

♥ **building** your donor base



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**this** section contains the following guides:



**how** to build a base of small but regular donors

**how** to keep your donors engaged

**how** to look after donors and supporters

**how** to set up an end of financial year appeal

Click on the guide and follow the links throughout the text for more information. Links to related guides and websites are highlighted in this section in **bold pink**.

## how to build a base of small but regular donors



Building a community of donors who donate small amounts can provide an ongoing income stream.

Most creative practitioners and organisations are surrounded by a community of supporters – people who engage with your work and recognise its importance. It's easy to underestimate the size of these communities and forget that small donations can add up to substantial financial support. Follow these steps to put a regular giving program in place and build a base of small but regular donors.

### Step one: Populate your database

Your database of supporters is your primary tool for communicating with potential donors. If you don't have one, start to populate one with names, contact details and basic demographic data. Send an introductory email asking them to opt-in to future communications.

### Step two: Talk to your social media followers

When you add up your followers on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, your community of potential donors may be bigger than you thought. When you communicate with your database, make sure you also talk to your social channels.

### Step three: Check you have **Deductible Gift Recipient** status

This allows you to offer a tax deduction for donations. It's important to have this in place before you approach potential donors.

### Step four: Plan your campaigns

Think of two or three events during the year where you can ask supporters for donations. Structure campaigns around those events and give people the opportunity to support specific projects. Include an end-of-financial-year appeal in your calendar of campaigns.

### Step five: Make it easy to donate

Tell your supporters what a donation of \$25, \$50 or \$100 will fund. Use a secure online payment system to capture your donors' details. Invite them to opt-in to future communications. A web developer can set this up for you, or use an existing platform such as [givenow.com.au](http://givenow.com.au).

### Step six: Say 'thank you'

Never miss an opportunity to thank your supporters. Try different ways of doing this, from a personally written note to public acknowledgement of their support.

### Step seven: Review the data

Collect and review the data after each campaign. Look for people who have given larger amounts: they have strong interest in your work and want to help. When you say 'thank you' take the opportunity to ask what's motivating them.



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### Step eight: Set up a regular giving program

Once you have a base of donors, give them the opportunity to support you on a monthly basis. Explain how a regular donation helps your organisation. Set up a direct debit facility on your website, or use a third-party platform.

### Step nine: Stay in touch

As you grow your community of regular supporters, keep them up-to-date with your work. Email newsletters allow you to track readership. Short videos posted on social media can be effective. Hard copy mail can cut through overloaded inboxes. Be concise and emphasise the work donors are supporting.

### Step ten: Get to know your regular givers

Build relationships and get to know your supporters and their interests. The more personal a connection you can forge, the more durable the relationship.

### 🇺🇸 A NSW EXAMPLE: SYDNEY STORY FACTORY.

Jayne Wasmuth, Development Manager at Sydney Story Factory, talks about the importance of maintaining a regular donor program:

“ Our regular givers are some of our most treasured supporters. They’re people who love what we do and love being part of making it happen. We make every effort to ensure that we stay connected and that every one of them understands how much we value their contribution. In turn, knowing who our most committed supporters are enables us to reach out to others in our wider community to encourage them to become regular givers as well. ”

### FURTHER READING

- Getting Ready to Receive Donations** – Online guide by Our Community
- Bangarra Dance Theatre on appealing to an existing donor base** – Success story from Creative Partnerships Australia
- How to work the room and make your donors feel special** – Blog post by Sharpen CIC
- Case Study: 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art**



## how to keep your donors engaged



Communicating with your donors in a consistent and engaging way can lead to repeat contributions. Follow these steps to implement an effective engagement plan.

People who have donated once are likely to give again if you build a relationship that goes beyond their financial contribution. Find the right balance between staying in touch with your donors and bombarding them with too much information.

### **Step one: Set a retention rate target**

Your **donor retention rate** is the percentage of donors who have given to you more than once. Aim for a higher retention rate each year.

### **Step two: Write an engagement plan for the next 12 months**

An engagement plan is a calendar showing how you plan to communicate with your donors over the next year and when. This doesn't have to be a long document: see the example below. Plan your communications around big events – not just projects, opening nights and exhibitions but also Christmas, end of financial year and other key dates for giving.

