



Nine Tips for Turning Volunteers into Donors

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Some organizations struggle with asking volunteers to donate. I've talked to more nonprofit leaders than I can express who've said they fear asking volunteers for money since "their time is their contribution" and if they also ask for money "it may lead to a lessening of their commitment of time."

My own experience tells me the opposite. As volunteers receive a more holistic understanding of the organization's needs – some of which are financial – it usually strengthens their relationship to the organization. Indeed, a [study by Fidelity](#) found that 87% of volunteers said there is an overlap between their volunteer and financial support for nonprofits.

So without further delay, here are 9 tips for converting volunteers into donors.

1. Treat them well

This also is about keeping them as ongoing volunteers, but it's worth emphasizing. Acknowledge them. Give them appropriate tasks with adequate training. Build personal relationships and don't just treat them as numbers/bodies.

2. Keep track of them

You need both a good fundraising and volunteer database and, if at all possible, these should be one and the same, or somehow integrated so you're not having to manually cross-check data between them. With regard to volunteers, it's important to know not just if they volunteer, but how often and for what types of activities. It's also very important to find opportunities to collect volunteer email, phone, and mailing addresses. Don't be satisfied with just one.

3. Turn them into stories

Highlight stories about your volunteers in your communications, especially those that show steps up a ladder of deeper engagement. Bonus points when you have a volunteer who's also a donor who'll allow you to use a testimonial that covers both their volunteer time and their reasons to donate.

4. Thank donors (in addition to volunteers) at volunteer events

Make sure your volunteers understand that managing their volunteer experience carries costs and be sure to thank not just the volunteers, but also your donors, at volunteer activities. This helps communicate to the volunteers your financial need in advance of asking.

5. Consider a [peer-to-peer fundraising](#) campaign aimed at volunteer fundraisers

One great way to get volunteers to donate is to get them to raise money! If you have a volunteer base, a subset of volunteers is likely willing to raise money if part of an organized campaign or for an event, as long as it's supported by appropriate website and other communications. There are many reasonable cost technical solutions that facilitate this type of fundraising, whether it's part of an event (e.g. an -athon) or a campaign.

6. Give them multiple ways to give

Be sure and have both an excellent online way for people to donate, but also a process for efficiently accepting donations at volunteer events for those people who are so inclined. But make sure the at-event donations are collected in a manner you can track back to specific volunteers so they can be appropriately databased/thanked. A donation “jar” may get you some easy cash donations, but it’s not the best way to build a philanthropic relationship with the donors.

7. Involve those who have the strongest relationship with your volunteers

If you have staff who manage the volunteers as part of managing a program or as a stand-alone volunteer management position, they need to be involved in raising money from volunteers, as opposed to having your development staff as the sole team involved. In some cases, this means making sure your program staff have fundraising as a portion of their job duties and have adequate training on how to make asks.

8. Keep your eyes open for potential major donors

You should scan lists of volunteers (and not just donors) when creating lists of prospective major donors. If you pay for a wealth screening of your donor database, include your volunteers.

By doing just a quick scan at OLCV of a dozen volunteers that a board member suspected were likely major donors, followed up by some online sleuthing, we found a couple regular volunteers who were maxing out to Federal political candidates, which accurately told me they had capacity to give our organization significant gifts as well – which they did when asked.

9. Don’t forget to ask!

Most volunteer events or activities should not contain a strong ask. Many will just appropriately thank volunteers (and donors --see #4) and include what I’d consider a soft ask, referencing how they can give if so inclined.

But you should consider some events and/or other communication methods in which you explicitly ask your volunteers to become donors. While you should at, a minimum, fold them into regular prospective donor outreach, you should consider some segmented communications just to volunteers where your message can thank them for volunteering within the context of a financial appeal.

The communication vehicle may vary: email, mail, phone. But the general thrust should remain the same.

Give me feedback! If you’ve had a particularly good or cautionary experience with regards to raising money from volunteers, please let me know.