

THE A TO Z GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR DONOR

Everyone wants to be understood.

Taking the time to understand your donor is a great investment of your resources and will pay off big later.

Think about it: the more you know about [what your donors want](#) from you, the easier it is to give it to them. And donors who get what they want are happy donors.

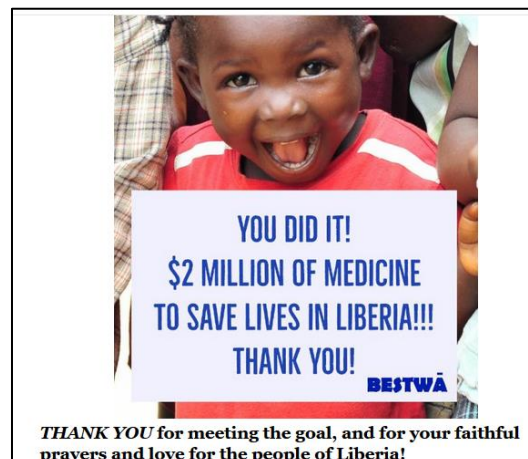
Happy donors give more and stick around longer.

So, here is an **A-to-Z guide through the wants and desires of today's donor.**

Today's donor is



- **Apprehensive.** They've been burned before by charities that asked too often, caring more about the money than the donor. They've heard stories about big, national nonprofits whose CEOs make gigantic salaries and only a small portion of money actually goes to programs. They **want** to trust you, but they don't want to waste their money. Your job is to build trust and show them you'll be a good steward of their donation.
- **Busy.** Your donor won't read long letters, newsletters, or appeals. Keep it short and clear. No vague requests. If they have to work hard to understand what you're saying or asking for, you'll lose them. They'll toss whatever you've sent them without a second thought.
- **Curious.** After their gift, they want to know what impact their donation made. A quick update through the mail or email can give them just that. Here's a shot from an email update after a short campaign from BESTWA:



- **Demanding.** Today’s donor is demanding, but in a good way. They want you to act like an organization that has its ducks in a row, not a rag-tag bunch who is barely holding it together. They want to trust that if they give to you today, you’ll still be around tomorrow. They’re demanding a higher level of professionalism and business acumen from nonprofits than donors of years past.
- **Expectant.** Your donor expects your nonprofit to be well run and fully staffed. They expect you to plan ahead and be smart with your resources. They expect you to be around for the long haul. They expect to be thanked for their donation and appreciated for what they do. Meet those expectations and they’ll stick around for years to come, supporting you all the way.
- **Feeling.** Giving is an emotional act. Today’s donor wants to feel the joy of helping make a difference. They want to feel good about helping you change the world. So much of our day-to-day experience in life is stressful that we are desperate for the times when we get to feel good about something. Do what you need to do to thank your donor and give them that good feeling they crave. Call to personally thank them. Thank them in a video. Get creative – there are lots of ways to fulfill that emotional need your donor has. Check out my [playlist of Donor Thank You videos](#) on YouTube.
- **Generous.** People love to fill a hole. If you can tell donors and prospects what their money will do and what you’re trying to accomplish, people will generously help. For example, if you share that it costs \$35 to sponsor a girl in school and you have 10 girls who need a sponsor, you’ll likely get those girls sponsored pretty quickly. Here’s a great example from [Illuminate India](#) (click the link to go see the full page):

SPONSOR A CHILD

IN THE CAREER PATHWAYS PROGRAM

THE CHILDREN BELOW NEED A SPONSOR!



Age: 13 Grade: 7
Future plans: Nurse



Age: 13 Grade: 7
Future plans: Nurse

WHAT YOUR \$35 PER MONTH COVERS

100% OF YOUR MONTHLY GIFT GOES TO COVER YOUR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CAREER PATHWAYS PROGRAM.

- **Helpful.** Today's donor wants to help, once you show them that you appreciate them and their support. We all love helping organizations we like. Happy donors will connect you with other donors, additional resources, and give you their insights, feedback, and ideas to make your organization even better. Their help will be unleashed once they see that you're open to it and ready to accept it.
- **Interested.** They want to help you succeed in fulfilling your mission and they love regular updates about your work. Be careful what you share though – they want to know about impact and outcomes, not programs and process. Don't share internal language and jargon. Instead, tell them the stories of how they're helping you make a difference.



- **Jaded.** They're tired of the same old thing from the nonprofits they support (and yes, they support more than one). They need fresh, authentic messaging that makes them feel good about supporting you. Message fatigue is real! And you can stand out from the rest of the groups they support by offering them something juicy that they can sink their teeth into! Show them how you're different by being real, keeping your word, and caring about them, not just the money they can give.
- **Kindred.** Your donors care about the work your organization is doing. You may even hear them say "I'd love to do what you do, but I can't because...". They are kindred spirits to you and would love to be beside you, shoulder to shoulder, on the front lines of your organization.

