

# How to Use a Giving Day to Strengthen Your Annual Giving Strategy

A successful day of giving makes the news: the [2019 Purdue Day of Giving](#) brought in a record \$41 million in 24 hours. When a high-profile giving day smashes participation and dollar goals, annual giving teams across the country double down on strategies to ensure their own success.

Even if your success doesn't make national news headlines, you can execute a great giving day that propels your annual giving program forward. While donors might think that a giving day is just one day, the most effective annual giving shops treat a day of giving as a midpoint in a larger strategy to acquire and steward new donors. Here's how to lay the groundwork for a successful event and then use the momentum to strengthen your annual giving program:

## Before the Campaign

### Potential Pitfall:

You have a record-breaking day of giving, but it negatively impacts your other campaigns and leaves you behind pace.

### Solution:

Pick the right moment to begin your outreach so it doesn't distract from other annual giving initiatives. Adjust your goals as needed.

Sending direct marketing pieces or starting your phone calls too early will draw attention away from your other fundraising activities. Your donors will hold out in anticipation for giving day when they are "supposed to donate." While you do need some time to generate buzz, it's best to design giving day marketing to complement, not supplant your existing fundraising efforts.

The same can be said for goal setting. Very large giving day goals can take away from the totals of other campaigns throughout the year. If you have an out-sized goal for giving day, be sure to adjust your other goals to reflect your increased focus.

### Opportunity 1:

Before your giving day, set aside resources to develop a matching donor program. Mid-level to major donors should be approached before campaign day to sponsor matching gifts. The goal is to increase contributions among mid-level to major gift-level donors who may have consistent, but plateaued giving totals. By including them in the early phases of a giving day, they will feel invested in your strategy. Doing this legwork early helps you build a great base of support and is a method to create excitement on the big day.

### Opportunity 2:

Blackbaud data suggests that the average giving day donor is 54 years old—the same average age of annual giving donors overall.\*

You're missing the mark if you're structuring your day of giving to appeal predominantly to younger demographics. Tailor your giving day messaging for the middle-aged alumni who are already some of your strongest annual fund donors. Be sure to connect nostalgia and fun social sharing activities with messaging that demonstrates the impact of their gift on students today. With the right messaging, you'll win big with this demographic.

## Day of the Campaign

### Potential Pitfall:

The team, or your fundraising infrastructure, doesn't have the capability to process the unusually high giving day gift volume.

### Solution:

Before you plan your giving day, do a quick audit of your team's and your technology's capacity. This will help you create an achievable goal for your team. If your goal is larger than what your team can process quickly, have a plan for promotional and stewardship language that is not dependent on announcing totals. Regardless of your capacity, it's a good idea to have a backup plan for gift processing in case something goes wrong or your team can't key in gifts fast enough.

### Opportunity 1:

Stretch your team's capacity by using volunteers to pre-ask for your giving day. By getting donations in sooner, you take some of the load off of the campaign day.

### Opportunity 2:

Who said unruly participation rates were a problem? In fact, large giving day participation goals are often more attainable than large donation totals because this group of donors tends to make smaller contributions. We found that newly acquired donors gave an average of \$49 on giving days compared to the average gift size of \$208 through other annual giving initiatives.\* Renewed and retained donors were also making substantially smaller gifts on giving day. Use a giving day to engage and delight a broad group of donors and meet your annual participation goals. With a strong stewardship program in place, you'll be seeing many of these donors again.

## After the Campaign

### Potential Pitfall:

Thanking your donors for a great day, but unintentionally letting them off the hook for future donations.

### Solution:

You've just had an enormous outpouring of enthusiasm and support—maybe even a record number of donor participants. Now is the opportunity to do everything you can to steward these donors. Donors need to understand that they didn't just participate in an event—they funded the library, or a scholarship, or an athletic team. Send them a thank you note and use this touchpoint to educate and involve them in your mission. Your communication should be a springboard to a future relationship, rather than the closing of a past transaction.

