Qualifying Donors for Major Gift Caseloads

An article from Veritus Group to help you succeed at major gift fundraising.

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VERITUS GROUP
Building Authentic Donor Relationships

The donor won't even return my call, and I am so frustrated!" said the MGO. When we checked to see why, it was not surprising to find that a majority of the donors on this MGO's caseload did not want to connect. Why? Because the donors on this caseload (like those of hundreds of MGOs like him around the country) had not been **qualified.**

This is a core problem in major gift fundraising: well-intentioned MGOs talking to the wrong donors. So we want to help you find the donors in your donor base that actually want to relate to you in a more meaningful way.

But first, a little context.

What you will learn

- ✓ Why you should qualify donors on your caseload
- ✓ What pool of donors you should qualify from
- ✓ How to discover if donors want to relate personally

At Veritus Group, we feel very strongly that there are just a few metrics that matter, related to measuring the performance of a MGO and a major gift program.

In a 2014 study done by Bentz, Whaley and Flessner on "**Optimizing Fundraiser Performance**" in the healthcare and education sector, the authors stated that major gift metrics had changed in priority and emphasis from 2005 ("past") to 2014 ("current"), as reflected in the following chart:

Note the column showing what we think matters most in terms of measuring MGO performance. Most managers would agree that a key metric is total dollars raised. And the more enlightened managers will know that donor retention – how did each donor's giving maintain course (or not) year to year – is also important.

But after that, in our philosophy, there are only five other metrics that matter:

Bentz Whaley, Flessner 2014 Study		
Past Metrics	**Past Metrics**	**Veritus Metrics**
Total Dollars Raised	Total Dollars Raised	Total Dollars Raised
# of Face to Face Visits	# of Face to Face Visits	# Meaningful Connections
# of Contacts	# of Asks	# of Stewardship Calls
# of Asks	# of Gifts Closed	# of Asks
# of Gifts Closed	# of Stewardship Calls	Working the Plan for Each Caseload Donor
# of Discovery Calls Made	# of Prospects Identified	How Did Each Donor Perform Year to Year
# of New Prospects Identified	# of Discovery Calls Made	
# of Stewardship Calls	# of Cold Calls Made	
	# of Moves	

1. How many meaningful connections did the MGO make?
2. How many stewardship calls or connections?
3. How many asks?
4. And is the MGO working the individual plan for the donor?
5. How did each donor perform year to year?

That's it. Here is an important point: if the MGO does not have a connection of some sort with the donor, then success in meeting these metrics is impossible. You can't have a meaningful connection or a stewardship call that is worth anything, or do an ask or even come up with a plan for a donor, if you haven't already connected.

THIS is why qualifying donors for a caseload is so important. Too many caseloads of too many MGOs around the country and in Europe are stacked with up a majority of donors who do not want to talk or connect with anyone – in fact the number of non-responsive donors is as high as 75% of the caseload! This is an impossible situation.

In this White Paper, we'll answer the following questions:

01 How many meaningful connections did the MGO make?

02 How many stewardship calls or connections?

03 How many asks?

04 And is the MGO working the individual plan for the donor?

05 How did each donor perform year to year?

Qualifying donors is very, very important – no, *critical* to your success as a MGO. Ignore it to your peril. Embrace it, and you will have success. There is nothing like talking to a donor who actually wants to talk to you!

Why Qualify?

We are frequently asked, "Why are you asking me to qualify donors?" There are three reasons:

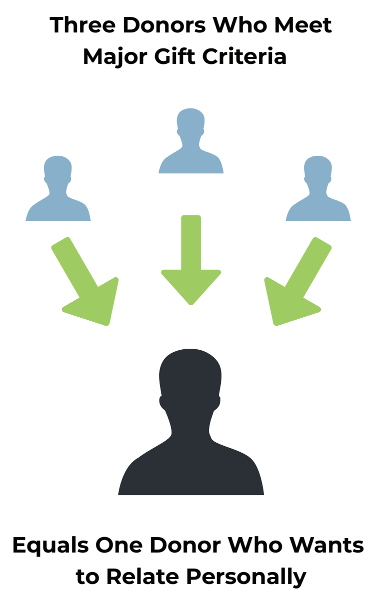
1. Not every donor who meets your major gift criteria actually wants to relate to you.
2. You only have so much time.
3. You (and your organization) need to be wise stewards of the money that is being invested in you.

Let's look briefly at each of these.

Most donors do not want to relate personally.

It's a fact. Just because a donor gave your organization a gift does not mean he wants to relate to you. That may be surprising and disappointing, but it is true. In fact, our experience is that in the best cases, only one in every three donors who meet your major gift criteria actually wants to connect. Sometimes the ratio is 4:1 or even 5:1.

This reality means that you must uncover a way to find those donors who DO want to relate.



You only have so much time

Look at it this way. A major gift officer should have no more than 150 qualified donors on his/her caseload. 150 donors. That's it. You have no other task but to manage those donors. You have 365 days to do that. OK, you have to take weekends and vacation. And there are holidays and business meeting days. So let's do it this way:

- 365 days in a year
- less 104 weekend days (assuming you will never work a weekend day)
- less 50 days of holidays and organizational business meeting days
- Leaves you 211 days a year or 18 days a month!

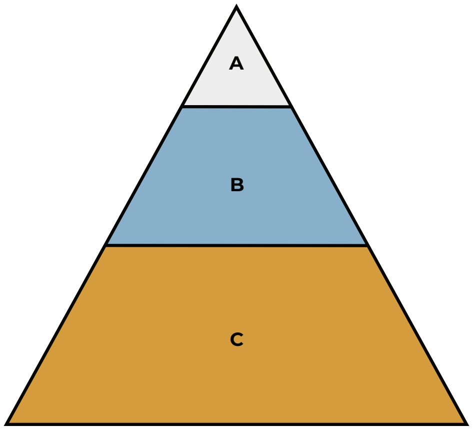
18 days a month. That's all you have.

When you look at it this way, that's precious little time to do ANYTHING but pay attention to the donors on your caseload. This means:

No prospecting. You can't be doing any prospecting for new donors. We've said it before, and we'll say it again: you CANNOT spend time looking for new donors when you have a qualified caseload that you need to spend your time on. You cannot do it! Even if it looks good.

> *Richard tells the story of the MGO who said: "Richard, I was looking at this list of very wealthy, high-capacity people that live in my area and I think there is a great opportunity that we are missing." I wanted to grab him by the neck. "Roger (not his real name)" I said, "how many times do I have to tell you that you have very little time, and that your greatest chance of success is working with the donors on your caseload who love you and the organization and want to help? How many times have I told you that?" "At least ten times, Richard," he said. "But I just can't help thinking that we are missing something." Then we had a long and friendly conversation about why Roger just can't help looking over the fence at the greener grass. It's complicated, I know. But I convinced Roger to get back to his caseload and focus on his good donors.*

You need to focus on donors with the most potential. You can't be spending the same amount of time with your B and C donors as you will with your A donors. This is a common time-waster: the MGO spends hours with a C donor whom she just loves, and very little time with an A donor who is difficult to deal with but has very high capacity and high inclination. This tiering or classification of donors is a very strategic way a MGO can use time wisely. It is a way to plan for less time to be used on C donors, a little more on B donors and the majority of the time on A donors. This works.