- **Listening.** They want to hear the stories of the lives your nonprofit is changing. They love the 'before-and-after' details that illustrate how you're making a difference. They love the before/after stories you share on Facebook and the videos you post on YouTube. They love the updates you send and they especially love hearing your plans for the future. Want to really set them on fire for your organization? Ask their opinion about your future plans or your current activities.



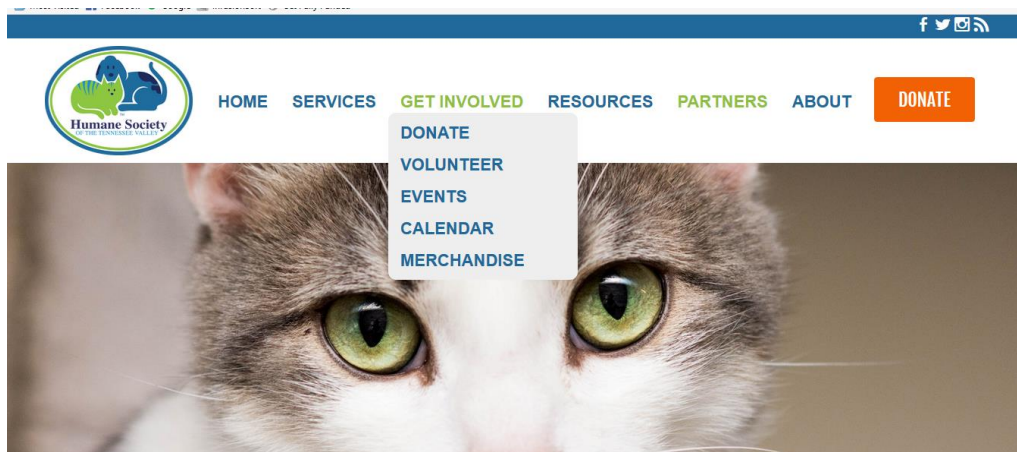
- **Mysterious.** Sometimes your donors will do things that will puzzle you. Just remember, each donor has their own reasons for giving, and those reasons may or may not make sense to you. I once had a donor to a food bank say that her favorite thing about the food bank was that it was so environmentally friendly. By accepting surplus food into their warehouse, they were keeping it out of the landfill. I was floored! It was not an answer I expected, and I learned never to assume that I know why a donor does what she does.
- **No-nonsense.** Today's donor wants communications that are clear and to the point. They don't want a lot of fluff nor do they want tons of backstory. That means you must be a concise writer, get to the point quickly, and give them only the information they need to take the action you want them to take.
- **Opinionated.** Donors definitely have an opinion! And they'd love to share it with you. Obviously, they care about your cause and they're likely to take a stand on your behalf. For example, many

supporters of animal welfare nonprofits advocate against inhumane treatment, voicing their opinion on social media and contacting their governmental representatives. They may support the community becoming no kill or support specific animal welfare legislation even if your nonprofit has nothing to do with those things. If your nonprofit has highly-opinionated donors, you may want to give them a way to express those opinions through polls, surveys, and petitions.

- **Personal.** Today's donor wants to be more than a number in your database. They want to be someone who is helping end hunger or helping cure cancer, not just donor # 15167. That's why it's important to learn as many donor names as possible. Call them by name in your appeals and emails. Invite their feedback and questions and give them the name and contact info of a specific staff person they can contact if they want. The personal you can make their connection with your organization, the more engaged they will feel, and that's always a good thing.
- **Quick.** A first impression is made in a matter of seconds. People form opinions in a few seconds more. Your donor is quick to decide whether they like you and will support you based on how you treat them. They're not likely to tolerate your ignoring them for long periods of time followed by repeated requests for money. Remember that everything you send a donor is either building trust or tearing it down.

