Gratitude for Funders 365 Days a Year

Author: Diane Leonard, GPC

The month of November is always full of gratitude articles, blogs, Facebook challenges, and year end appeals. The focus on gratitude throughout November is critical. It helps community members think about helping local food pantries and the start of local toy drives. It helps set the stage for nonprofits making annual appeals to their donors and community members. It puts a priority on thanking grant funders and major donors for their role in supporting our organization. It helps remind each of us individually that while the year goes by so quickly, we need to take time to be grateful in all aspects of our life.

The thing though about a month so focused on gratitude, is that often, those feelings of gratitude are quieter or fewer and farther between during the other eleven months of the year. You will send your required thank you letter after receiving a grant award notification and check, but other activities of gratitude may then wait on the back burner until November when gratitude is the focus for all funders. Therefore, I challenge you to instead think about how to spread your gratitude and expressions of sincere gratitude for your grant funders across an entire year. Everyone always appreciates heartfelt gratitude at any time, so absolutely, continue on with your current plans for November, but I encourage you to use this November as a springboard for challenging yourself over the next 12 months to expand your expressions of gratitude to funders.

Consider some of these other methods of expressing gratitude to grant funders throughout the year and how you can adapt them to your own organization:

- Write a handwritten note to a funder that participated in a local funder forum thanking them for participating and being active in the community.
- Place an ad with funder logos in the local or regional newspaper thanking all funders for a specific program.
- Invite a funder, or group of funders to a site visit for your funded program.
- Create a schedule for how you will thank funders via each of your social media networks over the course of the year.
- Talk with your colleagues in the Development Department to see what success stories and other materials are being created or utilized that would also resonate with your grant funders. Include your grant funders in the distribution and sharing of those materials.
- Write a handwritten note to a funder that took time to answer your questions about their application on the phone.
- Promote the work of your funder(s) via your organization’s social media accounts even when not about the grant funding that was provided to your organization. Sharing their work related to your shared mission helps to advance the work of both groups.
- Capture success stories about funded programs via participant video testimonials and create a montage on YouTube to share with funders.
- Thank your potential funders when they deny your application for taking the time to review your application. Provide an even more heartfelt thank you via a handwritten note when they provide you with feedback on the denied proposal.
• Talk with your development staff about how to also recognize your grant funders for specific programs within the organization’s information being shared with major donors at a special event.
• Invite your funders to attend conferences that you host or support that are focused on your shared mission.
• Put a short article in your quarterly newsletter highlighting not just the award provided by a funder, but also the other work they are doing which advances/supports your larger mission.
• Include a handwritten note, or a cover email when sharing an article, resource, or recent study with a funder that addresses your shared mission.

There are numerous other creative ways that you can express your gratitude for your funders throughout the year. I encourage you to let your imagination run wild and brainstorm with your colleagues ways that are within your organization’s capacity to creatively thank those who are financially supporting your work. I believe that you’ll be pleased with how those extra efforts will enhance those long-term funding relationships!