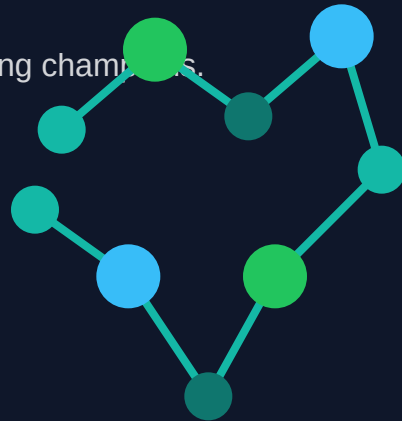


EXECUTIVE GUIDE SERIES | VOLUME 1

The Nonprofit's Guide to Donor Retention

**Stop Chasing Donors.
Start Building Relationships.**

A practical framework for turning first-time donors into lifelong champions.



BY JARVIS HARRIS

Founder & CEO, Donor Success

DonorSuccess.com

A Letter From Jarvis

“ Every donor represents more than a gift - they represent trust.

Dear Nonprofit Leader,

Every day, nonprofits pour tremendous energy into acquiring new donors. You launch campaigns, host events, send appeals, and celebrate every new gift.

But here is the question that matters most: What happens after that first gift?

Growth does not come from constantly replacing people. It comes from intentionally keeping them engaged. Donors rarely leave because they stop believing in the mission. More often, they leave because they stop feeling connected to it.

That is why I created Donor Success - to help nonprofits build stronger, smarter, more intentional relationships with the people who make their mission possible.

Fundraising is not simply about asking for another gift. It is about earning the opportunity to receive it.

Jarvis Harris

Founder & CEO, Donor Success

Why This Guide Matters

Acquiring donors is only half the equation. Keeping them is where sustainable growth begins.

- Retention costs less than acquisition
- Loyal donors give more over time
- Repeat donors become advocates
- Strong stewardship creates predictable revenue
- Relationships outperform campaigns

ACQUISITION

**fills the
bucket.**

RETENTION

**keeps it
full.**

Acquisition fills the bucket. Retention keeps it full.

A New Way to Think About Fundraising

The future belongs to organizations that measure relationships - not only revenue.

STOP

managing donations.

START

cultivating donors.

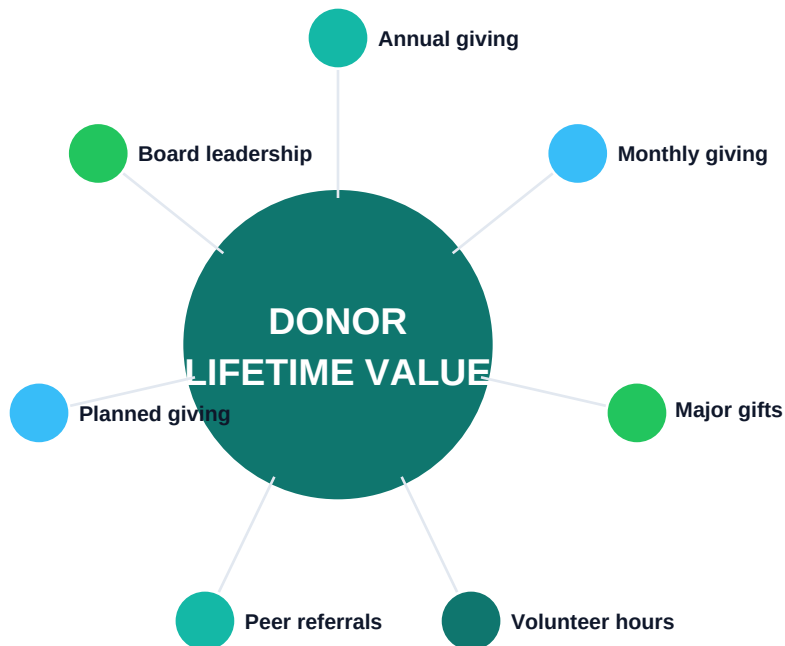
Intelligent Donor Success™ applies Customer Success principles to nonprofit fundraising to strengthen trust, engagement, loyalty, and lifetime value.



“Donors don't leave because the mission changes. They leave because the relationship does.”

The Hidden Cost of Donor Churn

Every donor lost is more than lost revenue.

