The Seven Faces of Philanthropy: tailoring donor communications to donor type

Based on and adapted from the book by Russ Alan Prince and Karen Maru File

And brought to you by the GIFT Center Proposal Writing Team
Why tailor your communications?

- We often take one piece of writing—usually a case for support—and use it as a way to communicate with *multiple* donors about a certain project or organization.

- The language used in the case may be generic, but most likely it contains specific appeals toward a specific sets of donors—intended or not. For example, if the piece is for alumna, the piece might, through language, appeal to the audience's shared school spirit.

- This is often helpful, since it saves us time by catering to multiple individuals with one document.

- However, it can also have an adverse effect, since certain donors might not respond favorably to certain appeals in the document.

- A basic example: If a generic document heavily emphasizes the importance and significance of a naming opportunity, and if that document is used to attempt to solicit a donor who wants to remain unnamed, the potential donor, while probably not offended, will not be as persuaded as he or she *could have been.*
When we engage socially with another person, we intuitively and continuously interpret personality, mood, motivations for giving, etc. In other words: we tailor our speech and responses accordingly, *in the moment*.

Our writing, then, will be most effective when it also caters as closely as possible to donor personality and giving motivation.
This is harder because it must be done beforehand.

Speech is fluid, writing is static. Speech can adapt, writing cannot.
Therefore, if you are about to use a generic piece of writing to make a specific ask to an individual, and if you have time and the ability to edit the document, it would be wise to glance through and make edits based on the projected donor-type—or to merely make sure things feel right for the particular donor.

This is hard, probably tedious work, but is well worth it if you have time. The more personalized the written communication, the more likely it will be in concert with what you say, and the more likely it will succeed.
The Seven Faces of Philanthropy

- People are complex beings, and always changing—this makes it difficult to cater our written materials to specific donors, because it requires us to classify and access this complexity.

- We can, however, make good guesses about who people are and what they want. Russ Alan Prince and Karen Maru File, through their research, segmented donors into seven classifiable types in their book *The Seven Faces of Philanthropy*. They are as follows:
• The Communitarian
• The Devout
• The Investor
• The Socialite
• The Altruist
• The Repayer
• The Dynast

It’s OK if you don’t yet know what these mean. The idea is that any given donor *probably* falls under one of these categories, giving you key information on the most effective techniques to use when communicating through writing and speech.
• Before we proceed, take a second to admire this picture of a human brain.

• Brains are extremely complex: so while these categories will help us in developing communications, they are by no means end-all-be-all answers to who our donors are.

• This is just important to remember, I think, before we begin turning our donors into structured ideas, and not people.
The Communitarian

• “Communitarians, the largest [donor] segment (26.3%), give because it makes good sense to do so. Communitarians are typically local business owners who find that service on boards and committees of local nonprofits can be good for business because of the relationships that often develop in such settings. The other reason Communitarians believe active philanthropy makes good sense is that they help their own communities prosper by supporting local charities.”
Communitarian Dos and Don’ts

• DO:
  – Give public acknowledgement and treat the reader as a community leader.
  – Give individualized attention.
  – Discuss how the project will positively affect the local community.
  – Logically prove how and why you will be effective in your project.
  – Focus on social and business benefits of giving for the Communitarian (even if it’s brief).

• DON’T:
  – Neglect the personal benefits of the gift for the donor (Communitarians see giving as a win-win)
  – Ignore the details of how you will succeed and track your success—a Communitarian wants to know.
  – Focus on the greater world—the Communitarian is typically deeply concerned with the local community.
  – Exclude the Communitarian from personal investment in the cause—they will likely want more involvement than merely giving.
The Devout

• “The Devout make up the second largest group (20.9%) of major donors. The Devout are motivated to support non-profits for religious reasons; they say they believe that it is God’s will for them to help others or that the moral teaching of their religion charges them to support charities. As a result, they channel almost all their giving (95.8%) to religious institutions and associated organizations. The Devout are mostly male, owners of businesses, and college educated.”
Devout Dos and Don’ts

• **DO:**
  – Focus on the moral implications of the gift
  – Evoke positive images that reinforce their religious rationale for philanthropy. The Devout should feel that you respect their religious motivations for giving.
  – Emphasize that you have their best interest and intentions at heart.