Count	% Effort
10	50%
40	30%
100	20%

Jeff relates a story of a MGO we serve who received a $1 million gift. He has never before had a gift from anyone on his caseload of an amount greater than $100,000. But this $1 million gift came in because the MGO focused properly, spent a great deal of time with this donor, and successfully matched the donor's interests and passions to a need in the organization. This is a perfect example of how time used wisely pays off!

You need to avoid unnecessary meetings. You can't be spending too much time in any meeting at the office that doesn't directly relate to the donors on your caseload. This is a sticky one, because every MGO has managers and authority figures who just love to hang out in meetings, organize things and blather on for hours. Don't misunderstand – we are not against meetings. But we have too many of them, and each of them is way too long. Maybe we should only have meetings standing up. No chairs. You just stand there. It helps to make things short and to the point.

These are our opinions about the use of your time. If you have to, toss half of it out as pure nonsense. But you have to agree that a more disciplined and focused use of time will have its benefits in your major gift work.

You need to be a wise steward of the money invested in you.

From a purely economic point of view (NOT a relationship point of view) you have 150 economic units – 150 qualified donors. So a caseload has its own mini-economy that must be managed for organizational purposes. We like to look at this economy in a couple of ways. First, the cost side:

Cost Basis:	
MGO Salary and Benefits	$87,500
MGO Ad Assist Salary/Benefits	$31,250
Office Expense	$11,250
Travel Expense	$20,000
Total Costs	$150,000

Cost Per Donor Unit:
$1,000

Let's say these are the operating costs of one MGO in a medium-sized non-profit. If your numbers are different, use these categories to figure out your annual costs. Let's also say there are 150 qualified donors on the caseload. Now note that the cost to service ONE donor is $1,000 a year.

This is an important figure to keep in mind. Here's why. If a MGO clearly understands that there is a REAL cost to relate to one donor, that MGO will realize that there is an economic consequence when she does not take care of the donor. It actually costs the non-profit money! This is an important data point for a MGO and his/her manager.

Next, the revenue side:

Revenue Basis:				
20	"A"	Donors Avg:	$36,000	$720,000
65	"B"	Donors Avg:	$8,500	$552,500
65	"C"	Donors Avg:	$3,500	$227,500
			Total Revenue	$1,500,000

Average Rev. Per Donor Unit:
$10,000

Let's say the qualified caseload breaks down into A, B, C donors as we have designated in the chart above. First, note that there are fewer A donors, but they have higher economic value; second, the caseload value is $1.5 million; and finally, the average revenue per donor is $10,000.

Now, putting cost and revenue together, take a look at this chart:

Here are the 150 qualified donors. Some of greater value – others of lesser value. They each cost, on average, $1,000 to service. And the net revenue from each is different.

One sharp-eyed critic, when he saw this chart, pointed out that the cost to service an A donor would be higher than a B donor etc., making the ratios turn out differently. This is true, and you can adjust the math to allocate cost properly. But here are the points we want to focus on:

150 Qualified Donors									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110
111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130
131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140
141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150

Donor Economics:	
Cost:	$1,000
Revenue:	$36,000
Net:	$35,000

Donor Economics:	
Cost:	$1,000
Revenue:	$8,500
Net:	$7,500

Donor Economics:	
Cost:	$1,000
Revenue:	$3,500
Net:	$2,500

1. **A major gift officer should understand that it costs money to manage a donor**. Real money. If he understands this, it should motivate him to steward his time and efforts to manage each donor on the caseload.

2. **The MGO should understand that the donors must each yield revenue in excess of what it costs to service them** or there will be nothing left to give to the organization. There are exceptions to this. For instance, you are managing a relationship that will take two or three years to reach its potential. In this case you may lose money for a time before getting into a positive net revenue situation. But be sure there is real potential there. We have seen too many situations where a MGO chases a high-capacity donor only to have wasted time and money.

3. **A MGO should walk away from a situation where the donor gets what she wants, but the organization doesn't**. This one is difficult. But it happens, and you need to watch out. You cannot be in a one-sided relationship with a donor where everything is going her way, but very little (in terms of economic return) is coming to the organization. It is not good stewardship. It is not what you are hired to do. And further, it is not right.

So a smart outcome for caseload and donor management is to have relationships with donors where:

- The donor gets her philanthropic passions and interests fulfilled.
- Net revenue results from that relationship that funds the programs and operations of the organization.
- And this is all done at a reasonable ROI (return on investment).

Do not let yourself love either side of the caseload coin more than the other. You must deliver on both sides. As a professional MGO, you must deliver on fulfilling donor passions and interests AND you must deliver on securing revenue for the organization at a proper cost.

So, why qualify donors? Because:

1. Only 1 of 3 will actually want to relate to you, so you will need to sort through 450 good donors to find the 150 you will put on your caseload.
2. You only have 18 days a month to talk to donors, and you want to manage that time wisely.can't be spending your time with unresponsive donors.
3. Your organization (and you) need to be a good steward of the funds that have been invested in you. Each caseload donor has a real cost, so you can't be spending your time with unresponsive donors.

This whole topic boils down to good stewardship. The donor expects that from us. And we should expect that from ourselves.

What’s the Objective?

All the time, we receive unwelcome offers like these:

- Attention: we are buying and selling laptops
- Try us for a month. No contracts. Great leads
- Discover our April edition…
- 300,000 businesses reveal their top reasons for using our service.

You must experience this just like we do. All of these people are doing the same thing: they are looking for “qualified buyers” for some service or product. Why? Because it is common knowledge that not everyone wants every product or service – so it is smart to have a qualification process in place, to figure out who might be willing to entertain an offer.

If the business can figure out who is inclined to buy, then they save money in the sales process. Qualifying customers (developing “warm leads”) has been happening as long as sales has been a necessary function of a business. It makes sense. And it saves money.

What is interesting about most of the offers is that they have NOTHING to do with our areas of specific interest. Nothing. So who in the marketing department has told the lead generation person to add us to the list of people to contact? There is a huge problem here.

But this situation is not unlike many targeting decisions people make in major gifts. They assume that just because a donor gave a large gift, she actually *wants* to relate to someone in the organization. So they start sending offers to that donor (much like the offers we are getting from businesses) that the donor does not want, nor is she interested in.

This is why we recommend qualifying donors who have given recently, at certain amounts, at a certain frequency – and who may have greater capacity than other donors on your file. These donors, unlike the situation above, have voted with their purses and wallets, a key data point to pay attention to. And if they respond positively to the qualification process, you have actually succeeded in sorting out those who have *given and want to relate* from those who have just given.

It always amazes us that some MGOs have donors on their caseloads who gave a sizeable amount four years ago and haven't given since. That's a very important clue about those donor's intentions, isn't it? But many MGOs do not pay attention to these very clear signals, so they waste space on their caseloads with donors who will never again re-engage.

So what's the objective of qualifying? The overarching objective is to have meaningful connections with your best donors. That is the sole objective of qualifying. Among all of those good donors on your file who give the most, could give the most and who have given most recently – you're trying to figure out who of that group of donors actually wants to connect in a more personal and meaningful way.

That meaningful connection might be on the phone, in person, in an email or through some other form of connecting. The donor will tell you because you are going to ask that critical question in the qualifying process.

"What? I thought that the primary objective of qualifying was to get a gift!" Nope. The getting of a gift is a *result* of a meaningful connection. It is not the objective. Remember, major gift work is NOT about the money. Money results from a meaningful connection where the donor is now certain that he can do something meaningful for our hurting planet and its people. And because he is certain, he gives a gift.

