

Donor Relations & Stewardship for Philanthropic Partners of Parks

ENGAGING YOUR DONOR BASE CONSISTENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY

Relationships with donors are critically important in supporting the National Park Service (NPS) in a sustainable way. Creating spaces at National Parks that provides the best experience to visitors from around the world is often contingent upon the generous contributions of our donors. With that in mind, there are four primary pillars of stewardship that are important to remember as you manage your donor base: regular communication, asking questions, creative engagement, and making a plan.

Regular Communication

Authentic, regular communication is important when engaging your donors. Just as with any relationship, donors want to feel acknowledged, appreciated, and informed – let them know how their donation has positively impacted the park. That said, different people prefer different methods of communication so take the time to get to know what type of interaction your donors prefer, whether that be a hand-written letter, email, or phone call. It is also important to recognize your donor base in print at least once a year – perhaps in a newsletter or annual report – assuming you have their permission to do so. Personalized touches like sending a note on birthdays, anniversaries celebrating donor loyalty, and other important milestones can also go a long way in garnering future support.

Asking Questions

As donors are your biggest park champions, confer with them often to garner much needed feedback about how your organization is doing and what can be improved. They are individuals who care enough about your park to invest in its success and they may appreciate the opportunity to share their expertise and ideas about its direction. Donor surveys, community roundtables, and town halls provide an easy way for you to collect valuable data about the experience at your park while also recognizing your donor base for being an important player in its success.

Creative Engagement

Just as it is important to ask your donors for feedback, it is also worthwhile to engage them in park experiences directly. Asking donors to participate as docents, volunteers, attend park events, or serve on a committee or Board of Directors is a great way to garner their expertise. Donor influence does not have to be limited just to their financial contribution; get them involved directly in the park experience!

Making a Plan

For organizations with a fairly large donor base, it can be helpful to establish a stewardship calendar and plan at the beginning of each year. This allows your organization to evaluate which donor outreach efforts should be your top priority and ensures that you are connecting with donors regularly and appropriately. Planning for increased levels of engagement based on donors' levels of contribution and involvement with your park can also be helpful in terms of ensuring that your overall stewardship strategy is consistent and in line with the fundraising goals you are trying to accomplish for the year.

For more information on creative ways to improve donor relations, listen to our webinar for great additional tips and strategies.

For ideas about how to best use tools like these to support the work of your organization, contact the Community Partnerships team at NPF directly.