

Donor Relations and Stewardship Defined

Donor relations is the comprehensive effort of any nonprofit that seeks philanthropic support to ensure that donors experience high-quality interactions with the organization that foster long-term engagement and investment. This effort is commonly thought to have four elements—*gift acceptance and management, acknowledgement, donor recognition*, including events, and *reporting*—that together support the acquisition and retention of donors.

Among the customary donor-focused tools used by donor relations professionals are tax receipts, acknowledgement letters, giving societies or gift clubs, honor rolls, donor walls, named space signage, donor profiles appearing in print publications and online, press releases and paid advertising, cultivation and recognition events, awards, mementos and gifts, volunteer engagement opportunities, reports of philanthropic impact, and donor visits.

It is increasingly common for the terms donor relations and *stewardship* to be used interchangeably. The latter, however, has traditionally referred to the carrying out of the organization's fiduciary duty to the donor to use the gift as the donor intended. In this context, the elements of gift acceptance and management, and reporting, are usually most closely associated with stewardship and, therefore, stewardship is generally considered a subset of donor relations.