So as we further discuss qualifying donors in this series, remember that you are trying to find those recent and high-capacity donors in your file who want to connect. And once found, you want to have meaningful connections with them.

The First Step – A Caseload Pool

For many MGOs, finding the right donor to add to your caseload is like trying to guess which cup the ball is under. There are many, many variables, which is why you must have a system to figure it out.

Don't forget that your ultimate goal is to have 150 qualified donors on your caseload, and that it takes at least three donors who meet a certain set of criteria (explained below) in order to end up with just one qualified donor. That means you need at least 450 donors who meet the criteria for selection if you want to end up with one qualified caseload.

The very first step in qualifying donors is to create a *caseload pool* – a group of donors who meet your major gift criteria as explained here. We call it a "caseload pool" because it is a pool of donors from which you will qualify people to add to the caseload you will manage.

Recency

How long has it been since the donor's last gift? Many organizations make the mistake of including donors for a caseload pool who gave their last gift 18-24 months ago. In our view, donors who have not given in the last 18 months are considered lapsed donors, which means the organization has lost or is at risk of losing their relationship and investment. The best major donor candidates for a caseload pool will have given in the past twelve months — preferably in the past three to six months. But this does not mean we won't try to get a 12- to 18-month donor to give again.

Gift Amount

This is the primary indicator when creating caseload pools. When analyzing giving files, those donors who are more likely ready for caseload qualifying are those donors who are currently giving more than the other donors on the file. Giving recency and amount are very clear indicators of "inclination" – that the donor is inclined to keep giving in the future. It is not a fail-safe indicator, but it is a strong one.

Capacity

In most giving files, there are donors who possess great wealth and therefore have the potential for becoming major donors. "Capacity" is both an objective and subjective indicator, because there are many ways to gauge it. For example, when creating caseload pools, the way we select donors is by looking at their giving levels and gathering information from people who know these donors, in order to determine who might have the capacity to give more.

In addition to history and giving levels, one of the most popular and effective ways to further determine capacity is by performing a wealth overlay. This is an in-depth research process that examines all public giving information for the donors on your file, in order to reveal which donors have the highest capacity for giving significantly to your organization. Data findings are relevant and can be used for several years following the overlay. Every other year, it makes sense to run a smaller overlay on the top of your donor file in order to assess giving capacity of new donors for potential addition to caseload pools.

Organizations need to be careful, however, about their expectations when it comes to wealth overlay findings. A wealth overlay can indicate who the wealthiest donors are, but this does not mean that these people will ever give large gifts. Some donors may have capacity but will never be motivated to give significantly. Others may have longstanding gift commitments to other organizations, which will keep them at low giving levels.

So while wealth overlays are helpful in uncovering capacity, it is important to remember that capacity does not necessarily translate to large gifts. The two biggest values in performing a wealth overlay are these: it informs you of the capacity of a donor with high inclination, and it allows you to pull some folks into caseload pools that would otherwise have been omitted.

Relationship

Like the wealth overlay, this is another subjective indicator, and it is contingent on who has been managing the donor or who knows the donor prior to adding her to a caseload pool. The person that has been working with donor files up to this point may have an idea about donors who are already bonded to the organization. Some of these folks may not have demonstrated great donor loyalty by their gift recency or amounts, but if someone in the organization knows the donor, they may provide important factors to consider in adding this donor to a caseload pool.

So now you have all of this information. What's next? You need to organize the data you will use for qualifying. Here are our data selection criteria.

Select all donors who meet your current major donor cumulative giving criteria in each of the last four calendar years and the current calendar year-to-date. Remember, donors think in calendar years, so we use calendar years in this data selection.

Include *all* donors, regardless of "do not mail" and any other kind of coding. The important part of this process is that all people, foundations, and organizations that qualify are included. (Exclude deceased donors.)

For this exercise we will use $1,000+ cume giving, for illustration purposes.

When doing the data selection, the only qualifying factor for selection is if the person or organization cumulatively gave $1,000+ cume in any of the last four calendar years or the current calendar YTD.

Note: donors do not have to give $1,000+ cume in all the years. If they gave in any of the last four calendar years plus the current calendar YTD, they get into the selection. Then you want to see what they gave in the other years. So you might have a donor that gave $900 in 2012, $750 in 2013, $1,200 in 2014, $450 in 2015 and nothing YTD 2016. This donor would meet the selection criteria because they gave over $1,000 cume in 2014. And you would look at all their giving for the other years, both before and after that year.

Some systems and/or software record cash and non-cash gifts as "hard" and "soft" credits. Cumulative giving for this report should include total giving of both cash and non-cash gifts, in separate columns if possible.

Also, in some organizations one-time gifts (like gifts for disaster relief) are tracked separately. So it would be good to isolate those givers and gifts as well. You will see how we do that in the list below.

This data should be exported into an Excel file. The Excel file should be laid out such that each of the following is in a column heading:

1. Donor ID or Account Number
2. Donor type (individual, corporation, organization, church, etc.) *If your system uses codes, provide a key.*
3. Donor Name
4. Donor Address
5. Zip Code
6. Total Giving four years back (CY 2012) – *for these total giving columns, hard, soft credit and disaster only or special circumstance in separate columns, or combined if you can't separate them.*
7. Total Giving three years back (CY 2013)
8. Total Giving two years back (CY 2014)
9. Total Giving last calendar year (CY 2015)
10. Total Giving this calendar year-to-date (CY 2016 YTD)
11. Lifetime Giving
12. All Fundraiser Assignment Coding for MGO, PG, or Other Name(s), if your data system has assigned fund-raisers
13. Fundraiser Coding Relationship (e.g., Manage, Steward, etc.)
14. Service Center Code or Area, if you divide areas of fund-raising by geographic codes
15. Total Number of Gifts Given
16. Target Analytics Wealth Rating Info (or other wealth ratings)

Not every organization either keeps this level of detailed data or has a system to keep it. That's fine. If all you can do is find those donors who gave the most, did it most recently and have the highest capacity and relationship with the organization, then that will be enough to create a caseload pool.

The Process of Qualifying

At this point it is important to remember **why you are doing this**. Just because a donor has given you a large gift does not mean that she wants to relate to you personally. That is why you need to try to connect with each donor on your caseload pool, from the highest value donor (confluence of recency, amount, capacity and relationship) to the lowest, to determine if the donor wants to have a relationship with you. There is no point in having a donor on a caseload who does not want to relate more personally to you.

The qualifying process is complex, which is why we need to take a substantial amount of time and space to explain it to you. And in the appendix to this paper, we've included sample letters and surveys, and a more detailed explanation of the process.

For now, we will walk you through a process Veritus Group uses to qualify donors. It is fairly labor-intensive, which means it will take months to complete. In fact, if you can qualify 5 donors per week it will take approximately 7.5 to 8 months for you to have a fully qualified caseload, starting from scratch. But once you have it in place, your work will be so much more effective, efficient and enjoyable.

By the way, Veritus Group is currently working with another company to add an online, social media, website element to this qualifying process that we anticipate will speed up the qualifying process. More on that when it becomes available.