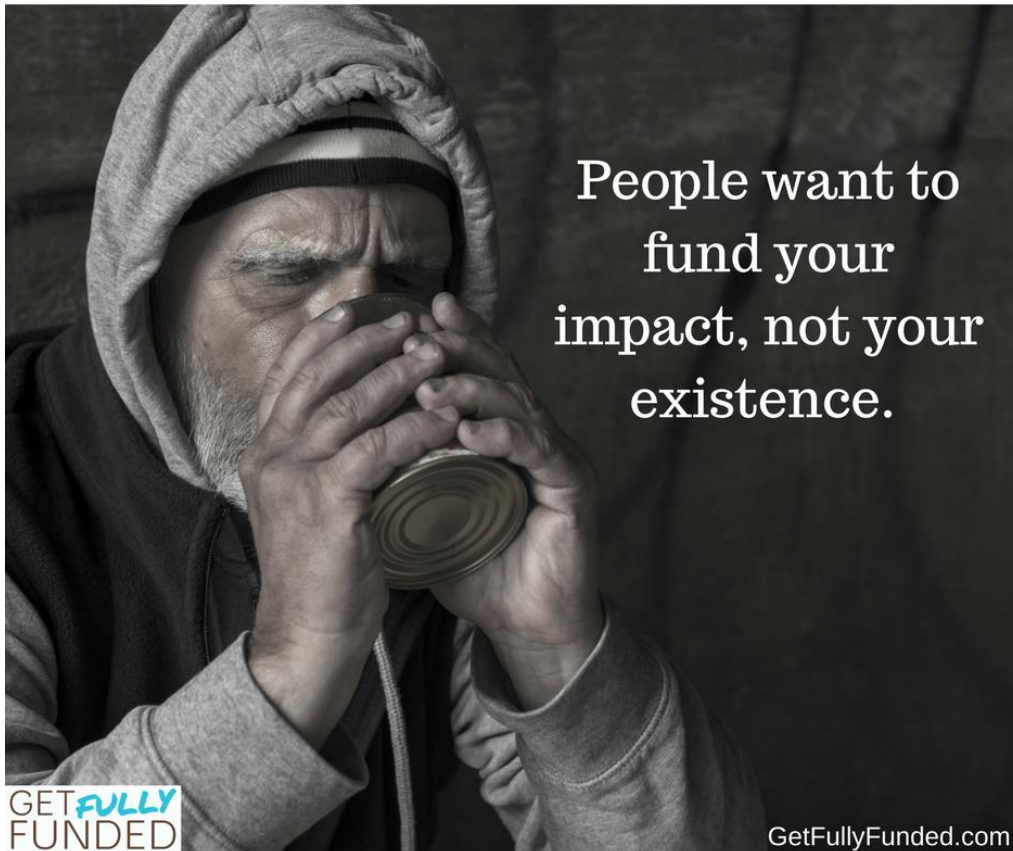


- **Receptive.** Your donor wants to hear from you regularly, but not if you've always got your hand out asking for money. Thank them well (they'll receive that!) then communicate well with them, sending them frequent updates about the work your nonprofit is doing. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that they'll get tired of hearing from you if you send a monthly newsletter. Actually, the opposite is true. Your donors will welcome the news if it's full of stories of lives being changed and articles that make them feel good about giving to you.
- **Skeptical.** Today's donor wants to know they can trust you and may ask for financial information before giving. Be ready to share your 990, your latest finance reports, and anything that may give them insight into the financial health of your organization. Your openness in sharing this info will help build trust with your donors and prospects.
- **Tolerant.** When your donors love you, you can make mistakes occasionally without losing them. You can miss a newsletter deadline, send an appeal with a typo, or ask for too much money, and your donor is okay with that. However, most donors won't tolerate mistake after mistake because they're uncomfortable giving money to a sloppy organization. After all, if you can't get the little stuff right, how can they trust that you'll get the big stuff right?
- **Unfulfilled.** Today's donor doesn't want to just give you money and watch you ride off into the sunset. They want to be involved. They want to volunteer and advocate on your behalf. Treat them like partners in your work – that's what they are if they're giving you the money you need to do your work! Then do what you can to appreciate them and update them on the difference their money is making. It will meet that inner need they have for personal fulfillment.



- **Visual.** Donors are busy people and won't take the time to read a lot of text, no matter how well-written it is. Use short, conversational paragraphs to tell a story followed by charts, infographics, and video to get your message across. As a bonus, make these shareable and watch your donor help spread the word about your nonprofit!

- **Wanting.** Your donors want so much more than you're currently giving them. They want stories. They want photos and video. They want to feel good about their experience with you. They want to tell their friends about the great nonprofit they support. Give them what they want and you'll get more of what you want when they become generous, loyal donors.
- **eXtraordinary.** Today's donor is willing to part with their hard-earned money and precious time to help your nonprofit fulfill its mission. That's how much they care and caring about something other than yourself is an extraordinary thing!



- **Yummy.** Many times, professional fundraisers become friends with donors because of all they have in common. While the boundary between personal and professional relationships must be carefully managed, it's awesome to get to work with people who are remarkable and delicious to be around!
- **Zany.** Just when you think you know what to expect, your donor may surprise you with a donation ten times the size of anything they've given before. Or they have an idea or a resource for you that will blow you out of the water. And sometimes they'll just make you laugh with their funny ways of supporting your nonprofit. Honor that personality and thank them for sharing their zany side with you!

Want to learn more about understanding your donors? We share fundraising tips, tools, and techniques every week at Get Fully Funded in the Inspiration Zone. It's always a quick read with practical "how to" info that you can use right away, sprinkled with a bit of Southern humor. Subscribe today to get a regular dose of fundraising motivation delivered straight to your inbox.

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