

Radical

RECURRING GIVING GUIDE

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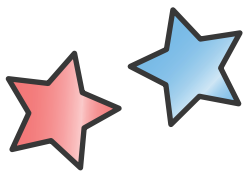


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A Quick Note

By all accounts, giving to nonprofits is increasing. But, though the dollars are there, the number of donors is dropping.

How is that possible?

The answer is that more and more charitable donations are coming from major donors, and fewer and fewer are coming from smaller donations. That's fine for now, but it's not a sustainable model.

See, major donors typically make large gifts only after they've been involved with a nonprofit for five or more years. And, since the industry's donor retention rate hovers around 45.5%, the chances that most nonprofits are retaining potential major donors for 5 years or more are low.

Conversations around how to increase donor retention abound. But one powerful tactic for improving donor retention and identifying potential high-value donors is often overlooked — that tactic is building a great recurring donor program.

Nonprofits love recurring programs for a good reason. They provide a steady stream of predictable revenue. And, in an industry that regularly experiences shifting giving patterns, predictable revenue is unbelievably valuable.

But recurring donors offer much more to nonprofits than recurring revenue. They're a group of loyal donors that have proven their ongoing commitment to your mission. Their lifetime donor value is generally higher than most one-time donors. Their relationship with your nonprofit presents loads of opportunities for upgrading their gifts, involving them in volunteering opportunities, advocating for your nonprofit in their communities, and even potential planned gifts.

It's tempting to enable recurring gifts on your donation form and leave receipting, thank-you notes, and other processes on autopilot. But building a really great recurring giving program that nurtures and expands donors' relationships with your nonprofit sets you up for successes now and in years to come.

This eBook will help you do exactly that.

*Making the Case for
Recurring Giving*

Making the Case for Recurring Giving

As fun as it would be to be able to start a new campaign totally solo, that's not (usually) a realistic option. If you need to get others on board the recurring program train, here's how you can make your case.

For fundraisers

If you've downloaded this eBook, you're probably already interested in building a great recurring giving program. But perhaps your other development staff members aren't as convinced. What can you do to make the case to them?

According to The Nonprofit Recurring Giving Benchmark Study from our friends at NextAfter:

- Recurring donors give 5.4 times more than one-time donors over their lifetime.
- Over the course of a year, a recurring donor will give 42% more than one-time donors.
- Recurring donors are more than 2x more likely to support their favored nonprofit beyond one year.

In their study, Nextafter also discovers that recurring donors feel more of a particular emotion that's a very important part of donor retention — they feel more happiness.

See, donors get a hit of feel-good emotions when they give, whether they've made a one-time donation or a recurring donation. The difference is that, while the happiness that comes with giving tapers off after a one-time donation, that happiness is consistently reinforced. Every time an installment of their recurring gift occurs, they get that little boost of happiness.

This is probably one of the reasons that recurring giving was up 40% from 2016 to 2017. That trend is expected to continue!

For board members and stakeholders

A board's job is to help nonprofits build a strategic plan that will keep it growing and thriving for years. If you need to make a case for starting a recurring program, that's an excellent place to start!

If your board members need to be persuaded to invest time and resources in building a recurring program, here are some facts to add to your case:

- Many fundraising platforms already include recurring donation capabilities. See if your platform offers this!
- Recurring donors represent more lifetime revenue than one-time donors, which means making an investment in a recurring program can see positive ROI.
- Your fundraising platform should include tools that facilitate receipting for recurring donors and reporting tools that will help you monitor the health of your recurring donor base. This is an especially important point if your board members are data-driven or leery about buying new tools.

Make sure to help your board members understand that a recurring program is a long-term investment. Yes, recurring donors are a fantastic resource right off the bat. But they're also an unbelievably valuable group of donors in the long run, too. They're more likely to become major donors, more likely to talk about your nonprofit to others, and more likely to make legacy gifts. You can't afford not to build a recurring program

Where Do I Start?

Where Do I Start?

Any great fundraising campaign takes time, effort, and planning. Recurring programs are no different!

Here are steps you can take to get your recurring program up and running.

If recurring donations aren't enabled on your form, go turn them on

The smallest details are often the easiest to overlook. Go check your online donation form. If you don't have recurring donations enabled, turn 'em on.

If you don't have a platform that accommodates recurring donations, go find one! We're a little biased about which platform we would use, but there are lots out there. Recurring programs are popular, so most online fundraising platforms will have that capability. Before you sign up for anything, make sure the platform allows:

- A variety of different time periods for gifts (monthly, weekly, annually, etc)
- Collection (and retrieval!) of donors' information
- Optional accounts for recurring donors so they can manage their gift
- Alerts when a gift or credit card is expiring or has expired

These abilities will all come in handy over the lifespan of a donor's interactions with your organization.

