

# RSC ASSOCIATES

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## PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM OUTLINE

*Simple Planned Giving for Big Results*

RSC ASSOCIATES  
RSCrevenue.com

Updated for 2024

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### *Simple Planned Giving for Big Results*

### INTRODUCTION

Nearly every non-profit organization envisions developing a robust and meaningful planned giving program that encourages donors to make a lasting impact. If that's the case, then why do so few non-profits ever accomplish this goal? It's not lack of interest or expertise in planned giving, nor understanding of how a program works.

Most organizations don't sustain their planned giving program for two reasons. First, there's often an 'eroding urgency' when compared to competing daily priorities, with the here-and-now nearly always outweighing the down-the-road. Second, over time, the stamina and continual focus necessary for a robust program nearly always decreases. Planned giving efforts start, are active for a while, then drop off.

The key to an effective planned giving program lies not just in starting one, but in maintaining its activity over months and years. The key for many organizations is in simplifying the planned giving program to a handful of effective, repeatable activities.

At its core, a planned giving program encourages donors to make a legacy gift to your organization, and then further encourages them to inform the organization about the future gift. An efficient program streamlines activity to simultaneously steward current legacy donors, ensuring their gifts are eventually realized, and inspire new prospects to notify you of their interest. This creates a virtuous cycle between identified gifts and a healthy planned giving prospect pipeline.



## WHAT ARE THE BASIC RULES TO A SUCCESSFUL PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM?

1. Keep it Simple: Start with the basics and gradually enhance your planned giving program.
2. Measure in Terms of “# of Donors”: Set goals based on adding a specific number of new planned giving donors each month.
3. Be Consistent: Cultivate a planned giving program with a steady flow of information and opportunities.
4. Have Access to an Expert: Ensure someone on your team understands the nuances of planned giving.
5. Be Conspicuous: Provide multiple opportunities for donors to notify you of their intentions.
6. Celebrate: Show appreciation through recognition, events, and ongoing stewardship for legacy donors.

## LAUNCHING A PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM

1. Start Where You Are: Some organizations have an established planned giving program, while others don't. So, start where you are and build from there.
2. Create or Re-Start Your Planned Giving Society: Do you have an established planned giving society / club? If so, great. If not, develop a club with one simple rule: if the donor tells you that they have made a provision for your organization, then they are automatically in the club. For Wills and Bequests, no written proof is needed, although legal documentation may be required for some gifts, such as a life insurance policy.
3. Define Your Program: What gifts will your organization accept? What planned gift vehicles will you initially use? In other words, define your gift acceptance parameters and how you will administer them. Bequests of cash or property, life insurance policies, and simple retirement plans are each common to most programs.
4. Develop Your Team: Your planned giving team should consist of the CEO, the Development Director and at least 1-2 board members who have some understanding of planned giving. Including a family wealth attorney is often helpful.



5. Develop Your Case: Why should someone make a legacy gift to your organization? What are the top three reasons? What would their support mean for preserving the past? Setting the stage for the future? What would their support mean to the organization? To the Community? Create a simple 2-3 paragraph outline of how your organization will present the purpose and value of planned gifts to your institution.
  
6. Define Your Prospect Base: If you wait until your donors are “old,” you’ve waited too long. Most planned giving decisions are made between ages 55-72, so cultivating the relationships in the preceding years is immensely important. With that in mind, create your prospect list, starting with those who are closest to your organization. Consider as a start (in order of importance):
  - a. current and past board members
  - b. current leadership donors
  - c. long-time subscribers / members
  - d. non-board volunteers
  - e. long-time broad-base donors
  - f. recent donors and less frequently-attending stakeholders
  - g. artists
  
7. Determine Cultivation, Recognition, and Appreciation (Stewardship)  
Opportunities: Develop a list of recognition opportunities. Where can you recognize donors in writing (program books, donor walls, newsletters, webpages, etc.)? How about verbal recognition (board meetings, from the stage, at a special event)? Perform the same exercise with regards to donor appreciation. Hold an annual planned giving society dinner. Spend time with each donor one-on-one at least twice each year. Invite them to annual donor receptions. Pick up the phone and ask for their feedback on a decision that the organization is considering. In other words, continue to build a relationship with the donor, well after the gift commitment is made. You can accomplish most of your planned giving cultivation and stewardship opportunities by adding donors to pre-established organizational opportunities. There’s no need to create much “new” and there’s no reason to develop a large expense budget to accomplish the planned giving “relationship” goals.
  
8. Create a Marketing Plan for Prospect Approach: Keep it simple, but consistent, using both passive and active marketing techniques. Your marketing materials should always reinforce



that your organization welcomes planned gifts and that making one is simple and easy to do.

