

# **Top 8 Things to Think About Before You Start a Planned Giving Program**

By: Joanne Fritz  
(Reprinted from About.com)

Every nonprofit wants to raise funds...fast. A planned giving program is not a fast project. It takes time to construct and even more time to realize results. Nevertheless, a nonprofit that has succeeded in drawing other kinds of donations should think about putting a planned giving program into place.

Here are some things to think about before you take that step.

## **1) Understand what planned giving is and what it does for donors.**

Donors are altruistic to be sure, but they are also motivated by a desire to achieve a little bit of immortality. No other form of giving achieves that better than a planned gift that will memorialize them after death.

Your organization can become the vehicle through which people, otherwise ordinary in every way, can make a lasting mark through a gift that leaves the world a better place.

## **2) Make sure that your organization is around when a donor's last wishes are read.**

Saying so won't make it so. You must demonstrate to potential donors that your organization has staying power and that you will be able to put the donor's wishes into play. If your organizational purpose is time-limited, don't even consider a planned giving program.

## **3) Consider your organization's mission, goals, and activities.**

Are they big enough and important enough to enable a donor to leave a lasting legacy? Donors envision leaving something permanent, such as a park, a building, or a scholarship fund. Can you provide that kind of lasting memorial?

## **4) Can your organization articulate how planned gifts will be spent?**

You must think this through before talking to donors about leaving their money to you. Donors don't want to leave their estates to your operating fund. They want to see them invested for the long term in such significant items as a building fund or an endowment. Having such possibilities available will reassure donors that you will not spend their gift carelessly.

## **5) Can you offer meaningful recognition opportunities for your donors?**

Although not all donors will want to be publicly recognized, many will. Can you offer "naming" opportunities (a building, monument, land, scholarship) that will carry the donor's name into perpetuity?

**6) Does your organization command community respect and stature in its field?**

Donors want to be affiliated with "pillars of the community." They trust such organizations and institutions to use their gifts wisely even when they are no longer around to monitor their actions.

**7) Have you done your homework?**

To prepare for a planned giving initiative, you must educate everyone in the organization including staff and board members so that they both understand and support what you are doing. They must be able to go forth confidently, and competently, to promote your giving opportunities to prospective donors.

**8) How strong is your financial management?**

You will need a robust financial management system run by experts in order to execute your program competently.

Start with simple inheritance gifts and build toward more complicated instruments. Enlist a good consultant and set up relationships with solid financial institutions.

Planned giving is not the first thing that should be on your agenda if you are a new organization. Give it time, fulfill your mission, and establish your systems first.