

# Three Steps to Bequest Development Heaven

## Proven Activities for Developing and Increasing Bequests to your Organisation

There are three key bequest development activities. These actions will help your bequest strategy take effective AIM:

- Activate
- Involve
- Maintain

### Activate

Central to the success of a bequest program is to activate a relationship with the donor. This is only effectively achieved by face-to-face visiting and soliciting a bequest. It is, by nature, a slow process that may require more than one visit before a direct “ask” can be made, but not necessarily. Bequest development is an individual activity - requiring database segments of one.

This visiting doesn't have to be expensive. It doesn't just require lots of full-time staff drinking cups of tea with old ladies. With proper training, volunteers could be empowered to visit bequest prospects. However, it would be essential to effectively train these volunteers.

Positive by-products of visiting can be upgrading donors, maintaining annual gifts and reactivating lapsed donors. The bequest staff or volunteers can contribute to present cash flow income as well as building the future.

In preparing your bequest strategy, you have conducted considerable research. This has provided a wealth of background detail about bequest prospects. Utilising this information, bequest staff can devote their limited time to strategically visiting the highest-level clients. This helps make best use of the time available.

Seeking “asset rich” existing donors, members or contacts from the database will provide ‘warm leads’ for the bequest staff. These people are already bonded to your organisation and devoted to the cause. In some instances, they may have already made a bequest. They simply need to be nurtured to be ready to notify you of that bequest.

The aim of each visit is to inform and educate the client and to move that client one step upward along a “bequest pyramid” towards becoming a confirmed bequestor.

Examine the data from previous bequests made. The vast majority of bequests will come from women. This is partly because women live longer. However, it is likely that many of the larger bequests will have come from single women. This identifies a market segment that staff need to target: segment all the single women (or likely single women). That is all those marked “Miss” or “Ms”. These people need to be visited for further nurture.

When preparing for second or third visits, knowing the parental status of a prospect is also vital. Mostly, those marked “Miss” will also be childless (however, not always). In some instances, “Misses” will be firmly ensconced in the wider family and may not be willing to bequest to an organisation. So each person needs to be approached with sensitivity and care. Childless couples are another segment for strategic visiting. They often select their favourite charities during their lifetime, to be recipients of their estate.

Whichever segment of the database a person being visited is from, staff should read the researched results and notes for each prospect just before the visit. Knowing the prospect is essential preparation for a visit.

Bequest prospects might also be activated through advertising programs, telephone campaigns of existing supporters and possibly even by mail. However, the principle remains that the higher the level of the gift, the higher the level of personal attention.



## Involve

This is actually a nurturing process. You need to involve yourself with the prospect and engage them with your organisation. Keeping an up-to-date diary and customer relationship management system is a simple way to maintain nurture of bequest clients and prospects. Input the researched data on contacts into your database and use a calendar system to automatically set reminders for special days for those clients. Acknowledging events such as birthdays, anniversaries, or organisation- connected occasions help remind the client that staff are thinking of them. It also maintains the “top of mind” process and builds your bonds and connections.

If a staff person notices a newspaper article referring to a bequest client or contact, send him or her a copy with a note. The prospect undoubtedly knows they were in the paper, but it’s nice that you noticed and beneficial to your organisation that you let the client know.

## Maintain

Gathering leads is only the first step. These people need to be followed up: Firstly with continued research. Secondly, followed up with personal visits, nurture and ultimately bequest solicitation.

Continue to follow-up prospects and clients on a consistent and regular basis. The process can take more than one visit and there may be objections expressed along the way. You will need to prepare methods for overcoming these objections.

Contacting those donors or contacts that request bequest information is basic customer relationship management. These people are not only the warmest prospects, but they have actively expressed an interest in making a bequest. It would be almost unforgivable to now ignore these people.

Follow-up includes calling back people who indicate an intention to include a bequest. Many people say they want to make a bequest, but actually don’t get around to it. With gentle follow-up, clients can be motivated to activate their intention.

Deliver the receipts of known bequest clients or prospects as a reason or excuse to maintain contact. Those people on the lower levels of the ‘bequest pyramid’ can be moved higher up the pyramid, when you continue with consistent follow-up.

Staff should follow-up any complaints or objections. People have taken the time to provide that feedback. Your organisation needs to respect those people. However, many complaints and objections may be from a lack of information or from misinformation. Following-up these people cannot only lead to a better understanding; it can also result in reactivating a lapsed donor or turning an objection into a bequest.

A well planned and implemented bequest program, with the right staff knowing the best techniques and methods will produce a successful and financially rewarding result. A.I.M. to implement a bequest strategy that works.