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**54**  
years old



### Opportunity 1:

Adopt a process from direct marketing called the “drip campaign.” After their donations, your constituents should be added to a group of people who receive periodic communications from you. These updates are not an opportunity to make an ask, but rather a time to share. Newsletters, student scholarship stories, project updates, campus news and event invitations could all be part of the campaign. When it comes time to make another ask, these prior donors have been kept in the loop and may be ready to reach into their pockets once again.

### Opportunity 2:

Go bold with larger asks. Even though giving day donors tend to give smaller gifts, our research shows that they are more likely than other annual fund donors to upgrade the value of subsequent gifts. Donors who experience good stewardship and understand their value to your institution are often willing to increase their support.

## What to Remember

Giving days are an amazing whirlwind of excitement and opportunity. Solid planning before the event will make the big day go off without a hitch. Keep the momentum alive after the event by planning intentional stewardship opportunities. With the right activity, a giving day is a chance for your annual giving program to gain energized, committed donors.

Developing your giving day strategy isn't an easy task. **[Learn the steps Brown University took to raise \\$3.5 million in 24 hours.](#)**

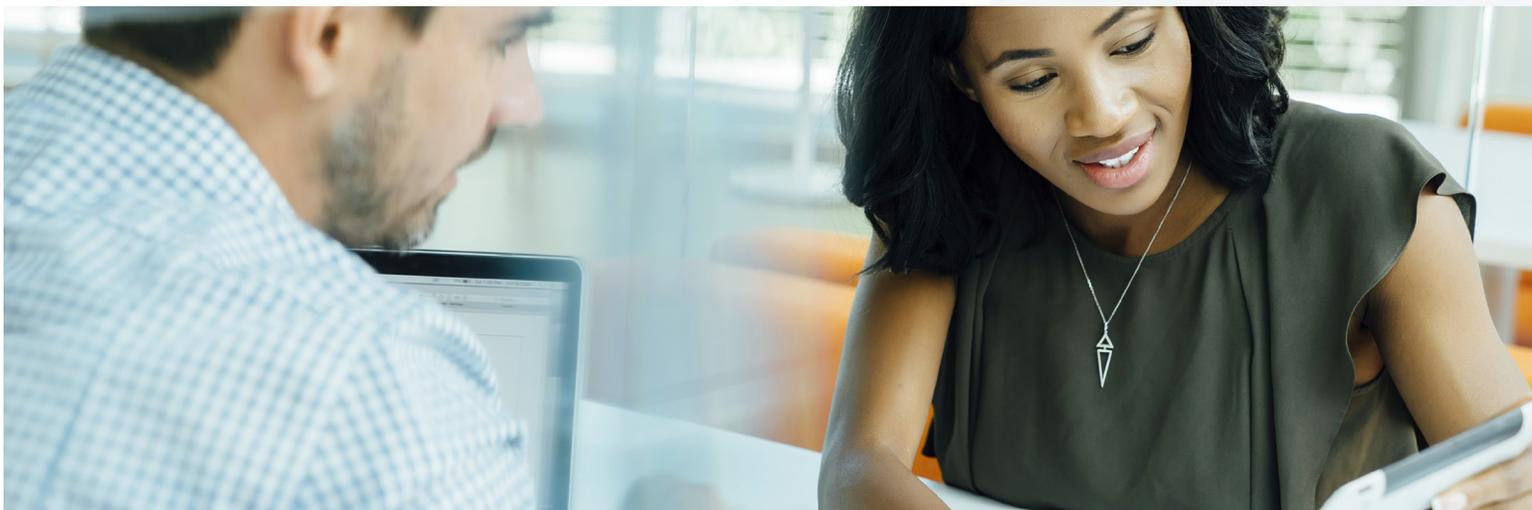
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\*Research: Reeher, Powered by Blackbaud  
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### About Blackbaud

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