

Four Characteristics of Senior Givers

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By *Abny Santicola*, editor, FundRaising Success Advisor

Most nonprofit development professionals know that older donors like to give via direct mail. But what are some other traits of this massive donor demographic?

In a recent conversation, Harvey McKinnon, president of Harvey McKinnon Associates, a donor-relationship consultancy based out of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, shared some of the other giving nuances common to senior donors.

1) Seniors are prime candidates for monthly giving. Electronic pledge programs where people give, say, \$25 a month to a charity are an easy sell to older donors, McKinnon says. "Seniors are quite up for joining these programs because, as you can imagine, if they have an automatic withdrawal coming from their bank account or are automatically making a pledge on their credit card, that's convenient for them. ... We've seen significant growth of older people joining these programs."

2) They respond well to premiums that honor or pay tribute to others. McKinnon says that he worked with one client on a Mother's Day mailing that included a stylized rose. Recipients were asked to write their name on one side of the rose and the name of a woman they'd like to honor on the other side, and mail the rose in with their donation. "It's more than just a gift, it's something where they can pay tribute to somebody they love," McKinnon says. Seniors, he adds, recognize the power of paying tribute to people in ways that younger people don't.

3) They give primarily to health care, international development and environmental causes. One client McKinnon works with, the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Foundation, which works to save the Vancouver Island Marmot from extinction, has a house file comprised of about 80 percent seniors. Of that 80 percent, 80 percent are women.

McKinnon says that as far as environmental causes go, seniors are more apt to respond to causes that are animal related or that focus on wildlife conservation, as opposed to action-oriented, activist missions. And seniors' support of health-care organizations is intuitive, he adds. "That makes sense because they are the most likely to be accessing cancer organization services or hospitals, and their peers are the ones that are most likely to have gone to the hospital and needed to have their lives saved."

4) Older donors respond more to emotional pleas than action-oriented language. For the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Foundation, McKinnon says, an image that works on the outer of its direct mail is a picture of a Vancouver Island Marmot with a word bubble that says, "Will you please help me." "That's something that's more likely to appeal to the senior, I think, than somebody who's a 40-year-old activist that wants pollution shut down in a factory nearby," he adds.

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