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**THE IDEAL DONOR PROFILE TOOLKIT**

*FOUR STEPS TO BUILD AN IDEAL DONOR PROFILE*

The Ideal Donor Profile is one of the most powerful tools any fundraising team can have. In this short workbook we break down the process so you and your team can build profiles that:

* Simplify your marketing.
* Save your time, effort, costs, and hassle.
* Help you attract, cultivate, and retain donors already pre-disposed to support you.
* Build a Unique Value Proposition as the foundation for prospect identification.
* And teach you the value of building consensus so all members of your team are on the same page.

There are four and a half steps to building an Ideal Donor Profile:

Step 1: Your Unique Value Proposition  
Step 2: Donor’s Giving Motivations  
Step 3: The Exchange of Value  
Step 4: The Factual Profile  
Step 4.5: Pulling it All Together

STEP ONE: YOUR UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

*What Makes Your Nonprofit Compelling to Donors and Other Funders*  
What It’s For:

The Value Proposition describes what you do, why you do it, and why it is worthy of funding. Think of this as your “value added,” a business term describing the ways your nonprofit and its programs “add value” or provide benefits to its constituents.

# How to Do This Exercise:

This exercise is best conducted in a small group (at least five participants). Set up a whiteboard or easel pad with two columns as shown below. Use brainstorming technique to gather opinions from every participant. This exercise resembles the classic SWOT Analysis (Internal **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses; External **O**pportunities and **T**hreats), often used during strategic-planning initiatives. However, the Value Proposition focuses only on your organization’s internal strengths and weaknesses.

Use classic brainstorming techniques:

* All participants must contribute.
* Go around the room (or online conference) to gather one idea per person.
* Keep going around the room in the same sequence until you run out of ideas.
* There is no crosstalk or critique about any addition.

If the group lacks a formal facilitator, one participant must take on that role, as well as participating in the exercise. The facilitator’s role includes the following:

* Keep all participants engaged but allow participants to pass if they have run out of ideas.
* Intervene if participants stray from the exercise with cross talk.
* Keep an eye on the clock. The exercise should not last longer than a given period, from 15 to 30 minutes is typical.

## **1: Internal Strengths and Weaknesses**

Fill out this template to the best of your ability. Try to add as many ideas as possible; ideally you should end up with at least 15 or 20 ideas or more in the Strengths column. Remember, a Strength can be a Weakness and vice versa. Keep working until you have no less than 12-15 items in the Strengths column.

Once you have gathered all possible ideas in both columns, review the Strengths column to find duplicates. This is the first step in prioritizing your list of characteristics. Take as much room as you need.

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| **INTERNAL STRENGTHS** | **INTERNAL WEAKNESSES** |
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**2: Prioritize by Persuasiveness to Donor**From here on out, IGNORE the weaknesses. Copy all items in the Internal Strengths column and place them below. Working as a group, mark each item **H** for “Highly Persuasive to Donors,” **M** for “Moderately Persuasive” and **L** for “Low Persuasive.” If most people agree on a ranking but one or two do not, continue the conversation until you come to consensus, or until those who disagree say they can live with the majority. If you reach an impasse, try to avoid voting. Perhaps the one who disagrees has a better perspective.

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**3: Final List**Copy all the marked items and place them here. Then **delete** all entries marked “M” or “L.” The only entries left are all marked **H** – **Highly persuasive to donors.**

This final list represents your Unique Value Proposition by showing the **values** you offer to donors and other donors. Expect to modify and refine this list based on your experience, experience you will gain in the next exercise.

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STEP TWO: IDEAL DONOR’S GIVING MOTIVATIONS

# *What Motivates Your Ideal Donor to Give to Nonprofits Like Yours*

This exercise helps you determine the giving motivations of your favorite donors, grant makers and corporate sponsors. When you did the exercise “Your Value Proposition,” you produced the “value-added” characteristics of your organization, the things you think are most important to donors.