Once you've enabled recurring donations on your form, you're ready to...

Build a case for (recurring) support

You've probably worked on a case for support before. You want to show donors why they should help your organization instead of another one, and you want to show them why they should help you right away instead of waiting.

Building a case for recurring support takes it a step further. You want to explain to donors why they should help you (instead of spending their money

elsewhere) right now (instead of waiting) by making a recurring gift (instead of a one-time donation).

When you're putting together your appeal for recurring donations, consider elements like:

- Why should a donor give?
- What makes a recurring donation more powerful than a one-time donation?
- Are there any perks of becoming a recurring donor?
- What kind of communications should they expect to receive?
- How will you use their gift?

Your case for recurring support will guide your social posts, emails, letters, and other media targeted at your donors. Get it established right away to ensure your appeals are powerful, pointed, and inspiring.

Spread the word about your recurring gift program

“Build it and they will come” is not a phrase that applies to donation forms. That includes recurring donation forms! Building a base of recurring donors will take work, but the effort is worth it. Now that you've settled on your case for support, here are a couple ways to get your recurring program started.

First, enable recurring donations on your primary donation form — the donation form you've linked to your site's “Donate” button. If your fundraising platform allows you to add some text or an impact statement to your form, include a few (“few” is the operative phrase here) words about the extended impact they can make by setting up a recurring gift.

A powerful way to build a recurring donor base is to invite one-time donors to get involved on a recurring basis. Set up a donation form specifically for recurring events (if your fundraising platform charges extra for donation forms, you can still use your main donation form). After you've thanked your one-time donors and have showed them the impact they've made, invite them to make a recurring gift. You've already showed them that their one-time gift made a difference — establishing how they can make an even bigger difference with a recurring gift is a logical next step.

*Create Meaningful
Donor Experiences*

Create Meaningful Donor Experiences

After you've enabled recurring donations on your forms, it's time to focus on making the process of setting up a recurring gift as pleasant as possible for your donors. We'd love to think that our donors support us regardless of our donation forms. But we also know that the donor's giving experience can make or break their decision to give. Optimize your donor's experience from start to finish to ensure the best results.

Consider how they find you

Donor experience doesn't start on your donation page! It starts when they're first inspired to give to you.

How are your donors finding you? Are they coming from social media channels or email? Are they looking at your website because of another resource you offer there? Are they getting your newsletter?

Once you understand how your donors get to your donation page, you can identify where you can make the case for recurring giving. Spend some time really polishing your case for becoming a recurring donor and tailoring it to your audiences in each channel. Strategies to try include things like:

- Sending a newsletter that spotlights your recurring donors and the impact they made, then inviting others to get involved in the same way.
- Publicly thanking recurring donors on social media and telling others how to join.
- Celebrating milestones your recurring donors achieve and showcasing their impact.

See a pattern? You're showing potential recurring donors that others are involved (that's fantastic social proof!), showing them you value your recurring supporters, and showing them how they can make an impact. Combine those strategies with a great case for support tailored to your audience and you're sure to catch people's attention.

Make your donation form inspiring

No matter how much your potential donors love you and your work, they're less likely to make a gift if you've got a bad donation form.

We won't go into all the particulars of building an optimized donation form (but you can read about it [here](#) and [here](#)). Instead, we'll cover how you can use form design to inspire people to make recurring donations. Here are some simple ways to start:

- On your primary donation form, include a powerful, high-quality photo and brief (think 1-3 sentences) statement about how people who are donating will make a difference in the world. If possible, include an even more brief (think 1 sentence, max) statement near the recurring option that touches on how donors can make the biggest impact by offering ongoing support.
- Consider building a secondary donation form focused solely on your recurring donation program. On this form, focus your content more specifically on recurring donations. This is a great place to emphasize the lasting impact your donors can make with recurring gifts.
- Help your recurring donors visualize how their gift will be used. Include suggested donation amounts, and accompany each suggestion with a short description about how their money will be used. For example, include a suggested amount of \$25 and say something like, "Buy one month of nutritious meals for 2 children" or "Provide 3 bags of soil for our community garden."
- Encourage donors to create accounts when they set up their recurring gift. Don't make account creation required (that's a good way to lose donors!), but you should definitely make it an option! Creating an account allows donors to manage their gifts, payment types, and personal information without having to contact you.