So here are the steps we use to qualify donors:

1. Take your caseload pool and **sort it into priority order**, the highest value donor (confluence of recency, amount, capacity and relationship) at the top, down to the lowest value at the bottom. The purpose of this sort is to contact the higher-value donors first. You will need to segment these donors into groups of 10-15 and put no more than that many through the process at a time. Here's why. You are going to be calling all of them, and you do not want your letter to a donor to get "cold" because you have sent out more letters than you can call in a timely fashion. You are pacing yourself, and your pace may be more or less than 10 a week.

2. Discipline yourself to **send an introductory letter** to the first group of 10 caseload pool donors once a week. The purpose of the letter is to have the President/CEO/Executive Director introduce you to the donor and let them know that (a) you are his/her chosen representative to work with the donor and help them in anyway they want, and (b) you will be contacting them in the next few days. If all you have is the donor's email, then do this step via email, enclosing the letter as an attachment to the email and asking the donor to respond affirmatively with contact information. If no email or phone is available, the letter should reflect that "unfortunately, we do not have your contact info." In this case, include a postcard for them to return with phone and email information.

3. In preparation for the donor call, you will need to do an online search to learn anything you can about the donor in addition to what is already in the database, file notes and in the minds of people in your organization that may know the donor. This also helps you locate phone numbers if they are not listed in the record. The letter states that you will be 'contacting' them the following week. Also, if your database includes capacity information, you should study that as well. The point of this step is to be fully prepared with as much information as possible.

4. A week after the letter goes out, **make a qualifying phone call.** Be sure to manage the distance between the assumed in-home date of your letter and when you are making the call. Do not let too much time pass, as the letter will get "cold." The phone call has three objectives: (1) to introduce yourself as an investment counselor and helper, NOT a fundraiser; (2) to say *'thank you'* for supporting the organization; and (3) to determine if the donor has interest in relating to you in a more personal way. On this last point there is a delicate nuance. You can't just come out and say: "do you want to relate to me?" No. What you are trying to do in the phone call (or on email if you are limited to talking just on email) is to get a sense of whether the donor wants to engage in some sort of conversation and relationship. If the donor is cool and eager to get off the phone, then you have your answer – unless you perceive a special circumstance at play like you are calling at the wrong time, etc. The point is that you will perceive a degree of warmth and interest, or coolness and disinterest. And that is your data point – the one you will use to add the donor to your qualified caseload. Once you get into this, you will train yourself to perceive when to add a donor to your caseload. You will be able to tell. Oh, one other point on the phone call –if you don't connect immediately, keep trying. Don't just try once and then move on. You could also leave a message expressing your intent and assuring the donor that your call is not a fundraising call, and affirming your intent. If the phone doesn't work, then try email.

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5. **Use the point of contact to secure more information.** When you are talking to or writing the donor you will always need to keep in mind that your primary objective is to uncover the interests and passions of the donors. "Mrs. Reynolds, you have said you love to support X here at [name of org]. Would you mind telling me why?" And you carefully and kindly probe to secure those interests. You will also want to know the communication preferences of the donor. Do they want to relate by phone? A visit? On email? Or a combination? We get into all of this in great detail in our Major Gift Academy, so you can learn all the ways to secure information. A secondary objective on the call is to build relationship and trust. And for that you will be soliciting how you can help the donor in her relationship to the organization. "Do you need any more information? Are there any concerns you have?" Etc. And you will share your personal contact information and tell the donor she is welcome to contact you any time with any concern or request she has.

6. **Touch Point and Personal Note.** On the surface, this may not seem to be a relevant action as it relates to qualifying the donor. But in fact it is, because it shows the donor that you are wanting to connect and affirm the donor in his giving. This touch point is something that you send via mail or email that connects your donor to the impact of his giving in a real way. There are many ways to do this. Some common Touch Points may include an annual report, program update, thank you from program participants, a recipient story with a picture, note from someone helped, and more. This does not have to be complex, or a multi-page Adobe creation. Simple but impactful is good. Send them a story or update on that program with a personal note from you. This is a way to build connection to your organization, so they will begin to trust you as their contact.

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7. If the donor does not respond to letters or calls, then the **next step is to send a survey.** See the appendix to this document for a sample of what we use. The purpose of the survey is essentially to perform the function of the phone call – to secure information on passions and interests, as well as communication preference. The responses to the survey, though few, will be a wealth of information; most donors who respond should be considered qualified. This opens the door for the relationship. Marketing studies show that it can take an average of seven touches before a consumer will purchase a product. Applying that to the Major Gifts world, we have found that it can take several attempts to connect with donors. Some will become qualified from the initial letter or the follow-up phone call. Others will require more contact before they connect with you. For some top donors, we recommend trying one more Touch Point here.

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8. **Phone Call & Final Letter.** We suggest two final attempts to try to reach the caseload pool donor. First, attempt another call to follow up on the survey. This call will be similar to the Introductory Phone call, in which you'll be asking if the survey has been received, and initiating a conversation. Finally, it makes sense to send non-responders a handwritten note, explaining that you appreciate the donor's support and would like to gather information about her communication preferences. Saying something like, "Having not heard from you, I will continue to communicate with you every so often so that you have access to information about how your giving is making a difference in the lives of those we serve."

9. If after many attempts you are unable to connect with the donor, the lack of connection should be interpreted as the donor's response. In these cases, **make a decision not to pursue the donor, and move on.** Be careful on this point to be sure the donor is not on vacation or out of the country or ill, or there is some other reason you have not been able to connect. Some MGOs put the highest value donors on a list to try the process again a month later, rather than just give up. You will discover your own system for doing this as you get into it.

10. If, during the qualification process, ***any donor*** on the caseload pool gives a donation, an alert should go to the MGO that day, and the MGO picks up the phone and calls the donor to thank her. This happens regardless of whether the donor has received the intro letter or is actively in the qualifying process. The point is to take advantage of the donation to immediately contact the donor and go through the process.

So that is the general description of the process. There is a lot more detail, so see the appendix for a more detailed document that includes samples of letters and surveys. We suggest you take the outline of the strategy here and create your own version of a qualifying system.

Lastly, here are some points to remember when you are contacting your donors:

1. Think of the donor as a friend, and communicate with them in that manner. If you are dealing with someone you really like, be intuitive and go with the flow – don't be formulaic. Go with that style.

2. Pay attention to what is happening in the relationship – the clues, etc. – so that you know what to do next. Don't think in terms of the "shoulds" of major gift fundraising, even things you have learned. You are now in a warm, friendly relationship. Listen to the cadence of that relationship. Look for the logical next point of what the donor is saying to you. Analyze: if they said this, then the logical next step is that. Spend more time listening for clues and entry points than running the formula through your head.

3. Ask questions not only to get information, but to lead the conversation toward gaining a commitment. Questions like
   - So why are you interested in [stated interest]?
   - Has that interest led you to take any actions to deal with the problem?
   - What do you think can be done to solve the problem?

4. Prior to each call or contact:
   - Remind yourself that each one of your donors is unique in what he or she seeks from the giving relationship. Think about this before you call – get it in your mind.
   - Remind yourself of the best possible outcome and the least acceptable outcome. In other words, decide where you want to go if it turns out really well, and decide (in advance) what is the least of what you will be happy with. This exercise will get you off the formula to a real scenario with that donor.
   - After deciding the objective (point above), review the key points to be covered in the contact. Again, this is deciding in advance what you

want to achieve. Not a formula, but a real live action plan *tailored* to the actual person and his journey with you.