This exercise helps you figure out what donors and other donors are looking for when they want to support a nonprofit. We call these characteristics the donor’s “value sought.” Value-Added and Value-Sought characteristics combine into the Exchange of Value, the third exercise in this set.

**Do NOT use these interviews to ask for money. Use them to help you understand what makes your Ideal Donors tick.**

These interviews use open-ended questions, meaning questions that cannot be answered yes or no. Do NOT send these questions to anyone by email. Find a way to have a live conversation by Zoom, phone, or in person. We prefer Zoom and phone because it’s less time-consuming and you can record the calls (with their permission, of course).

One purpose of these interviews is to establish rapport with the interviewee, to indicate you are seeking their insights and NOT their money. In our experience, our clients’ fundraising teams, volunteers, and board members appreciate questions like these and enjoy responding to them.

The questions are suggestions. Working in a group, select four or five that work for you, or create others that fit the specifics of your organization. Use the same questions in the same sequence for every interview.

The highlighted questions are those our clients have found most helpful. Feel free to put the questions in your own words.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT DONOR’S MOTIVATIONS:**

* Please share your charitable philosophy with me. What motivates you to donate your money and time to any charity? What types of charities are you most likely to support?
* How do you go about deciding which charity or cause interests you?
* What life experiences have led you to becoming the person/philanthropist you are today?
* When you think about giving money to charity, what is most likely to motivate you to do so? Is it the mission, the programs, the population served or something else?
* What motivates you in terms of your personal interests? For example, is it important to you to become known for your philanthropy, to get to know other like-minded people, to improve your social status?
* If our organization were to succeed in its mission beyond your wildest dreams, what do you think would happen? Why would that be important to you?
* Let’s think about the reverse situation. Let’s say for some reason our organization was not able to succeed at all, and we had to close our doors. What do you think might happen then? Why would that be noteworthy or troubling or important to you?
* You mentioned these ideas/things/concepts as being important to you (list the main points the interviewee has mentioned). Can you help me put them in your order of priority? If not, do you think they are all equal importance?
* How does the economy effect your philanthropic decisions?

***Profiling questions:***

* What other organizations do you support?
* What are your top 3 charities? Why do you like to support them?
* In general, when you support an organization, how do you like to be involved with them? What kinds of support or relationships are most satisfying or appropriate for you? Are you more interested in a hands-off relationship, a moderately close relationship? If board service appeals to you, why is that important? What other forms of recognition or volunteering are important to you?

**PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

1. Choose interview candidates from donors or board members you already feel comfortable with, people who are easy to reach and want to help you succeed.
2. Select the questions you plan to ask, then use the same questions in the same order, for every person you interview.
3. KEEP EXPLICIT NOTES USING THE INTERVIEWEE’S EXACT WORDS. Even better, record the conversation if possible. Remember to ask permission. (My excuse is I’m bad at taking notes, so I ask permission to record the conversation.) You will build future messaging and web content with language used by your current advocates.
4. Send a request for a 30-minute meeting by email, text, WhatsApp, or their preferred method. Since your candidates are already people who are involved with your organization, you don’t want to annoy them. It’s easier for them to say no to an email than it is to a phone call. Use language something like this in your email or text:

“Dear (first name), Can you do me a favor? We are working on our marketing strategy, and I could really use your advice. Can you spare me about half an hour of your time? I would like to know what motivated you to support us.

I promise this is not a request for a donation! If it’s OK with you, please feel free to schedule the meeting on my calendar.

Yours,   
[your name]”

Try to make this email sound as much like yourself as possible. Make sure you include that link to your electronic calendar.

1. When you have been talking to your interviewee for about 20 minutes, interrupt to say, “I just want to give us a time check. We have spoken for about 20 of the 30 minutes I promised you.” By doing so, you show your respect for the interviewee’s time. However, if the interviewee wants to extend the time, let them do so. Often these 30-minute interviews turn into 90-minute, deep conversations, which is great!
2. Choose the key concepts, themes, words, or phrases that strike you as matching your UVP, and list them separately.
3. Try to conduct ten or more interviews. Keep adding your findings to the list mentioned above. Prioritize these items by combining similar ideas. Finally, reduce the number of items to a manageable few, no more than 10 to 15.

