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# How to Accelerate Your Fundraising Based on The Four Types of Giving



**Brian Gawor, CFRE**  
giving geek and donor enthusiast



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Fundraising isn't just about *asking everyone to give*. It's about listening, to understand where each donor is in their journey with your cause. Every potential philanthropist comes to the giving experience as a human being with unique personal values and perspectives.

Unfortunately, we don't always focus on that truth as fundraisers. We often just "send everything to everyone," failing to recognize that donors are all at different places. That's just bad strategy, and it can kill your results, ROI and more importantly, your relationships. The "one fits all" approach is wasteful, inefficient, and frankly kind of sucks for most donors.

**Fundraisers: we have to remember that fundraising is only sort of about money: it's mostly about attention and purpose.** As time goes by, donors grow grow in their attention, learn more about our impact, and make your organization part of their lifestyle. We often call this process "cause adoption."

To raise more money and maximize the joy of giving, we have do do a better job meeting donors where they are today in their cause adoption. For example: first-time donors might not even know your impact. Maybe a friend just bugged them to give. Long-term donors are probably looking for ways to be more involved, not to just receive the giving "pitch" over and over again. And your big prospects – transformative donors – are best engaged through listening. **Too often, we provide the wrong engagement, and the wrong behavioral incentives, not meeting up with where a donor is today.**

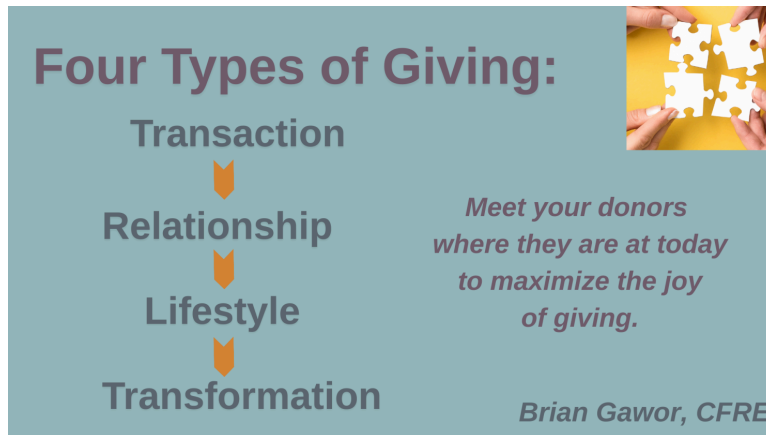
*Disclaimer: what follows is a massive over-simplification of decades of social psychology, behavioral economics and philanthropic motivation research. If you want to talk more about it, just drop me a line. You know I'm ready to geek out in depth, any time.*

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progression, moving donors from small, one-time contributions to major, mission-shaping gifts. We rarely see donors making big, transformative gifts without going through some of the other stages first. They might even do this silently, without our notice, but the old adage: "big gifts don't grow on trees" really holds true as I've looked at millions of records of donor behavior prior to big gifts.

**Success in fundraising at scale mostly comes down to smart engagement, and behavioral incentives that move donors forward along this continuum.** By using targeted strategies at each stage of cause adoption, you can accelerate a donor's connection to your organization's mission. Let's explore each type of giving and the key tactics to foster deeper donor engagement for each level.



Donors are all at different places in their generosity journey with their cause: be sure your fundraising strategy gives them opportunities for them to connect from where they are today.

### Transactional Giving

Transactional giving is the entry point for many donors. These are typically one-time gifts motivated by an immediate need, an emergency, or a direct ask. Donors in this category might give through a crowdfunding campaign, a donation page, or even as part of a checkout process. This giving is quick, and while generous, usually not super thoughtful.

**Key Tactics:**

- **Reduce Barriers:** Make the process of giving simple and convenient.
- **Highlight Urgency:** Convey a sense of immediacy and importance for the donation. You might even "manufacture" some urgency with a time-sensitive campaign like crowdfunding or a giving day.
- **Tell Impactful Stories:** Use personal stories to begin connecting the donor to the cause emotionally.

*Donors who have made a quick decision to give probably have little knowledge of your cause, impact, and history. Start serving that up to them immediately after the gift. And to be clear: your number one investment in this stage is to just make giving easy.*

### Relationship Giving

Once donors have given a transactional gift, some will become Relationship givers. Some might even start from this point, because they

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of personal connections or a meaningful interaction.

**Key Tactics:**

- **Showcase Tangible Results:** Regularly update donors on the impact of their contributions.
- **Boost Social Engagement:** Create opportunities for donors to interact with your organization and other supporters. Everything we do socially is more "sticky."
- **Facilitate Future Involvement:** Frame communications in a way that encourages ongoing participation, fostering a sense of community.

*Donors who have begun to adopt your cause need nurturing, and opportunities to engage further. Don't assume they fully get the "why" of your cause, and spend resources educating them, especially with impact-driven stories.*



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4 Types of Giving

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## Lifestyle Giving

Donors who incorporate giving into their lifestyle support your cause consistently over time. These donors reliably contribute monthly or annually, volunteer at events, and may even take on leadership roles within your organization. Those givers who call you and ask: "Am I on the donor list for this year?" and don't want to be left out are a good example of Lifestyle givers.