- Determine what you will ask the donor to do: give, visit a site, talk back about some point, etc.
- List anticipated questions and your responses to them.
- Rehearse and visualize prior to your contact. Where is that person sitting? What do they look like? What might they be dealing with today? Get into her environment and state of mind BEFORE you call her.

5. On the call or in the contact, establish a confident and friendly atmosphere in your conversation. Focus on atmosphere first then your call objectives.

Qualifying donors is a very important part of major gift caseload management. You want to be sure you are talking to and relating to those donors who want to engage. It will make a tremendous difference in the quality of your work.

Dealing with Objections

It's pretty clear to you – you just want to know if the donor wants to have a relationship with you. It's pretty simple and basic. To you. But to the donor, there are all kinds of questions swirling around in her head. Why is this person calling me? What do they want?

That is why you need to be prepared to answer questions and handle any objections to your process of qualifying donors for major gift caseloads.

Most of the objections/questions we encounter in the qualifying process are usually one of the following, or a combination of them:

1. **Are you calling me for money?** The simple answer is "No, this is not a fundraising call and I am not a telemarketer." We counsel MGOs not to jump right into this topic unless there is a sense that it needs to be said. (If you sense that the donor is needing to hear this, then of course, say it.) The reason you are calling is (a) to thank the donor, (b) to let him know you have been asked to be his personal representative at the organization, and (c) find out how you can better serve him in his giving to the organization. This last point is about securing the donor's passions and interests, communication preferences and any other information that will help you help the donor in his relationship with the organization.

2. **I don't have time to talk right now.** Just ask when a better time is, and give options. For instance, it might sound like this: "That's fine, Mr. Reynolds. Would tomorrow at this same time be OK, or maybe day after tomorrow sometime between 1 and 5 pm would be better?" This approach gives two options, one with a range. Your objective is to secure a specific alternate date and time.

3. **I already know everything you do, so we don't need to talk.** "That's great! May I ask you a question? Could you tell me why you give to NAME OF ORG?" And then try to uncover interests and passions AND communication preferences. Rather than get into a debate on whether the donor knows everything about your organization or not, you are asking for information YOU need.

4. **Please don't spend time or money coming to visit me.** This objection gives you the opportunity to secure communication preferences. Here is what your response might sound like: "Oh, OK. Thanks for telling me that. Would you prefer I communicate with you on the phone or by email?" And then you secure that contact information. Often, a donor will ask for communication by email and then, over time, the relationship grows to the point that a phone call and even a visit is welcomed.

5. **I'm a private person.** "I understand. Thank you for telling me that. First of all, let me assure you that your giving to NAME OF ORG and the financial records related to your giving is kept private. Secondly, my only role is to help you secure information you need and want about your giving, or about the organization." For instance, you might say: "your gifts to the X program are so important. And you likely will want to know, from time to time, what is happening in that program – how lives have been impacted for good." Then ask the donor how you can help provide her information on impact.

6. **I'm not the one you need to talk to – talk to my spouse.** This one is a bit complicated. You need to accept it at face value, even if you believe it is an excuse not to talk (which is a key clue on what the donor wants in your relationship, namely, not to talk to you). But we suggest saying something like this: "Would tomorrow at this same time be a good time to talk to your spouse, or would day after tomorrow sometime between 1 and 5 pm be better?" This, like the "I don't have time" objection, gives the donor choice. And if the donor helps you connect, then you have your relationship answer. If not, you also have an answer. You also could continue to send information to the donor you are talking to, knowing that he will share it with his spouse. One time I was given this reason for not connecting, only to find out that the real decision-maker was the person I was talking to.

7. **I'll let you know if I need something.** "Ok, do you mind if I call (email) you every once in awhile to let you know how your giving is making a difference?" Here you are simply trying to establish even the smallest connection which can then, over time, bloom into something else.

8. **I am really upset about X.** Here, you give the donor the platform and channel to offer constructive criticism or just to complain about things. You should listen well and do the best you can to help address the concern the donor has. Believe me, in this situation, there is a direct correlation between a donor who is heard and a donor who engages.

There may be other types of questions or objections you have encountered. If you have them, please send them to us.

Here is the whole point of this exercise.

You are trying to determine if the donor will engage with you. Engagement means that there is warmth, response and interaction. At this point, the content of your interaction is not as important as the fact that the interaction occurred, and that you are getting a sense that you are welcome to interact in the future. THIS is what you are trying to accomplish in the qualifying process. Keep this one point in mind.

Qualifying a donor for your caseload is one of the most important actions you can take in making sure your major gift work is effective and efficient. There is nothing like having a group of donors in your care who actually welcome talking to you.

Veritus Group is a full-service mid-level, major gift and planned giving consulting agency serving non-profits all over the world. We help create, build and manage major gift, mid-level giving and planned gift programs by combining donor-centered strategy with solid management that is focused on accountability.

You can reach us on the Web at **www.veritusgroup.com** or by contacting Amy Chapman at (215) 514-0600 or achapman@veritusgroup.com.

More resources like these are available for free at **www.veritusgroup.com**

APPENDIX:

The Qualifying Process

with sample documents

Selecting Donors for the Caseload Pool

There are five elements that help determine which donors from a giving file are right for major gifts programs. These elements work together, almost like a mathematical algorithm. The top five indicators for major gifts programs are:

- Gift Amount
- Recency
- Frequency
- Capacity
- Relationship

Gift Amount

This is the primary indicator when creating preliminary caseloads for a new major gifts plan. When analyzing giving files, those that are ready for a major gifts plan are giving more than the rest of the donors on file. This amount will vary by charity, based on the giving file.

Recency

How long has it been since the donor's last gift? The best major donor candidates will have given in the past twelve months — preferably in the past three to six months. Donors who have not given in the last 12 months are considered lapsed donors, which means the organization is in great risk of losing their relationship and investment. This does not mean we won't try to get a 12 to 18 month donor to give again. It simply means that our BEST donors to help build the caseload pool will have given recently.

Frequency

Typically, donors who give more frequently throughout the year turn out to be men and women that already feel closely bonded to the organization and therefore are some of the strongest donors.

Capacity

This is both an objective and subjective indicator because it takes the donor's giving capacity into account. In most giving files, there are donors who possess great wealth and therefore have the potential for becoming major donors. There are many ways to gauge capacity. For example, when creating caseload pools, the way we will select donors is by looking at their giving levels and gathering information from people who know these donors in order to determine those that might have the capacity to give more.

In addition to history and giving levels, one of the most popular and effective ways to determine capacity is by performing a wealth overlay. This is an in-depth research project that examines all public giving information. The goal is to reveal which donors have the highest capacity for giving significantly to your organization. Data findings are relevant and can be used for several years following the overlay. Every other year it makes sense to run a smaller overlay in order to assess giving capacity for new donors on the major donor and mega donor caseloads.

Organizations need to be careful about the expectations they have when it comes to wealth overlay findings. These overlays are not 100% accurate, and they are more of an art than a science. Also, a Wealth Overlay can indicate who the wealthiest donors are in a file, but this does not mean that these people will ever give large gifts. Some donors may have capacity, but will never be motivated to give significantly. Others may have longstanding gift commitments to other organizations, which will keep them at small giving levels to your organization.

So while wealth overlays are helpful in uncovering capacity, it is important to remember that capacity does not translate to large gifts. The biggest value in performing a wealth overlay is that it allows organizations to pull some folks into preliminary major gifts plans that would otherwise have been omitted. Not all of these overlay folks will become major givers, but if a few become five to six figure givers, they more than pay for the wealth overlay investment.