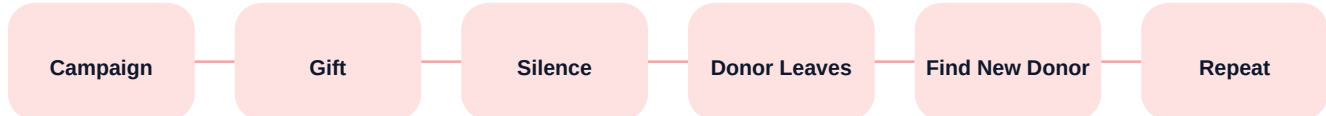


“ Every donor has a lifetime value. The first gift is simply the introduction.

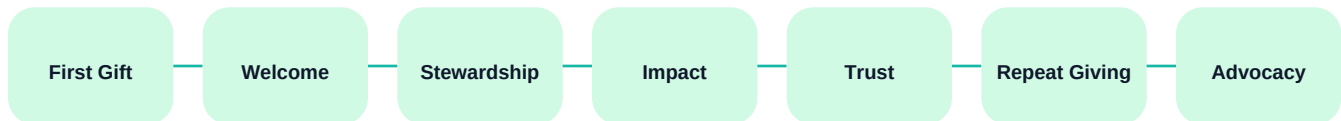
The Cost of Replacing Donors

Stop replacing relationships you have already earned.

THE FUNDRAISING HAMSTER WHEEL



THE DONOR SUCCESS FLYWHEEL



“

Keeping relationships is more sustainable than constantly replacing them.

Why Good Donors Leave

Most donors do not stop caring. They stop feeling connected.

1

They never felt seen

The receipt arrived. The relationship did not.

2

They never saw impact

Donors invest in outcomes, not transactions.

3

Every message was another ask

Healthy relationships give more value than requests.

4

Communication was generic

People want to feel known, not marketed to.

5

Nobody guided their journey

The experience simply happened instead of being designed.

“

Donors rarely leave all at once. They leave one missed connection at a time.

A Better Way Forward

Move from reactive fundraising to intentional relationship management.

“

Design the donor experience. Every touchpoint has purpose. Every communication adds value. Every interaction builds trust.



FIRST GIFT



TRUST



ENGAGEMENT



IMPACT



LOYALTY



ADVOCACY

**Great fundraising is measured by
the relationships you keep.**

Introducing the Donor Success Framework™

Great donor retention is not accidental. It is designed.

1

Make Them Feel Seen

Start with gratitude.

2

Turn Information Into Inspiration

Connect hearts to mission.

3

Prove the Promise

Make impact visible.

4

Invite Them Into the Mission

Create belonging.

5

Earn the Next Gift

Build trust before asking.



Retention isn't a fundraising strategy. It's a relationship strategy.

Stage 1 - Make Them Feel Seen

The relationship begins the moment they give.

- Thank within 24 hours
- Reference why they gave
- Explain the impact
- Introduce the broader mission
- Set expectations for what comes next

QUICK WIN

Record a short personalized thank-you video.



Appreciation delayed is appreciation diminished.

Stage 2 - Turn Information Into Inspiration

Facts inform. Stories inspire.

- Who was helped?
- What changed?
- Why did it matter?
- Use client, volunteer and staff stories
- Share mission moments - not only statistics

CONTENT IDEA

Turn one program outcome into one human story every month.



People don't fall in love with organizations. They fall in love with stories.

Stage 3 - Prove the Promise

Every gift creates an expectation.

- Show specific outcomes
- Translate dollars into impact
- Report progress consistently
- Connect outcomes to donor support
- Make impact visible

BETTER LANGUAGE

Replace generic thanks with a specific outcome.



Impact reported becomes trust earned.

Stage 4 - Invite Them Into the Mission

The goal is not more donors. The goal is more believers.

- Invite them to volunteer
- Bring them to an event
- Offer a facility tour
- Ask for feedback
- Create opportunities to share the mission

COMMON MISTAKE

Waiting until the next campaign to reconnect.



People support what they help build.

Stage 5 - Earn the Next Gift

Don't ask too soon. Earn the right.

- Express gratitude
- Share stories
- Demonstrate impact
- Create engagement
- Build enough trust for the next invitation

BEFORE YOU ASK

Have we thanked them, shown impact, created connection, and earned trust?

“

The best fundraising reminds people why they wanted to give.

The First 90 Days

The most important journey you will ever design.