### **Step three: Mix up your media**

Use a mix of media platforms and formats to reach your audience. From online newsletters and blogs to Facebook and Instagram, keep track of engagement statistics to see what's resonating.

### **Step four: Mix up your content**

Vary the tone of your communications. Humour is a great way to capture attention. Take your audience behind-the-scenes with photos and videos. Show them the big moments. Don't be afraid to let your personality shine through: it's important for donors to feel they know you.

### **Step five: Communicate regularly**

It can seem like there's a never-ending stream of content to make. Pace yourself. Stick to your engagement plan. Stockpile content to use when are too busy to make something new.

### **Step six: Meet face-to-face**

Your engagement plan should include opportunities for your supporters to meet you face-to-face. Events are a good place to say 'hello' and 'thank you'. For your regular donors, plan meetings that aren't so crowded or rushed. Take them for coffee, hand deliver a thank you gift or invite them into your studio.

### **Step seven: Acknowledge them at every opportunity**

If you're asked to speak at an event, acknowledge the support of your donor base. Talk about the difference they make and become practiced at telling that story. For your major donors, consider thank you plaques or an online equivalent.



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### Step eight: Leave on good terms

If one of your supporters stops donating, don't be afraid to (respectfully) ask what's changed. You may be able to respond and adjust your engagement plan accordingly. Always say 'thanks' to a departing donor and leave on good terms.

### Step nine: Be responsive

If your donor base loved one of your recent video messages, produce more like that. If one of your major donors wants to talk about your new project, get back to them promptly. Responsiveness is a clear signal of the strength of your relationship and must be part of your engagement plan.

### Step ten: Review and repeat

Go back to your data to see if you increased your donor retention rate year-on-year. Adjust your engagement plan and aim for a higher retention rate next year.

### ♥ TIP.

an engagement plan is a calendar showing how you plan to communicate with your donors over the next year and when.

## What does an engagement plan look like?

It's a calendar showing how you plan to communicate with donors throughout the year. It can be as simple as a table showing your audience, engagement methods and timing. Use the sample below to build your own and extend for a full year.

AUDIENCE	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY
Followers, not donors	Instagram competition	E-newsletter	Video message	Promotion of new show	End of Fin Year video message
One-time donors	Instagram competition		Video message	Personal invitation to new show	End of Fin Year video message
Regular donors			Drinks event, studio tour	VIP invite to post show event	Coffee catch ups re: new work

## FURTHER READING

**5 Approaches to Keep Your Donors Engaged** – GuideStar Blog by The Big Duck

**First Day Podcast** – Bite size advice on fundraising strategies from The Fund Raising School

## how to look after donors and supporters



Building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with donors and supporters takes time, effort and a genuine interest in the people who donate.

After your donors and supporters make a donation, try to find out what motivates them and why they support your work. Follow these steps to build long-lasting relationships with them.

### **Step one: Keep a record of every donation**

Keep track of who has supported you and when. Make note of dates, amounts, and create prompts that will remind you to get in touch at the same time next year. This information helps you know when they're likely to give and at what level.

### **Step two: Tell them how the project is progressing**

Keep donors or supporters up-to-date with the progress of the project they supported. Be inventive: video messages from the creatives involved in your organisation can be very effective. Sending a personal 'thank you' note in the mail may seem old fashioned but is often appreciated.

### **Step three: Take a genuine interest**

Get to know your most generous donors and supporters. Ask them how they came into contact with your work. What are their interests? What else do they support?' The more you know, the better you can build rapport.

### **Step four: Find out what they like about your work**

Ask for feedback. What brought them to your theatre/gallery/screening in the first place? What inspires or excites them about your work? What motivates them to give? This feedback can help you identify creative projects they may like to support in future.

### **Step five: Treat your supporters like VIPs**

Invite them to VIP events, provide special access and opportunities, send a personally written note or tickets to opening night.

### **Step six: Acknowledge their support**

Some donors will welcome public acknowledgement. Others prefer to keep a lower profile. Make sure you thank your supporters in the way they'll positively respond to.

### **Step seven: Tap into their skills, contacts and resources**

Your donors and supporters have more to offer than funds. They often have skills, contacts and/or resources which may be of use. They may be able to make useful introductions or volunteer at your next event. Think of other ways you can ask for their support.



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### Step eight: Talk about the impact of your work

Show your supporters the difference their contribution has made. Make sure you emphasise what *wouldn't* have happened without their help.