- a. Passive: Where are the easiest, most simple places to advertise? In the places you recognize donors! Program books and newsletters are all good. You can also include it with your subscriptions / membership materials, annual fund solicitations, and gift acknowledgement letters – these are all great passive, low-cost, and consistent ways to advertise your program. *The result of passive marketing is to help the prospect self-identify so that you can then move into more active, personal follow-up.*
  - b. Active: You must also market your program in active ways, too. Consider 1-2 direct mail letters each year to your top prospects. Also invite a handful of prospects to your planned giving society dinner each year. Make a few personal calls to those who express interest through your passive marketing, and follow-up with them in a prompt, thoughtful way.
9. Be Bold – Ask!: A planned gift opportunity more closely resembles a major gift ask, rather than an annual fund ask, so your approach should be reflective of that idea. Annual giving is often “scheduled,” sometimes based on a general solicitation calendar, and sometimes based on a donor’s anniversary date. Put another way, it is very “organizational needs-paced.” Planned giving, on the other hand, has a different rhythm. It’s usually slower, steadier, and with a longer build-up making it very “donor needs-paced.” However, the *need to ask* remains. How do you do it when the time comes? It’s simple – create a script with this message, *“It’s easy to join our XYZ Planned Giving Society. All you need to do is let us know that you have made some provisions for us in your estate. Depending on the provision, we might ask you to sign a simple, non-binding donor-intent form so that we can recognize you now for your generosity later. Would you do that today?”* There are variations of this ask dependent upon what you know about the donor, the possible legacy gift, etc., but this approach provides a solid outline to get you started.
10. Sustaining the Program: Starting the program is easy, but maintaining it can be difficult. Competing organizational priorities, a slow initial response to your planned giving marketing, and other factors can eventually draw your attention away from the planned giving program. So, how can you avoid losing the momentum you worked so hard to achieve during the program launch? Remember these rules:



- a. Keep your activities simple but consistent – do a little bit every day.
- b. Develop a calendar of activities for marketing – and use it daily.
- c. Keep your planned giving message timely, but never lose the simplicity.
- d. Make planned giving easy for your donors to understand.
- e. Measure your success in terms of “new donors” not “new dollars.”
- f. Add new names into your prospect base at least once each quarter.
- g. Include planned giving donors and prospects in other organizational opportunities so that the program remains top-of-mind.
- h. Ask frequently.

## CONCLUSION

As your organization’s planned giving program grows, you may want to introduce more sophisticated giving opportunities, work with a community foundation or other local resource, or begin to hold learning events for your prospective legacy donors. These are all wonderful activities, but for the initial launch and subsequent build of the program, keep things simple, easy, and repeatable.

For More Information Contact



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## PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM OUTLINE

### *Simple Planned Giving for Big Results – A Checklist for Moving Forward*

A Planned Giving Program is an avenue for donors to notify you that they have made financial legacy provisions for your organization. The program streamlines recognition, benefits, and communication to simultaneously steward current legacy members, ensuring their gifts are eventually realized, and inspire new prospects to notify you of their interest. This creates a virtuous cycle between identified gifts and a healthy planned giving prospect pipeline.

### THREE LINKED FOCUS AREAS:



### PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM TACTICAL CHECKLIST:

#### ***Create or Update Materials:***

- ⇒ Design evergreen Planned Giving (i.e. “Legacy Society”) information and collateral
- ⇒ Update website “introduction” to your program
- ⇒ Feature Legacy Society information and donor listing in organizational publications
- ⇒ Consider other opportunities to “drip” planned giving: checkbox on pledge / membership forms, P.S. on acknowledgment letters, newsletters, membership materials, etc.
- ⇒ Consider 1-2 direct mail letters per year targeting top planned giving prospects: current and past board, long-time patrons (active 10+ years), recent leadership donors, long-time broad-base members (any level of gift for 10+ years), non-board volunteers, etc.



***Devise a Recognition Plan:***

- ⇒ Create a process for updating the Legacy Society member listing (living and passed) as new gifts are identified
- ⇒ Consider 1-2 meaningful opportunities to steward Legacy Society members per year, such as a Legacy luncheon and / or invitations to other exclusive donor events or sneak peeks
- ⇒ Create a communications plan to share 1-2 planned giving stories per year, such as feature in playbill / newsletter, e-blast, or press release

***Ensure Organizational Processes & Policies are Planned-Giving-Friendly:***

- ⇒ Do you have a response plan for when a donor says they're interested in planned giving? Who will reach out? What information / materials will they share?
- ⇒ Do you have financial or legal advisors to whom you can refer donors if they don't have their own?
- ⇒ Is it clear what types of planned gifts you'll accept?
- ⇒ Do you have simple forms for donors to share their intentions that prompt them to share additional documentation?

As you put Planned Giving information and materials together for your organization, please refer back to this checklist and RSC's planned giving outline to continue refining your efforts.

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