If you want people to set up recurring donations, each element on your donation form must reinforce a donor's decision to give, and setting up their donation should be simple and easy to do.

When a donor finishes setting up a gift, that's just the beginning of their relationship with you. Make a good impression by:

Building a fantastic thank-you page

What better way to make your donors feel awesome about supporting you than building a great thank-you page?

Adding a few simple elements to the thank-you page is an easy way to turn a boring confirmation page into a heartwarming reminder that your donors are changing the world. Make a great first impression on your donors by adding elements like:

- A heartfelt thank-you message
- An impact statement that reinforces those mentioned on the form
- A thank-you image or video, preferably spotlighting your clients or showing donors the people they'll impact
- A brief note that they should look for their receipt, plus future updates about how their gift is being used

Perfecting your donors' experiences before, during, and immediately after the giving process takes a little extra time and effort. But that effort will result in more recurring donations and more engaged donors.

*Make Being a Recurring
Donor a Pleasure, Not a Chore*

Make Being a Recurring Donor a Pleasure, Not a Chore

You know your donors' experience as they discover your organization and set up a recurring donation is important. But do you think much about your donors' experiences after they've set up a recurring donation?

Getting someone engaged enough to make a recurring donation is one thing. Keeping them engaged after they've set up their donation is another. Unless you're careful, making a recurring donation can become more like paying a bill and less like making a difference. Here are some ways to keep it inspiring, not onerous.

Make your receipts exciting

Do you get excited when you get your electric bill in your inbox? How about when you get a reminder that your rent or mortgage is coming due? Have you ever gotten a thrill of anticipation before opening an email confirming you've made a student loan payment?

Now, think about the receipts you have set up for your recurring donors. Are they something that will excite and inspire their recipients? Or are they just another form letter thanking them for making a payment?

If you want donors to be excited about getting your receipts, your receipts need to be exciting. That means they should contain more than a "thank you for your donation" sentence and their transaction details. Flesh out your receipts with elements like:

- A personalized salutation
- A thank-you note that explains your donor's impact
- A picture
- An invitation to follow or "like" a page on your social channels
- A link to your organization's blog
- An invitation to visit your facility or volunteer

Making your receipt engaging, readable, and interactive will delight your donors every time they make a gift instead of boring them. But recurring receipts shouldn't be built once and left alone forever! To keep your donors engaged, be sure you:

Update your receipts regularly

Your electric company probably sends you the same email every time your bill is due. When you pay your bill, you probably get the same receipt every month. That's fine for an electric company — you have to pay them. But it's not fine for recurring receipts.

Getting the same receipt over and over again is boring. If you want to delight donors each time they get a receipt, you need to keep it fresh! Updating your receipt doesn't have to take a ton of time: merely updating images, swapping out an old greeting for a new one, and adding a couple of new links can make a big difference.


Help donors manage their gift

Giving donors the tools they need to manage their recurring gifts can help you raise more money... and save yourself some trouble.

The best way to do this is to encourage them to create an account to manage their details. They can manage their donation amount, payment and billing information, and preferences. Donors can upgrade their gift (we'll get into this more later!), change the bank account or card they use, or update their addresses or phone number. Giving donors a way to manage these details makes them more likely to update their information or renew or upgrade their gift than they would be if you had to do it for them.



Enabling donor accounts makes it easier for donors to manage their gift, but there are still some safeguards you should set in place to help retain your donors.

First, set up a notification for when a recurring donation is about to expire. If someone in your office knows about an expiring gift, they can personally call the donor to ask if they'd be willing to continue their gift. That kind of personal outreach is a powerful donor retention tool!



Set up additional notifications for expiring credit cards and repeated declined transactions. Donors may not remember to update their payment information in their accounts. Keeping an eye out for expired cards (or retired cards!) will help keep donors' gifts from lapsing.

Once you've built out strategies to keep your donors' recurring gifts from becoming boring or run-of-the-mill, it's time to focus on other tools you can use to keep them involved with your nonprofit.



*So I've Started Recruiting
Recurring Donors — Now What?*

So I've Started Recruiting Recurring Donors — Now What?

Recurring donors stick around longer than one-time donors. But they require the same donor retention efforts as other donors — the strategies just look a little different. Now that you offer recurring capabilities, here are some donor retention strategies you can use to ensure your donors stay involved.

Keep donors engaged with personalized content

The last thing you want is for donors to set up a recurring gift and then forget about it. Disengaged donors won't renew their gift when it expires or, worse, forget that they've set up a recurring gift at all. Imagine having to answer a phone call from a donor who's forgotten why you're charging their card every month. No thank you!