• **DON’T:**
  – Focus on name recognition. The Devout tend to consider their giving a selfless act, and therefore, will expect nothing in return.
  – Put a high focus on technical information or work too hard to *prove* the technical reasons for why the program will succeed—the Devout are least likely of all groups to evaluate a nonprofit before giving.
  – Emphasize a commitment or greater inclusion outside the gift. The Devout are not likely to want an active role beyond the gift itself.
The Investor

“Investors are donors who give with one eye on the cause of the nonprofit and one eye on personal tax and estate consequences. About 15.3 percent of major donors are Investors. A typical Investor is a well educated male head of household who provides for his family through the ownership of a business. Business owning investors seek to prepare for their family’s future security through the smooth transfer of the business assets and farsighted planning…[they] are the segment most likely to support umbrella nonprofits such as community foundations.”
Investor Dos and Don’ts

**DO:**
- Be meticulous about *how exactly* you will use the money: Investors give like they invest, and want to feel like their money is being used wisely—they tend to be methodical.
- Emphasize logic and write in business-like, or formal, language.
- Subtly or out-rightly indicate why the gift makes good business sense. Investors typically appreciate when a nonprofit sympathizes with this motivation for giving.
- Give the Investor private and public attention, and emphasize this in the writing.

**DON’T:**
- Don’t associate yourself with the government: Investors typically give to avoid the government taking the money as taxes, money, as they see it, that would be spent unwisely.
- Over emphasize the moral or emotional imperative of the gift: Investors do not give because they feel morally compelled to do so, and so will likely be unmoved by overly emotional appeals.
The Socialite

• Extroverted, gregarious Socialites desire to help through being active in charity work, and they rely on their close friends and family to assist them in being effective. Socialites find social functions benefiting nonprofits to be an especially appealing way to help make a better world and have a good time doing it. They make up 10.8% of major donors…[they are] particularly women who have college degrees…[and] tend to support nonprofits which offer more opportunities for socializing, such as the arts and education, as well as religious nonprofits.”
Socialite Dos and Don’ts

• DO:
  – Emphasize other givers and what their priorities are—being apart of a group with a shared cause is important to a Socialite.
  – Be specific about your track record and its reputation for positive results. While Socialites do care about the social benefits of giving, they also care deeply about impact.
  – Mention and highlight events and gatherings related to the project or cause.
  – Use emotional appeals. Socialites tend to believe that giving is a part of their personality, and that they just happen to have money.

• DON’T:
  – Ignore the Socialites need for individual attention—this means reflecting back the reasons for giving. You should align your visions.
  – Meticulously describe the uses of the funds: Socialites tend to focus on selecting the particular nonprofit and the fund-raising. The use of the gift is less important. Focus on why this organization and project?, rather than here’s what we’ll do with your gift.
  – Treat the socialite in a vacuum. The socialite has deep connections and likely respects and follows the giving and advice of others. The socialite should be treated as a hero among other heros that “support each other” and “serve the community.”
The Altruist

• “Altruists embody the popular perception of the selfless donor—the donor who gives out of the philanthropic impulses of generosity and empathy to worthwhile causes and who modestly ‘wishes to remain anonymous.’ This conception is not far from the truth, except that a scant 9% of all major donors fit this description.”
Altruist Dos and Don’ts

• DO:
  – Use emotional language and focus on the moral imperative of the gift. Altruists believe giving is a moral imperative, and will respond to emotional language.
  – Emphasize the character of the project and organization, not the extensive track record (50% of altruists do not extensively research nonprofits before giving).
  – Acknowledge and applaud the motivation to give, but not the ego behind it.
  – Use personal, less-formal language.
  – Focus on self-actualization, self fulfillment, and a sense of purpose: align your purpose with the Altruist's.

• DON’T:
  – Focus on name recognition: altruists don’t give for this reason, and may even resent this gesture.
  – Overly focus on the logical or technical aspects of your project or organization—this is not a primary concern of the altruist.
  – Emphasize the importance of the gift. Altruists believe the cause is much more important than the gift.
The Repayer

• Repayers, who are 10.2 percent of major donors, tend to have been constituents first and donors second. A typical Repayer has personally benefited from some institution, often a school or hospital, and now supports that institution out of a feeling of obligation or gratitude. Repayers concentrate their philanthropy on medical charities and education institutions. Repayers are male by a 2-to-1 ratio, are predominantly business owners (76.2%), and are college educated (90.8%).
Repayer Dos and Don’ts

• **DO:**
  – Make empathetic connections to a specific experience that caused the donor to have gratitude for the project, if you know it. (Example: If a donor tends to give to the University because he received a fellowship during his studies that allowed him to make the money he has made—you could mention the fellowship).
  – Use emotional appeals and language. Repayers give because they care deeply about the institutions and programs that have affected their lives.
  – Emphasize the duty of giving—Repayers tend to believe that the wealthy have a responsibility to give.
  – Show that you understand and respect the Repayer’s motives for giving. Know those motives well.