Relationship

Like the wealth overlay, this is another subjective indicator and is somewhat contingent on whomever has been managing the donors prior to beginning a major gifts program. The person that has been working with donor files up to this point will have an idea about donors who are already bonded to the organization. Some of these folks may not have demonstrated great donor loyalty by their recency, frequency, or gift amounts, but the person managing the donors knows that this person wants to eventually become a major donor.

Note: *It is important that you contact your IT department to code your caseload pool. This is different by organization, but the key is to assure that your name is attached as the primary contact, so that no other fundraiser approaches the donor. We don't want to cause confusion for the donors. Also, coding allows you to run a query to track giving from your caseload pool donors while you are in the qualifying process.*

Qualifying Donors for the Caseload

After selecting donors who meet the five preceding criteria, we have created a "Caseload Pool." Typically, Veritus staff helps in the process of determining the size and content of the Pool, based on your organization's needs and processes.

Now begins Phase One of Moves Management, Qualification – finding out if the donor has interest in a relationship, because the five criteria above have NOT addressed whether the donor wants a higher level of engagement from a major gift officer.

To determine donor interest, you will contact each of the donors on the "caseload pool" using our Introductory Series (described below). We want to know if a donor wants a more personal connection to the organization – and what the nature of that relationship should be.

As in building any relationship, we want to progress slowly and methodically. And because donors are human, their responses will not all look the same. Interest in a connection can take on any of the following characteristics:

- I call, and the donor is open to the conversation and willing to speak to me even if it is for a few moments.
- I email a donor, and they email me back with a response.

- A donor sends a note thanking me for sending them information or contacting them.
- I am able to have a good conversation with them at an event where they are open to contact from me.
- A donor sends in a check with a note saying thanks for my reaching out to her.
- I drop into his place of business and he is willing to see me for a few minutes.
- I call a donor saying I will be in her neighborhood and would like to drop by with a small thank you gift. She calls back to say she doesn't want visits at her home but is very interested in my organization, and we have a nice conversation.
- I call and donor agrees to meet with me or visit a program.

The whole purpose of this process is to ensure, as much as possible, that you have a caseload of donors that will engage with you. When you can engage, you can better learn how to serve the donor, share how he is making a difference, involve him more with the programs and needs – and then be able to retain and upgrade him more effectively.

You only have so many days a week, month, and year to work with a caseload. You will be successful when you can focus on a caseload of individuals who want some level of relationship.

Donor Introduction Series

We discover interest by starting with our Donor Introductory Series. The objective is to contact each donor on the caseload pool to uncover who will be on the final caseload. The qualification process will take time. We are building trust and asking donors to show they want engagement.

In our experience, one in every three (or four) donors that begin on the Caseload Pool actually wants to connect in a more personal way.

Here are the steps of the Donor Introduction Series:

1. General Introduction Letter
2. Phone Call
3. Touch Point with Personal Note
4. Non-Responder Letter & Survey
5. Touch Point
6. Phone Call
7. Final Note

1. General Introduction Letter

This general introduction should begin with a letter sent to each donor, introducing yourself and explaining what you do and how you can be of service.

On the next few pages are examples of an introductory letter. Note the personal correspondence style rather than a business, "block" style. Also, we recommend using an easy-to-read font like Cambria or Times New Roman in size 11 or 12 type. Finally, hand-sign your letter in blue ink.

Note: *If you're taking on a role filled by a previous MGO, it may be beneficial to have (or your organization may prefer to have) the Introduction Letter written by the Executive Director/CEO. We have samples of this type of letter also. It would be more along the lines of, "You've talked to John in the past. I'm pleased to introduce you to Sally, who is your new personal representative...."*

Letter Example 1, Classic:

<Date>

<Mailing Name>
<Street>
<City, State Zip>

Dear <Salutation>:

I am writing to introduce myself as the new <Job Title> here at CVIC in Grand Forks.

It is my sole responsibility to serve the needs of and represent the concerns of our friends and donors. Whether you want information on a program or service we provide, have a concern about our community, or need an update on your giving, you can be in touch with me as your point of contact.

I know *<Donor Rep fills in personal Touch Point gleaned from the donor record, e.g. "you have been giving since date OR monthly through your pledge last year at the Rise & Shine Breakfast" or something.>*

Over the coming weeks I will be calling to meet you. My call will not be a solicitation for support. I want to learn what inspires and motivates you to give to CVIC. In addition, I will be sending you periodic updates on how the work is changing lives in our community and showing how your gift makes a difference.

Thank you for all you do to partner with us to make our community more peaceful to live in.

I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Donor Rep
Title

Letter Example 2, For Extensive/Specific Programs:

Insert Date]

[Insert Donor Name]
[Insert Address]
[Insert City, Zip]

Dear ________,

I am writing to introduce a program we have here in ORG NAME in CITY, supporting the important role you play with the people we serve and the programs we deliver on a daily basis.

We realize that many of our special friends and donors need a point of contact here at ORG NAME. Sometimes it is to get more information on how your giving is making a difference in other people's lives; sometimes it is to express concern or give an idea; sometimes it is to get information for a project for a child in school, or secure a speaker for a community event, or organize a fund raising program in your community.

In order to meet these needs that are so often expressed to us, CEO/President X and the leadership here at ORG NAME have appointed me to serve as a Donor Relations Director. I report directly to our leadership and my sole responsibility is to serve the needs of and represent the concerns of our special donors and friends here in CITY. Please trust that all information shared is confidential.

I would like to get better acquainted with you, to understand what you need from us, but also to regularly tell you how your giving is making a tremendous difference in the lives of disadvantaged individuals in CITY and the counties we serve. I will be contacting you so I can understand how we can better serve you in our communications and hear any questions, concerns or requests you might have.

Thank you _______, for all you do to serve those less fortunate. We are indeed grateful for your partnership with us. Should you need anything you can call me at our office [insert direct line] or my cell phone [insert cell]. My e-mail address is xxr@name.org.

I am really looking forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

MGO Name
MGO Title
Contact Information

Letter Example 3 (Notice the Call-out box)

Dear (Insert Donor Name):

Loyal and faithful donors like you are the core of our mission. Your belief in us enables us to work in bringing valuable relief and resources to victims of leprosy and their families. Your generous gifts provide us with funds to carry out this important work. In partnership, we can make a difference in the lives of those we serve. Thank you!

I am delighted to be working at ORG NAME as the Donor Relations Manager. And it's my pleasure to be your personal contact here.

It's always interesting to talk to donors with personal connections to DISEASE/CAUSE. Their stories of knowing someone with leprosy, or having seen the consequences of this unkind disease first hand, inspire our resolve to help others! Many donors tell me it is rewarding to support our work.

I do hope to speak to you in the next week or so. I would like to discover if you are happy with the way we report the work of ORG NAME. Also, as an "investor in goodwill" I'd love for you to hear the impact of your generosity – in a way that best suits you.

"They keep us up to date with news of the men, women and children who have DISEASE/CAUSE and their family members, who it also affects. We know that our donations do make a difference!"

Betty, *a loyal donor like you, commenting on the Donor Relations Program Staff*

We are keen to acknowledge that your generosity improves the lives of those with DISEASE/CAUSE. Sometimes we have not been as good as we might in telling you how we have used your gift and the difference it has made. I aim to change that. I am also here to answer any questions you may have, or to solve any issues that exist.