The best way to keep those donors engaged is to send them personalized content that's relevant to their status as one of your most loyal donors. All donors appreciate personalized communications; personalized salutations are more effective than generic ones like “Dear friend” or (shudder) “Cherished donor.”

Sending your recurring donors communications that relate specifically to them is an important way to keep them engaged. You don't have to write entirely new content, either! Tweaking the content you send your one-time donors to be applicable especially to recurring donors may take a little extra work, but recurring donors appreciate the extra level of attention. Even something as simple as adding the phrase “As one of our most loyal donors, you've helped _____” in an impact statement makes a difference.

This kind of personalization and relevant content is especially important if you're asking your donors to extend their recurring donation, upgrade their gift size, or donate to a different program or initiative. Acknowledging a recurring donor's ongoing support is an important part of successfully cultivating and expanding their involvement!

Donors want to know their gifts are noticed and appreciated. Adjusting your content to specifically call out recurring donors' ongoing involvement makes them feel like they're an important part of your organization. Which they are!

Add a little exclusivity to the mix

You can take it a step further and create a “club” or special group exclusively for your recurring donors. This is an especially powerful strategy, and its success is due to a deeply-ingrained need to feel significant.

Are you familiar with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs? At the top is self-esteem. People like to feel valued! **Marketers appeal to this motivation** all the time, but it’s useful for nonprofits, too. Consciously, your donors want to make a difference in the world. Subconsciously, they want to be valued. You can appeal to both of those motivations by inviting them to join an exclusive group of like-minded individuals by making a recurring gift. This is an especially effective strategy when you combine it with the great “why” statements you established when you started your recurring program.

Make your recurring donors feel significant by giving them early access to news, event registrations, facility tours, and other goings-on. Your donors will feel important, they’ll stay up-to-date on your organization’s activities, and you’ll keep your most loyal donors engaged and invested in your mission.

Ask for (and apply!) their feedback

Have you ever wondered what your donors think of your organization? Ever wanted to know what kind of news or updates they want to read? Ever wished you could get a donor’s insight into your events or programs?

If you’re looking for donor insights, your recurring donor base is the first place you should look. Asking them for feedback accomplishes three things:

- It gives you the donor insights you need;
- It makes them feel valued; and
- It reinforces the relationship they have with your organization.

After you collect feedback from your recurring donors, make sure you put it into action! Getting great insights from your supporters and ignoring it is worse than never asking at all.

*How Can I Increase My
Recurring Gifts?*

How Can I Increase My Recurring Gifts?

There are two ways to increase recurring gifts: you can attract new recurring donors, and you can encourage existing recurring donors to “upgrade” their gifts to larger or more frequent donations.

You’ve already got the know-how to recruit more recurring donors. Just revisit previous chapters! But how on earth do you go about upgrading your existing recurring donors?

Upgrading your donors is simple, but “simple” doesn’t always translate to “easy.” It requires thought, effort, and finesse, but here’s the basic strategy you’ll use:

Thank your recurring donors

You’ve thanked your donors on your thank-you pages, in receipts, and in other communications. It’s important to thank donors before you ask them to give more (or to give again)! Something as simple as opening your appeal with:

“Thank you for the ongoing support you provide for us. You’re one of our most loyal supporters, and the work you make possible is changing our community for the better every day”

will make an immense impression on your donors. It reminds them that their recurring donation is making a real difference, and it establishes again that you recognize and appreciate the gift they give you on a regular basis.

Don’t be vague with your thanks! You can certainly tell them that their gift makes a difference. But you’ll also want to:

Tell donors what they’ve accomplished

Imagine you receive two appeals from different organizations. One of them reads, “Thank you for your gift! It’s made an immense impact on our community. Will you please consider increasing your gift \$5 each month to make an even bigger impact?”

The other reads, “Thank you for your gift! You fed fun, healthy lunches to 150 hungry school children over the last year. Would you please consider increasing your gift \$5 each month?”

Which is more appealing to you?

The more specific you can be about how you’ve used donors’ money, the more compelling your additional ask will be. Your goal is to show donors that their money is important and to reassure them that you’re using their money wisely. Get them excited about the impact their gift has already made!

Tell them why they should increase their gift

What will increasing their gift accomplish? Is your community facing a new challenge that will require additional funding? Do more people need your services? Why should a donor give you more next month than they did last month?