• **DON’T:**
  – Ignore technical information about how the program will succeed and create results. Repayers are invested in the outcome of their giving because they want to ensure that others benefit *like they did*—this is unlike investors, who scrupulously inspect nonprofits to merely ensure their money is well spent.
  – Focus on naming opportunities: while Repayers want to be valued and kept informed, they do not want the focus to come off *the issue* or those benefited.
The Dynast

• “The philanthropic motivation of Dynasts stems from their early childhood socialization. Giving is something their family always stood for, and they believe it is expected of them to support nonprofits. Although Dynasts have been significant figures in philanthropy for some time, they now comprise 8.3% of major donors. Inherited wealth is concentrated in the Dynast segment; 44.1% say their source of wealth was an inheritance. For the remainder, the source of wealth for philanthropic giving is a family business inherited along with a family tradition of charitable support. Nearly all dynasts are college educated (93.7%), and there are as many women as men in this segment.”
Dynast Dos and Don’ts

• **DO:**
  – Emphasize and respect the Dynast’s tradition of giving: Dynasts give because it “is part of their self-concept,” and probably always has been. (note: younger dynasts are more likely to break from long traditions of family giving to particular nonprofits, but they *do still give.*)
  – Emphasize the technical details of how you will achieve your goals: Dynasts tend to carefully evaluate nonprofits before giving. Since giving is a tradition to a Dynast, he or she is most likely well-versed in nonprofits and their organization/effectiveness.

• **DON’T:**
  – Focus on the fact that they should give—Dynasts are already self-motivated givers, so better to strictly focus on *why give to you.* For a Dynast, your cause is one of many options, so being aware that you have competition is key—and understanding that the Dynast most likely has already established relationships with other nonprofits, is also key.
  – Expect your emotional appeals to work easily: it’s very likely that the Dynast has less of an already established connection to your cause or project. This is because the Dynast gives to many causes, and is less likely to *care deeply about yours already.*
  – Focus on what the gift will do for the Dynast: Dynasts expect nonprofits to stay focused on the mission instead of catering to major donors.
A PROBLEM

Like I said before: people are complex, and often don’t fit perfectly into boxes. This presents us with a couple problems as we approach potential donors, both in person and in writing:

1) We diagnose a donor type based on our prior research and social interaction. Sometimes as relationships develop and more knowledge is acquired, donors appear to be in *multiple categories*. This makes it almost impossible to even make an initial diagnosis of a stable donor “type.”

2) It may cause us to diagnose a prospective donor as a type, and then, through this treatment in writing, miss crucial information or techniques that might have been fruitful.
What do we do about this problem?

Make smart decisions when you craft your communications: use the seven faces as a general guideline, and then use your gut for the rest. For example: let’s say you’re writing a letter a donor you know really well—his name is Gary Collins. Gary has all the traits of an investor: he is meticulous; he gives for mostly business reasons, etc. Traditionally you would de-emphasize emotional appeals in favor of more formal and business-like tactics. But let’s also say that you have reason to believe Gary really cares about a specific issue related to your project on an emotional level. That he usually doesn’t, but for this cause he does. What now? Do you treat Gary as an investor and ignore relating to him on an emotional level strictly because of his “type”? 
Answer: no you do not. You treat him mostly as an investor and if your gut tells you that he will respond to a particular emotional appeal, use it.
In other words: be strategic by understanding your potential donor type. And then ADAPT your communications to the surely complex individual.
The Major Takeaway

If you have a generic document that strictly emphasizes the emotional appeals of a project or cause, and you then take that document to a whole group of Investors in an attempt to solicit gifts without thinking about it beforehand—you will have a statistically smaller chance of success, even if most of the work is done verbally.

So tailoring our written documents as closely as possible to our speech will create asks that are statistically more likely to succeed.
Thank you! 😊

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