
- Was there an option to pay towards a designated fund?
- Was there an option to give as a tribute or memorial?
- Was there an option to join a newsletter or other email communication?
- Did the donor receive a receipt for their donation via email?
- Did the donor receive a personalized or customized donation receipt?
- Did the donor receive a thank you letter in the first 5, 15, and 30 days after their donation?
- Did the donor receive a thank you call after their donation?
- Did the donor receive a personalized thank you email?
- Did the donor receive a newsletter in the first 30 days?
- Did the donor receive an ask to become a recurring donor?



What did the data show?

In this study, we donated \$25 to 50 Park Foundations across the US. This study examined the giving process and donor interactions across this segment to gain insights to improve the donor experience.

Online Giving Experience

10%

of Park Foundations offered multiple payment options for donors.

52%

of Park Foundations do ***NOT*** give donors the option to pay the transaction fees associated with their gift.

10%

of Park Foundations forced the donor to pay for transaction fees associated with their gift.

How can we improve the donor's online giving experience?

Offering multiple payment methods (for example, PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, Google Pay, credit card, and bank transfer) would be an essential first step. By limiting payment options, many Park Foundations are leaving money on the table and making it harder for donors to give.

All Park Foundations should offer donors the option to pay the transaction fee if the donor wishes to do so. Not doing so is a missed opportunity since over half of donors opt to cover the fee, and some platforms report this happening **65–92%** of the time.

To avoid any backlash, don't make it mandatory. Include a rationale for how this helps you save on admin costs and increases the impact of their gift. For example: "Make my gift go further by adding 3% to cover processing fees" or "If you opt to cover this small transaction fee, you'll be helping make an even bigger impact."



Donate button in easy to read bright contrasting color

Second call to action to give

Gift Designations

72% of Park Foundations did ***NOT*** give donors the option to contribute to a specific fund.

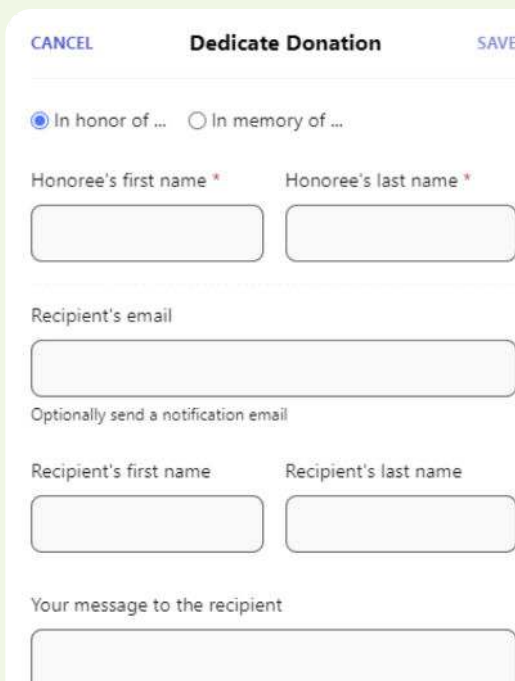
42% of Park Foundations gave donors the option to make a memorial or tribute donation.

What gift designations are important?

Allowing gift designations in memory or tribute is a must-have option for Park Foundations. Park Foundations are ideal choices for memorial gifts, and they would be wise to market making gifts in memory of a loved one or in tribute to a park lover.

Not having a list of fund options to give to is perfectly acceptable. It's human nature to believe that the more options we offer people, the better. Practically speaking, having too many choices can overwhelm us and make us less likely to complete our gift. As long as your Park Foundation has a clear and compelling case for support on your donation form, you needn't complicate or add clutter with a drop-down of multiple fund designations—most of which your donor is not familiar with and which could (a) confuse them and (b) make them abandon the donation process.

 **The right way to do tributes and memorials**



CANCEL **Dedicate Donation** **SAVE**

In honor of ... In memory of ...