Go back to those two appeals. The first one ends after, “Will you please consider increasing your gift \$5 each month?” But the second one reads, “Will you please consider increasing your gift \$5 each month? It would help pay for the increased demand for lunches we anticipate in the next school year.”

Which one is more compelling?

Simply asking a donor to increase their gift might work. Asking a donor to increase their gift and showing them how it will make a difference is much more effective. And remember: when you’re writing this appeal, remember that donors will give to people before they’ll give to organizations. When you’re making your case, put the emphasis on the donor and the difference they can make, not on why your organization wants more funding.



Make upgrading a recurring gift as easy as possible

Donating should be easy, and updating a donation should be just as easy. If you ask a donor to upgrade their gift, make the process of upgrading it as easy as possible.



If your donors have created accounts to manage their donations, this will be easy! Just tell them to log into their account and change their donation details. If you work with donors who haven't created an account, give them the name and number of someone at your organization who can help. Make sure the contact is someone at your office who can easily log into your fundraising platform and update a donor's gift preferences.

Good customer service is key when upgrading donors. Make yourself available to help supporters, answer their questions, and make sure they feel amazing about increasing their level of support.

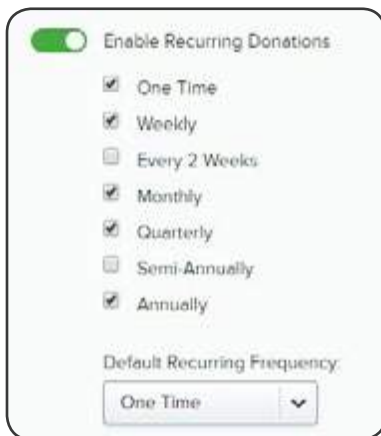


*Building Out Your Recurring
Donation Program*

Building Out Your Recurring Donation Program

So what does putting this into practice look like from a software perspective?

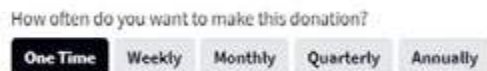
We'll show you how the process works with Qgiv's tools. Depending on the software you use, your forms or platform will look different! If you're a Qgiv client, you can find step-by-step details in the Qgiv help desk. You can also call us any time to ask questions, get ideas, and learn about the tools you have in your fundraising arsenal.



A screenshot of a settings panel for recurring donations. At the top, there is a green toggle switch labeled "Enable Recurring Donations". Below this, there is a list of frequency options, each with a checkbox: "One Time" (checked), "Weekly" (checked), "Every 2 Weeks" (unchecked), "Monthly" (checked), "Quarterly" (checked), "Semi-Annually" (unchecked), and "Annually" (checked). At the bottom, there is a section labeled "Default Recurring Frequency" with a dropdown menu currently set to "One Time".

There are a couple of options. If you'd like to have your one-time and recurring donation options linked to one donation button on your website, simply turn on the recurring donation option on your form and select the frequencies you'd like to make available to donors.

On your form, your donors will see the following:



A screenshot of a form asking "How often do you want to make this donation?". Below the question are five buttons: "One Time", "Weekly", "Monthly", "Quarterly", and "Annually". The "One Time" button is highlighted in black, while the others are light gray.

If you go this route, it's best practice to leave the default frequency set to one-time.

If you have two different donation buttons on your website, one for one-time donations and one for monthly giving, you can set up two separate forms in Qgiv and link them accordingly. This is great for segmentation purposes if you're using one of Qgiv's email integrations! You can easily map one-time and recurring donors to different email lists for targeted messaging.

Go Get Started!

The hardest part of starting a new program or campaign isn't learning the best practices. It's not doing the research. It's not even getting approval to start it. The hardest part of starting a new campaign is finding the time (and will!) to sit down and make it happen.

You've got a grasp on all the fundamentals of building a great recurring program. All that's left now is to make it happen.

Building a recurring program takes time and effort. But it pays off! Stay patient, be deliberate in how you attract and retain donors, and focus on building relationships with your donors. You won't build a huge base of sustaining donors overnight, but the effort will be worth it.

No matter how you manage your online fundraising, you've got the knowledge you need to put together a great program. If you're already using Qgiv, let us know if you need help. Talk to us about your goals, ask us questions, and experiment with the tools you have. We'll be behind you the whole way!

If you're interested in getting started with Qgiv, we've got you covered! Just let us know what you'd like to accomplish! You can contact us online or call us at 888-855-9595 if you want to learn more.

Go get started! We can't wait to see what you accomplish.

Happy fundraising!

The Qgiv Team



www.qgiv.com