DAY 1

Celebrate

Personalized thank-you + receipt

WEEK 1

Welcome

Mission + team introduction

WEEK 2

Inspire

One life-changing story

MONTH 1

Build Confidence

Early impact update

MONTH 2

Create Belonging

Volunteer or event invitation

MONTH 3

Deepen Trust

Outcomes + future vision

“

Every communication should answer: “Why am I glad I gave?”

Segment Your Stewardship

One size fits nobody.

NEW DONORS

Build confidence

Welcome • Gratitude • Education

RECURRING DONORS

Reinforce commitment

Celebrate consistency • Cumulative impact

MAJOR DONORS

Build partnership

Executive access • Strategic updates

LAPSED DONORS

Reconnect emotionally

Stories • Relevance • No guilt



Personalization isn't about knowing everything. It's about remembering what matters.

The 70-20-10 Rule

Stop asking. Start adding value.

70%

VALUE

Stories • Updates • Education • Gratitude

20%

ENGAGEMENT

Events • Volunteers • Surveys • Experiences

10%

FUNDRAISING

Ask after value and engagement are established

“

People don't mind being asked to give. They mind being treated like ATMs.

Measure Relationships

Revenue tells you what happened. Relationships tell you what is likely to happen next.



RETENTION

First-year retention rate



CONVERSION

Second-gift conversion



RECURRING

Monthly recurring growth



VALUE

Donor lifetime value



ENGAGEMENT

Email • Events • Volunteer activity



ADVOCACY

Referrals • Sharing • Peer fundraising



You can't improve relationships you never measure.

Technology Is Not the Strategy

But it should support it.

Technology should remove manual work so your team can spend more time building relationships.

Remember donor preferences

Automate stewardship

Trigger personalized journeys

Track engagement

Surface at-risk donors

Recommend next-best actions

Measure relationship health

“

AI should never replace human connection. It should make it easier.

The Five Commitments of High-Retention Organizations

1

Lead With Gratitude

2

Communicate With Purpose

3

Report Impact

4

Build Community

5

Measure Relationships

“

Donor retention is built by hundreds of intentional moments.

The Donor Success Scorecard™

Rate each category from 1 (needs improvement) to 5 (best-in-class).

Donor Welcome Experience

1

2

3

4

5

Thank-You Process

1

2

3

4

5

First 90-Day Journey

1

2

3

4

5

Communication Strategy

1

2

3

4

5

Storytelling & Impact

1

2

3

4

5

Personalization

1

2

3

4

5

Donor Segmentation

1

2

3

4

5

Engagement Opportunities

1

2

3

4

5

Retention Reporting

1

2

3

4

5

Technology & Automation

1

2

3

4

5

45-50

WORLD-CLASS

35-44

STRONG

25-34

OPPORTUNITY

<25

RETHINK

Your 90-Day Action Plan

Reading creates awareness. Applying creates change.

WEEK 1

Review the donor journey

Experience it as a first-time donor.

WEEK 2

Map communications

Find gaps and remove unnecessary asks.

MONTH 1

Interview five donors

Ask why they gave and what would improve.

MONTH 2

Build a retention dashboard

Measure relationship health.

MONTH 3

Implement one improvement

Do it consistently and measure it.

“

Transformation happens through consistent improvement.

Intelligent Donor Success™

Donor Success helps nonprofits strengthen relationships, increase retention, and build sustainable growth.

STRENGTHEN

**Intentional stewardship
journeys**

RETAIN

**Surface risk and recommend
next steps**

PERFORM

**Turn donor insights into
measurable growth**

EMPOWER

**Reduce manual work with
automation and AI**

Measure donor health • Automate stewardship • Track engagement

Build journeys • Surface risk • Increase lifetime value



**DONOR
SUCCESS**

INTELLIGENT DONOR SUCCESS™

FINAL THOUGHTS

Stop Chasing Donors. Start Building Relationships.

The organizations shaping the future of philanthropy will not simply become better fundraisers. They will become better relationship builders.

Every thank-you note. Every phone call. Every impact story. Every invitation. Every relationship.

Those moments compound into a community of people who do not simply give - they believe, advocate, invite others, and become champions for the mission.

READY TO BUILD WORLD-CLASS DONOR RELATIONSHIPS?

DonorSuccess.com

Because every donor deserves an exceptional experience.