**Key Tactics:**

- **Recognition Programs:** Offer exclusive benefits or recognition to acknowledge their ongoing support. At this stage of giving, you can also more often use "assumptive" language with donors, communicating that you *know* they are bought into the mission.
- **Engage Volunteers:** Involve these givers in volunteer roles, deepening their connection to your mission. Make sure the volunteer action plans are clear, (volunteers know what they will accomplish) and you provide tools to make volunteering fun and easy.

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*Donors who have made your cause part of their lives will move forward with greater giving when they are treated authentically, transparently, and as part of the team. Treat them with VIP, "behind the curtain" and socially-based engagement. FOMO grows in this group, and it's a massive behavioral incentive with today's donors.*

## Transformative Giving

Transformative donors are those who make substantial, often life-changing gifts to your organization. Their motivations are deeply personal, and their contributions are typically tied to a long-term vision for creating significant change.

**Key Tactics:**

- **Personalized Engagement:** Provide one-on-one, tailored experiences to build stronger relationships with these donors.
- **Communicate Long-term Goals:** Share the broader vision of your organization to align their values with your mission. Let them into the "inside" of your plans.
- **Discover Their Passion:** Engage in conversation to find the aspects of your mission that resonate most with them, allowing for deeper, more personalized connections.

*Basically, to get big gifts, after building a relationship with donors, ask big questions about meaning and purpose, then "shut up and listen."*

**Fundraising is about more than money.**

**Extrinsic "outside" motivation** → **Intrinsic "inside" motivation**

*Your donors are on a journey. Help them get to a personal motivation and greater cause adoption.*

**Brian Gawor, CFRE**

You're not a bean counter or a salesperson. As a fundraiser, your mission is to grow authentic relationships, meaning, and purpose. If you do that, you'll raise a lot more money, and donors will explode in their joy of giving.

## The Real Fundraising Goal: Moving From Extrinsic to Intrinsic Donor Motivation

While many donors start their giving journey with external motivations—such as responding to a request in the moment, or contributing due to social influence—the goal is to eventually cultivate intrinsic, personal motivation. **When donors feel personally connected to your mission**, they begin to give not because they are asked, but because they are passionate about the cause. This makes giving more "sticky," and bigger.

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transition from giving out of obligation to giving out of a sense of purpose. This shift fosters long-term loyalty and increases the likelihood of major/planned gifts, making them true partners in your mission.

*Fundraising isn't just about money. It's about bringing donors along into a personal journey of purpose.*

## Meet your donors where they are today, and you'll have bigger fundraising success

Understanding and applying strategies based on the four types of giving: Transactional, Relationship, Lifestyle, and Transformative helps you to accelerate donor cause adoption and deepen engagement.

The key to fundraising success is moving donors from an outside motivation to true, personal adoption. That's where the attention, purpose and joy of giving really blossoms. When donors feel that their giving is aligned with their *personal* values and goals, they are more likely to make transformational contributions that not only support your organization but also help to shape its future.

Think critically about where your donors are today, and apply the best content, motivation and behavioral incentives to move them to the next level. Your fundraising success will follow.

*Are you looking for strategies that help you engage donor smartly and to build their engagement, involvement, and buy-in to your cause? Drop me a line, and I'll help you craft a plan personalized to your organization's unique needs. Let's talk soon.*

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**Tim Sarrantonio** · 3rd+ · 5mo ...  
Generosity Experience Design | Empowering nonprofits to build a com...

I've been pushed by the [Institute for Sustainable Philanthropy](#) to examine the line between the lifestyle and transformational giving through the lens of identity. At what point does it shift away from relationships (donor + staff) and into identifying the cause, the organization, and the self (me + we) as the motivator? The answer is both art and science. Good stu ...more

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**Brian Gawor, CFRE** Author · 5mo ...  
giving geek and donor enthusiast

That's the quantum leap, right, Tim? Man we are such dorks.

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**Dana Textoris** · 3rd+ · (edited) 5mo ...  
Helping purpose-powered leaders do MORE with <less> and t...

Brian, I'm helping one of my favorite nonprofits with their year end fundraising campaign right now. This perspective is so usable and I can't wait to share it with them!

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That's awesome- and feel free to connect us all if they want to hear more!

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**Claire Morgan, Ph.D.** · 3rd+ 5mo ...  
 Donor Relations Specialist at Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, Sm...


Great article! I love this: "Fundraisers: we have to remember that fundraising is only sort of about money: it's mostly about attention and purpose. As time goes by, donors grow in their attention, learn more about our impact, and make your organization part of their lifestyle. We often call this process "cause adoption."" ...more

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 **Oliver Araiza** · 3rd+ 2mo ...  
 President at Araiza Revival Ministries, Inc.

Need some help on HOW / Ways to obtain donor data. Questions, Software, ???

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 **Clint Riley, CFRE** · 3rd+ 5mo ...  
 Advancing nonprofit organizations to enrich and sustain communities

This is terrific. I appreciate the clear definitions.

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**Brian Gawor, CFRE**

giving geek and donor enthusiast

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