Honoree's first name * Honoree's last name *

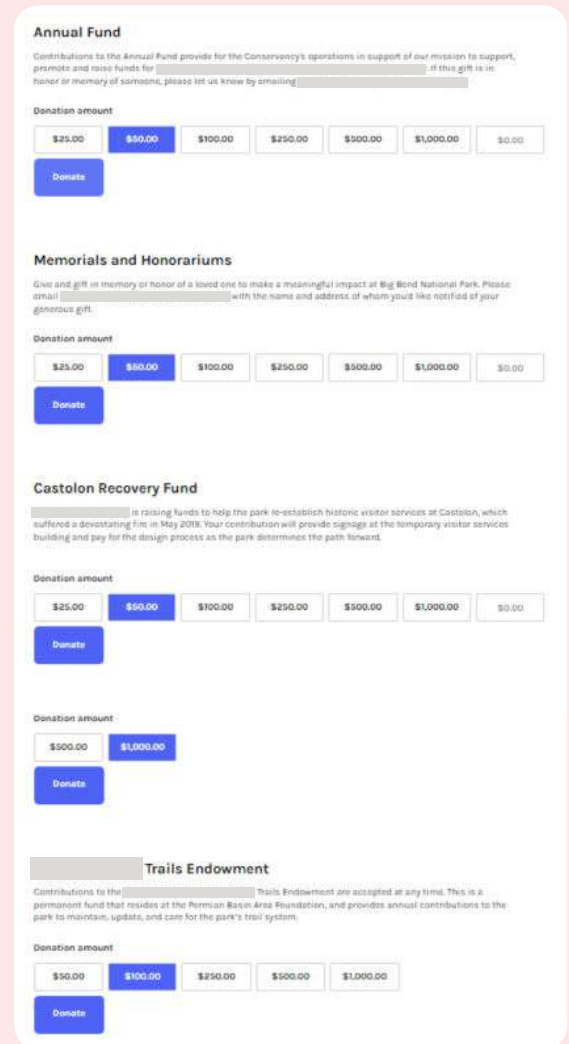
Recipient's email

Optionally send a notification email

Recipient's first name Recipient's last name

Your message to the recipient

 **What not to do:** Don't confuse donors with too many choices for fund designation.



Annual Fund

Contributions to the Annual Fund provide for the Conservancy's operations in support of our mission to support, promote and raise funds for [redacted] if the gift is in honor or memory of someone, please let us know by emailing [redacted]

Donation amount

Donate

Memorials and Honorariums

Give and gift in memory or honor of a loved one to make a meaningful impact at Big Bend National Park. Please email [redacted] with the name and address of whom you'd like notified of your generous gift.

Donation amount

Donate

Castolon Recovery Fund

[redacted] is raising funds to help the park re-establish historic visitor services at Castolon, which suffered a devastating fire in May 2018. Your contribution will provide signage at the temporary visitor services building and pay for the design process as the park determines the path forward.

Donation amount

Donate

Donation amount

Donate

Trails Endowment

Contributions to the [redacted] Trails Endowment are accepted at any time. This is a permanent fund that resides at the Permian Basin Area Foundation, and provides annual contributions to the park to maintain, update, and care for the park's trail system.

Donation amount

Donate

This screenshot shows an example of offering donors too many fund choices at checkout. Too many options distract your donor and reduce gift conversion. This donation page also lacks any automation with memorial and tribute gifts; as noted in the description, the donor has to open their email account and send a separate email address to let the development department know who they are honoring.

When someone opts to donate in honor of someone else, your platform should have the capability to prompt them to fill out the honoree's information so that the donor can properly and promptly recognize them, as shown here by Yellowstone Forever.

Invite donors to receive more communications from you

90% of Park Foundations did ***NOT*** offer donors the option to receive further communications from them at checkout.

This statistic was surprising. It would be less shocking if donors opted not to do this because they were also members, and their email addresses were already in the Park Foundation's database.

Why (and how) should I invite donors to sign up to hear from me?

Give everyone—donors included—frequent and compelling reasons to provide us with their email addresses. Park Foundations should consider enticing donors with an item of value or content they want or taking an action like a pledge. Some additional ideas: a trail map or hiking route for download with an email address, photography, bumper stickers, or laptop stickers.