Furthermore, I would feel honored if you have a personal story about DISEASE/CAUSE to share with me. These stories are our inspiration and motivation.

In the meantime, if you would like to contact me please feel welcome to call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email me at email@x.org.

In closing, thank you again for your trust and support – this vital work would not happen without you.

Sincerely

Name
Contact Information

Letter Example 4, Concise:

Name
Address
C, S Z

Dear NAME,

Thank you for your generous support of ORG NAME. We are grateful for your partnership in honoring America's military heroes and their families!

I'm writing to introduce myself as your personal representative at ORG NAME. My name is XXX XXX. As your point of contact, I'm available to answer your questions and to listen to your ideas about improving our programs.

Faithful supporters like you are the lifeblood of the organization. Your belief in our mission enables us to show our heroes that you remember their service and sacrifice. Your support makes a life-changing impact on those we serve.

I will be contacting you in the next week, to get better acquainted with you. Please feel free to call me anytime at xxx-xxx-xxx. My email is (insert email address here).

Thank you for your steadfast generosity! I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

MGO NAME
Phone
Email

2. Qualifying Phone Call

Following the letter, you should follow up with phone calls to the donors to whom you have mailed the letter. This should be done the week after you mail them. In the phone calls, you should ask if folks received the letter and follow up to the questions you asked to try to learn more the donor.

- It's important to prepare physically, mentally and psychologically for these calls. Prior to each call or contact:
- Do your research on the donor in your data system, and even Google them if she is a high-potential donor. Figure out what you know and want to know from the start.
- Remind yourself that each one of your donors is unique in what he or she seeks from the giving relationship. Think about this before you call — get it in your mind.
- On the call or in the contact, establish a confident and friendly atmosphere in your conversation. Focus on atmosphere first, then your call objectives.
- Remind yourself of the best possible outcome and the least acceptable outcome. In other words, decide where you want to go if it turns out really well and decide, in advance, what is the least of what you will be happy with. This exercise will get you off the formula to a real scenario with that donor. If you start with the end in mind, the conversation will fall more naturally in place.
- After deciding the objective (point above), review the key points to be covered in the contact. This, again, is deciding in advance what you want to achieve. Not a formula, but a real live action plan tailored to the actual person and his journey with you.
- Determine what you will ask the donor to do: talk back about some point, meet with you, visit a site (note: We suggest asking for a meeting only if the conversation is going well, not as a question voiced immediately).
- List anticipated questions and your responses to them.
- Focus on the great feeling of a fantastic call – and call coming from that feeling.

Talking point ideas for the follow-up call are on the next page.

Note: *Sometimes when we get nervous we ask multiple questions with rapid-fire speed. Slow yourself down. Ask one question at a time. Allow for silence. Then when they share, ask questions to better understand what they are saying. You are focusing on getting to know them, not the next* questions you want to ask.

Talking Point Ideas for Follow-up Call:

1. Call and introduce yourself, and give your title. If you get a person on the phone who sounds irritated and can't talk at the moment, say "Okay, no problem. Is there a good time for me to call back and talk for 5-10 minutes?" If they say they don't know, then don't be pushy. It's no problem; thank them for making a difference and let them know you will try back another time.
2. Ask, "Did you receive the letter I mailed last week?" / "Have you had a chance to read the letter?" If he/she has not received the letter, then explain the purpose of the call.
3. Explain again the reason for your new role at ORG NAME.
4. Reiterate that you are to be their primary point of contact.
5. "Do you mind if I ask you a couple quick questions, that will take five minutes, so we can better serve you?"

   Note: you may be fortunate to get to question 6 in the first call. More than likely, the following will serve as great follow-up questions for subsequent calls or visits. Adapt your questions to the time a donor seems open to giving you and prioritize them making sure you ask the most important questions first...
6. You have really helped the POPULATION YOUR ORG SERVES for (Number of years); I am very interested to know what motivated you to become a donor to ORG NAME."
7. "Do you know what your money has helped make happen?" List some things or tell a very short story.
8. "Are there any areas we serve that particularly interest you?"
9. You want to find out their communication preference. You may see that an email address is missing from their records, so you can ask if they would be willing to give you their address, making it clear that that email is not going to be used for direct marketing. You can also find out how they prefer to be communicated with by asking, "If I need to get a hold of you, do you prefer I do that via email or phone?"
10. "How familiar are you with ORG NAME's programs, services and facilities in this area?"
11. "Do you have any concerns or questions that you would like answered?"

    NOTE: *If the conversation is going well and the donor is open to conversation, move on to the next questions. If not, do not push with these questions on the first call.*

12. “Have you ever visited any of our facilities? Would you be interested in visiting? If so, which programs/locations?”

13. “Have you ever volunteered? Would you be interested in volunteering? If so, for what?”

14. “I would really like the opportunity to have a brief, 15-20 minute visit with you (be sure to clearly define the time) so I can better understand how to serve you in our communications. Could we arrange a visit?”

    Note: Just because they say no the first time you ask does not mean they will always say no. Many donors say yes after three or six months of communication and trust building. If you get a donor who is adamant they don’t want a visit, find other ways to get to know them and connect. Also, ask for a visit when you’ll be in their area.

15. Have some meeting dates and times ready to suggest.

In many cases, you will need to call the donors several times before you reach them. Call every three days or so, and vary the times in your efforts to reach them. Use your best judgment regarding when to leave and not leave a message. You want to try to reach them, but you also don’t want to be annoyingly persistent.

Here are a few more notes on calling...

As you begin to connect with donors on the caseload, here are some additional instructions to help improve your communication:

- **Think of the donor as a friend, and communicate with him in that manner.** If you are dealing with someone you really like, be intuitive and go with the flow – don’t be formulaic. Go with that style.
- **Pay attention to what is happening in the relationship – the clues, etc. – so that you know what to do next.** Don’t think in terms of the “shoulds” of major gift fundraising, even things you have learned. You are now in a warm, friendly relationship. Listen to the cadence of that relationship. Look for the logical next point of what the donor is saying to you. Analyze: if they say this, then the next logical step is that. Spend more time listening for clues and entry points than running a formula through your head.
- **Ask questions not only to get information, but to lead the conversation toward gaining a commitment. Questions like:**
    - So what is it that interests you about [stated interest]?
    - Has that interest led you to take any actions to deal with the problem?
    - What do you think can be done to solve the problem?

- **Ask open-ended questions** – those that require an answer other than "yes" or "no."
- **If you are consistently not able to reach the donor by phone, try sending her a follow-up note or email**, letting her know what time you will call: "I'm FIRST NAME, I'm new and would like to connect with you. I'll be calling you next Tuesday between 2-4 pm. Look forward to talking then!"
- **Reinforce your mission by looking for conversation entry points.** We have a few examples.

Read the donor and grab every window of opportunity to tease out more details from him about his passions and interests:

You ask the donor how he is, and he tells you the heat is just unbearable…

"I know, it is a scorcher out there! My heart goes out the families we serve, some of whom were homeless and living on the streets. Wow, that would be hard. X, you've helped give these families more than a home you've given them hope. Can I set up a short visit to meet you in person? I want to let you know more about these families your gifts support. I want to get to know you too."

"I love you guys, I saw an article…"

"Really, what interested you about it?" Or, "Did you hear about this family we just moved in last week? They never had a home."