In the next step you will compare the elements of your Unique Value Proposition to the giving motivations expressed during these interviews.

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STEP THREE: THE EXCHANGE OF VALUE

# *How Donor’s Giving Motivations Match Up with the UVP*

***Purpose:*** The Ideal Donor Profile contains two sections: donor’s giving motivations, sometimes referred to as the Donor Persona; and donor’s factual characteristics, such as age, gender, geographic location, wealth profile, and giving history. The donor’s giving motivations interact or connect with your UVP.

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| **YOUR NONPROFIT’S UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION** | **DONOR’S GIVING MOTIVATIONS** |
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**1: Enter the “High” Items from the UVP exercise.** Go back to the first exercise and copy the final list. Past it in the left-hand column above.

**2: Enter your final list of Giving Motivations.** After you have interviewed your current donors or board members, and collated your list of common concepts, place that list in the right-hand column above.

**3: Make the connections.** See how any given item in the left-hand column connects to a given item in the right-hand column. Do this repeatedly until you have selected key ‘connections’ between your Unique Value Proposition, and the Giving Motivations of your favorite donors. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CONNECT EVERY ITEM TO EVERY OTHER ITEM.

For best results, repeat this exercise with at least ten donors. Copy the template as often as you wish.

Working in a group, choose the items that are most likely to represent the link between what you offer and what your donors value. By combining these perspectives, you will learn how to design messages that attract donors most likely to support your mission and programs.

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STEP FOUR: THE FACTUAL PROFILE

# *The “Classic” Factual Considerations including Wealth Profile*

**Purpose:** No nonprofit organization is “right” or “appealing” to all prospective donors everywhere. Therefore, it pays for your organization to add the factual characteristics of your ideal donor. While most Major Gift officers want to know their donors wealth profile, there are other considerations to add.

Here are some typical characteristics in addition to wealth profile:

* **History of Giving.** This is VERY IMPORTANT. If your prospect has never shown any prior interest in your mission or focus, they are less likely to be a great candidate. Rely on your prospect-research services and techniques to identify past giving history.
* **History of Volunteering or Board Service.** Donors who have been active volunteers and served on governing boards can be very valuable. Assess whether this is a useful characteristic to add to your Ideal Donor Profile.
* **Age.** Age is a somewhat tricky characteristic, since the most traditional age cohort, those born before the end of World War II, are now in their 80’s (or deceased). So, you get to choose the age cohort most likely to respond to your appeals, be they Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z or whatever comes next. Younger donors tend to respond differently from older age cohorts. You may want to craft a variety of profiles based on age cohort.
* **Gender.** Another tricky characteristic. It’s most important if your mission is gender-specific or identified; otherwise, gender might be irrelevant.
* **Location.** Is it important that your donors live or work in a specific geographic area?
* **Level of Education.** Ditto.

Working in your group, discuss the relative value of these suggested characteristics, or other elements that are more important in your setting. List all the ideas that make sense. Then, using prioritizing methods like Multivoting, reduce the list to no more than five to seven characteristics.

STEP FOUR 1/2: PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

# *The Final List!*

**Purpose:** The most useful Ideal Donor Profiles are available to Major Gift Officers and others as templates.

**Ways to Format Your Profile:** We recommend crafting some kind of template to document your list of Ideal Donor Profile characteristics. You can set up a table in Word or Excel. Then, compare a current donor or new prospect to your Profile List to see how well they match up.

Do this before you pull a profile from your prospect-research service. If the donor is a poor match to your criteria, perhaps it’s not worth major gift effort. Those donors and prospects are still eligible for annual giving.

When the donor is a good or excellent match, those are the donors a Major Gift Officer wants to cultivate or steward with more energy and intention.