If you add an opt-in box for future communications on your donation form, make sure that it displays after the donor has made their gift and offers value to the donor. Signing up to "receive a monthly newsletter" is not as enticing as "click here to get exclusive offers and special invites from the park" or "click here to stay updated on all the ways your gift is making a difference." If the donor doesn't elect to sign up after making their gift, entice them to sign up in your thank you email.



Thank your donors

94% of Park Foundations sent a thank you email receipt after making the gift.

44% of Park Foundations personalized their email thank you receipt.

42% of Park Foundations followed up with a mailed thank you letter.



An immediate email gift acknowledgment is essential; it lets the donor know you received their gift. However, it doesn't tell the donor how their gift made a difference. [Research](#) on donor behavior tells us that the communications content that most influences whether a donor gives again is knowing the results achieved by their gift.

It's not enough to simply thank a donor; we must report back to them to tell them how their gift made a meaningful impact.

However, of the 50 Park Foundations in this survey, only 21 followed up to mail an actual thank you letter.

For Park Foundations, this is a missed opportunity to make the donor feel like the hero they are for protecting the park from unnecessary development, for maintaining the beloved trails, for preserving the precious habitat, and for taking care of the park and its native habitat through every glorious season of the year!

When you consider that just [23% of new donors will make a second gift](#)—and for donors giving less than \$100, that [rate drops to 18%](#)—you can see how following up with donors to tell them how their gift made a difference makes a significant impact on your revenue.

Not only does it cost [10 times more to acquire a new donor than to retain an existing one](#), but when donors give loyally over time, their gifts increase, and they're more likely to name your park in their will or estate plans.

Recommended donor appreciation timeline



Since donors making a second gift to an organization are 60% likely to give another gift, you can create a new donor honeymoon for the first 90 days to show your appreciation and how their gift made a difference with personal touches before you make another ask.

Below is a [timeline](#) to help, loaded with personal touches to show you care and opportunities to learn more about your new donor, from a wick donor survey to an invite for a tour. Keep in mind—the invitation is the cultivation. Even if your new donor doesn't come for a tour—and even if they don't answer your call and you have to leave a thank you voicemail message—it still makes an impact.

New donor cultivation timeline (first 90 days)



Picking up the phone to thank a new donor within 48 hours of their gift increased the odds of repeat giving [by 400%](#).

Who doesn't want donors who are four times as likely to give to you again?

Summary



Sadly, this study revealed that most Park Foundations don't have a strong culture of philanthropy where donors receive a meaningful welcome, thank you, and follow-up impact report that shows how much they made a difference.

The good news for any Park Foundation reading this report is that you can quickly implement a new donor cultivation timeline to change all that!

As Roger Craver said,

“It is the actions of the nonprofit that cause the good (or poor) donor attitude around higher giving, retention, and donor lifetime value.”

ROGER CRAVER

Author of [Retention Fundraising: the Art and Science of Keeping Your Donors for Life](#)



About the authors



Rachel Muir, CFRE

Rachel has worked every side of the Rubik's cube that is the nonprofit sector. When she was 26 Rachel Muir launched Girlstart, a non-profit empowering girls in math, science, engineering and technology in the living room of her apartment with \$500 and a credit card. Several years later she had raised over 10 million and was featured on Oprah, CNN, and the Today show. Today Rachel delivers workshops and offers a monthly membership, [League of Extraordinary Fundraisers](#), transforming people into confident, successful fundraisers. Learn more about Rachel at www.rachelmuir.com.



James Goalder

With almost 20 years of experience working in nonprofit technology and sales and relationship management, James brings the perfect blend of experience for his role as Partnerships Manager at Bloomerang. In addition to his work experience, James volunteers with Project Grows, a community farm in Virginia, serving on the Board and on Volunteer Nights with the organization.

Create a world inspired by giving



Tour Bloomerang

Volunteer Management

Donor Management

Online Fundraising

Payment Processing

Email Marketing

Reporting & Analytics

Integration Hub

Event Management

Auction Fundraising



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