"I give to several organizations, and you are one of them. You do so much. I know you will put my gift to good use…"

"Thank you! I am so glad to hear of your confidence in our work and us. Did you know that, in addition to building houses, we also do home repair?"

"I can't do coffee…"

"That is fine; I want to reassure you I am not going to ask you for money. Someday I will, but for now I just wanted to connect with you and let you see my face, because I am going to be your connection to ORGANIZATION. I want to serve your needs."

"I'm new, and you've been so faithful. My job is to meet with our faithful friends and find out what their needs are."

"Our goal is to serve our partners and let you meet the recipients of your generous giving."

Play the "new" card:

"We've been able to serve so many great families thanks to your help. I'm new and I want to learn more about you. Can I set up a short visit with you just to tell you more about the impact your support has had? "

IF (and only if) you feel resistance, you can reassure the donor you are NOT a telemarketer:
"I'm not calling to ask you for money. My sole responsibility is make our donors feel special, informed and communicated with – and I want to do that with you. Can I set up a short visit with you? I'll be your point of contact here, and I'd love to introduce myself in person."

3. Touch Point & Personal Note

A Touch Point is something that you send via mail or email that connects your donor to the impact of her giving in a real way. There are many ways to do this. Some common Touch Points may include an annual report, program update, thank you from program participants, a recipient story with a picture, note from someone helped, and more.

This does not have to be complex, or a multi-page Adobe creation. Simple but impactful is good. A "YMAD" (You Made a Difference) or Impact Statement would work well here.

When researching a donor, note if he has given to any particular program in your organization. Send him a story or update on that program with a personal note from you. This is a way to build connection to your organization and trust with you as his contact.

4. Non-Responder Letter & Survey

Those donors who do not respond in any way to your letter or messages should be contacted again via mail. The following is a draft of a letter that includes a survey and allows them to talk back to you, and provides some follow-up information.

We recommend keeping the mailing to no more than two pages: the cover letter and the survey, which could be one page, double-sided. Further, we recommend using mail merge for all donor information – they will usually take the opportunity to correct or complete their information.

Survey Cover Letter

[Insert Donor Name]
[Insert Address]
[Insert City, Zip]

Dear ________,

I wrote you a letter on [insert date] about the important role you play as a donor in the lives of the needy people we serve every day. I have tried to call you several times but unfortunately have not been able to reach you. The purpose of my call and letter was to find out how we may best serve you. We are also interested in better understanding how you prefer to be communicated with by ORG NAME. Lastly, we are interested to learn why you got involved with ORG NAME in the first place, and what your support interests are.

I know you are busy, and I want to respect your privacy. My only motivation in contacting you is to better understand your needs, so we can make sure you get the right information from us. We do not want to send you information you don't want to receive. Not only does that waste money, it really does not treat you, our valued partner in service, in an honoring way. If I know what you like and don't like in your relationship with ORG NAME, your experience with us will continue to be satisfying and rewarding. That is my goal!

So, would you be so kind to take a moment and complete the enclosed information survey? This will allow me to understand the best way to communicate with you and address any concerns, questions or needs you have. A return self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Thank you for your input, and I look forward to receiving this information. If you would like to talk in person, please feel free to call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Best regards,

FirstName
LastName
TITLE

Full Confidential Survey

ORG NAME values your thoughts and opinions. Please complete this short questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided. We appreciate your support and feedback.

1. What do you think are the most pressing needs in our community?

   o Feeding the hungry
   o Sheltering the homeless
   o Clothing needy children
   o Helping the elderly
   o Caring for abuse victims
   o Other (Please write in here): ________________________________

2. How did you first become a donor to ORG NAME?

3. Do you feel enough is being done to help the poor in our community?

   o Enough
   o Good
   o Poor
   o Don't know
   o Other

4. How do you rate the services offered by ORG NAME in our area?

   o Excellent
   o Good
   o Poor
   o Don't know
   o Other

5. What groups of people that ORG NAME serves are you most interested in helping? Check all that apply:

   o Men
   o Women
   o Children
   o Young People
   o Families
   o Seniors

6. Which programs of ORG NAME are you most interested in supporting? Check all that apply:

   o Christmas programs
   o Sheltering the homeless.
   o Feeding the hungry.
   o Job training.
   o Alcohol and drug addiction recovery.
   o Building strong families.
   o Youth recreation, counseling and assistance.
   o Providing clothing for the underprivileged.
   o Helping victims of all kinds of abuse.
   o Other:

7. I am interested in learning how I might volunteer with a ORG NAME program. Please call me at: ____________________________

8. I would like to visit a program or tour a ORG NAME facility and/or bring a group to visit. Please call me at: ______________________________

9. I prefer that you communicate with me by the following methods: (you may check as many as you want)

   o Mail
   o Phone – please use this number: ___________________________
   o Email – please use this email address: _______________________
   o Personal visit
   o Other – please describe: ___________________________

10. Do you have any other comments or requests you would like to share with us? Or are there any ways we can be of service to you. Please let me know: [Name & contact info]

Short Confidential Survey

We value your thoughts and opinions. Please complete this short survey and return it in the envelope provided. We appreciate your support.

What do you think are the most pressing needs in our community?

___ Providing quality programs for children and families year-round
___ Helping people who are unemployed
___ Helping abused kids in your community
___ Caring for the Poor (housing, feeding programs, etc.)
___ Other: ______________________________________

What areas of ORGANIZATION interest you? Please check all that apply.

___ Homeless Shelters
___ Youth Programs
___ Family Services
___ Human Trafficking Intervention
___ Disaster Relief
___ Other: _______________________________________

How would you prefer we communicate with you (check as many as you want)?

___ Mail
___ Phone. Please use this phone number: ________________________
___ Email. Please use this email address: ________________________
___ Personal Visit (Can be at home, coffee shop, business, etc.)
___ Other. Please describe:

Your Name: ____

Address: ____

City: ________________________________ State _______ Zip ___________

E-mail Address: ____

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any aspect of ORGANIZATION and our work, please call me on my direct line, email or write me:

MGO Name
Address
Email
Cell Phone

5. Touch Point

Marketing studies show that it can take an average of seven touches before a consumer will purchase a product. Applying that to the Major Gifts world, we have found that it can take several attempts to connect with donors. Some will become qualified from the initial letter or the follow up phone call. Others will require more contact before they connect with you.

For some top donors that are hard to connect with, we recommend trying one more Touch Point here.

6 & 7. Phone Call & Final Letter

We suggest two final attempts to try to reach the caseload pool donor.

First, attempt another call to follow up on the survey. This call will be similar to the Introductory Phone call, in which you'll be asking if the survey has been received, and initiating a conversation.

Finally, it makes sense to send non-responders a hand-written note, explaining that you appreciate the donor's support and would like to gather information about his communication preferences. Saying something like, "Having not heard from you, I will continue to communicate with you every so often, so that you have access to information about how your giving is making a difference in the lives of those we serve."

Veritus Group is a full-service mid-level, major gift and planned giving consulting agency serving non-profits all over the world. We help create, build and manage major gift, mid-level giving and planned gift programs by combining donor-centered strategy with solid management that is focused on accountability.

You can reach us on the Web at **www.veritusgroup.com** or by contacting Amy Chapman at (215) 514-0600 or achapman@veritusgroup.com.

More resources like these are available for free at **www.veritusgroup.com**