### Step nine: Be responsive

When your supporters get in touch – even if it's been some time since they made a contribution – get back to them quickly. Give them priority. Their gift may be one of only a few they make.

### Step ten: Introduce them to the creatives

It's a tried and true strategy: introducing supporters to artists and key creatives gives them an insight into the creative process and makes them feel connected to your work.

### 🇺🇸 A NSW EXAMPLE: THE SONG COMPANY.

Karen Baker, former GM of The Song Company and now Director of Development (Major Gifts) at University of Sydney says:

“ Stewardship is extremely important. As soon as a donor has given, the stewardship cycle is hand-in-hand with cultivation. Donors that have a great giving experience are more likely to give again. ”

### FURTHER READING

**Why stewarding your donors should be your new year's resolution** – Blog post by Kim Glenn

**Are you taking care of your donors?** – Checklist from Network for Good  
**10 things that make the millennial arts donor tick** – Blog post by Clare Ainsworth Herschell (Art Gallery of NSW) for Philanthropy Australia

**Case Study: Four Winds**



# how to set up an end of financial year appeal



Setting up a successful end of financial year appeal requires careful planning and execution.

End of financial year is one of the most critical times of the year for motivating your supporters to donate. Follow these steps to set up a successful end of financial year appeal that maximises your potential return.

## Step one: Start planning early

Don't wait until May or June to start working on this major fundraising opportunity. February is a good time to map out your plans and decide what you'll need to do when.

## Step two: Ensure you have Deductible Gift Recipient status

To offer a tax deduction, organisations must be endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient. Check this is set up and compliant with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission's requirements. If you're an individual artist, consider using the Australian Cultural Fund or Documentary Australia Foundation as a way of offering a tax deduction to your donors.

## Step three: Prepare your database and payment systems

Ensure your **database** is up-to-date. Use an online system to collect payments electronically and automatically issue receipts. Set suggested donation levels to make it easy for people to donate.

## Step four: Set a target

Make it ambitious but achievable. Be clear about what that target will enable you to do to enhance your appeal to donors.

## Step five: Set the theme for your campaign

Are you raising money for a new work or to kickstart a new project? Funding an artwork, film or project is more compelling to donors than paying for your ongoing costs (as important as that is). Choose a project or cause to theme your campaign around.

## Step six: Engage those around you

If you're working in an organisation, encourage your staff and board to share your campaign with their own network. If you're an individual artist, activate your social media networks and create content which inspires action.

## Step seven: Create a calendar or media, events and promotions

Draw up a countdown to 30 June and set milestones. Give yourself enough time to create and release content and stage events and promotions.



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### Step eight: Plan for the beginning, middle and end of your campaign

Typical fundraising campaigns assume a U shape: a burst of donations at the beginning, a lull in the middle and a ramp up at the end. Have strategies for each of these stages: make a splash at the beginning, spice up the middle of the campaign with fun content, and make a final motivating push at the end. As you get closer to your target, let people know. If you know of big donations pending, think about timing them to leverage interest.

### Step nine: Celebrate the result

Whether you reach your target or not, let people know when the campaign ends and thank everyone who contributed.

### Step ten: Look at the data

Who has donated higher than average amounts? These people have strong interest in your work so make sure you connect with them. Invite new donors to join your mailing list and social networks.

### ♥ TIP.

**choose** a project or cause to theme your campaign around.

### 🇺🇸 A NSW EXAMPLE: MILK CRATE THEATRE.

Judith Bowtell, CEO of Milk Crate Theatre talks about the experience of running an end of financial year appeal:

“ Launching a funding appeal can seem overwhelming when you are a small organisation without dedicated development staff: get some expert advice, break the project into small manageable tasks, have someone hold you accountable, and do what you can. We ran our first formal fundraising campaign this year, framing it as an experiment and learning experience, rather than having it be perfect from the get go – that way you have space to learn and improve as well as achieve surprising outcomes. ”

### FURTHER READING

**Mounting your end of financial year appeal** – How to guide from The Funding Centre

**3 Simple Steps to a last minute fundraising appeal** – Web article by Blackbaud

**Receiving Tax Deductible Donations An introduction from the ATO, plus links to additional articles with further detail.**

**Case Study: Arts Law Centre of Australia**