Best Practices: Reporting

I. Stewardship

Definition: Stewardship, as it relates to fundraising and the management of charitable institutions, is the act of acknowledging and recognizing individuals or organizations for any philanthropic gesture, including both charitable gifts and volunteer activities. Stewardship actions are most commonly viewed as reactive, initiated by a specific gift transaction or volunteer activity. However, systemic stewardship is proactive in nature, designed to clarify donor expectations, and begins with organization-wide understanding of the proper and accepted practices related to handling philanthropic gestures. For purposes of this discussion, we will focus on the stewardship of charitable gifts and donors only.

Topics:

1. Meet all legal obligations, including those obligations made through handshakes, original agreements, other legally binding circumstances or documentation. Ensure promises made to donors are both legal and sustainable for the entire of length of the obligation.
2. Clarify expectations before a gift is accepted.
3. Stewardship is customer service.
    1. External customer service discussion
    2. Internal customer service discussion
4. Involve and/or inform front line fundraisers/development staff as needed in actions that will impact their assigned donors. Include development staff in decision-making process as appropriate.
5. Determine who is to receive stewardship.
    1. Discussion of criteria for determining who receives stewardship (gift size, familial association, or other)
    2. Respect the donor's wishes regarding stewardship (anonymous gifts, other factors in making exceptions to stewardship processes)
6. Giving societies as part of stewardship plan
7. Donor recognition as part of stewardship plan
8. Individual stewardship plans
9. Ensure that gifts go where they should and that they are used by the institution as they should (i.e. they are spent.) Depending upon structure of institution, this may be a simple matter of reports and follow up or could be a complex program at larger institutions with custom reports, accessible files, annual impact information requests, etc.
10. The gift cycle and how it relates to stewardship.
    1. Cycle from gift agreement to gift set-up to tracking and reporting
    2. When stewardship should begin/continue/end

11. List of typical types of stewardship, such as events, reports, giving societies, donor recognition, media releases, volunteer opportunities, etc.

II. Donor Reporting

Definition: Reports to donors are generally considered to be one aspect of the umbrella work of "Stewardship." While most commonly the result of gift transactions, reports can be initiated by any number of situations, including accepting gifts, family relationships, cultivation strategies, volunteer activities, or serving other philanthropic needs or goals of the organization.

1. Reporting must serve needs of both donors and institution. Preparing the reports can serve as a check and balance system to ensure that the institution is using the gift as was originally promised to the donor, and providing financial and impact reports provides an opportunity to build trust with the donor.
2. The data cycle/workflow of reporting includes the following elements: properly recording gifts, acknowledging the donor according to established processes, ensuring the appropriate use of gifts, communicating both the financial data and programmatic impact of the gift to the appropriate parties, and deciding when and how the reporting cycle should end.
3. Financial data should be clear, accurate, and reflect institutional messaging, providing information that reflects and adheres to audited financial data.
4. Determine regular schedule for reporting/adhere to required scheduling (such as a schedule imposed by granting agencies or a schedule detailed in a gift agreement).
    1. Ensuring that fund administrators are aware of this schedule ahead of time often helps ensure that they can provide this information quickly and accurately.
5. The following are common types of data that can be reported to donors.
    1. financial data
    2. impact data
    3. recipient information
    4. thank you notes
6. Reports must comply with institutional policies and applicable federal privacy/other regulations (such as HIPPAA/FERPA).
7. Communicate reporting needs and schedules clearly to institution.
8. The following are common formats or components of reports.
    1. newsletters
    2. webpages
    3. financial fund report
    4. granting agency forms
    5. photographic records
    6. audio and visual recordings
    7. communications from recipients
    8. programmatic data
    9. study results
    10. newspaper or journal articles, or press releases
    11. annual reports
9. Donor Reporting staff has the right to request access to all necessary data. Data management tools and resources will vary by institution.

Assumptions:

1. Issues are drafted to reflect/account for both endowed and non-endowed (i.e., project, construction, etc.) funds.
2. Recommendations must accommodate a range of sizes, structures, and budgets of charitable organizations, with recommendations "scaled" as needed to reflect the minimum best practice to strive toward.
3. *We recognize that recommendations likely will impact both behind-the-scenes organizational work and front line donor communications.
4. Donor reporting exists to meet the needs of the donor and of the organization. Donors will assume that reports they receive represent the beliefs and opinions of the institution and its employees. Therefore, all information reported to donors should reflect approved institutional messaging.
5. Each issue is addressed from the point of view as stated in the definition. We recognize that other definitions of topics may exist but have chosen this definition for the purposes of recommending best practices.
6. All donor entities, individual as well as granting agencies, sponsors, corporations and foundations, etc., will be considered in these recommendations. Donor entities will be referred to as "donors," and references to a particular type of donor (such as individual) will be identified in the text.
7. Best practices will usually recommend 'end results' in terms of products or processes that stewardship offices should strive to achieve or implement. The ways in which offices choose to get to these end results - their "tasks" - depends upon their staffing and structures.
8. Sample documents will be provided where necessary to clearly illustrate a recommendation. These samples will not be exhaustive in their scope.
9. *Issues and recommendations will emphasize that the work of donor relations revolves around the ethical and moral obligation we have to accurately represent the needs of both donors and institutions.
10. *Donor Relations staff has a duty to keep accurate records that are accessible to fundraisers as well as other administrators (for gift agreements, business managers, financial offices, etc.)
11. For purposes of these recommendations, Stewardship and Donor Reports are seen as part of the customer service/fulfillment piece of the gift cycle.
12. Gift Cycle: 1. Donor makes gift, 2. Institution records gift and directs gift to appropriate area within the organization, 3. Institution sends receipt/acknowledgment for gift, 4. Institution uses gift, 5. Donor Relations processes provide ongoing customer service/ensure fulfillment of promises made related to gift as needed
13. *Donor Relations staff has a duty to consider consequences and maintainability/sustainability/practicality of promises made to donor, and to inform fundraisers and development staff of potential outcomes of promises made to donors. Where possible, these issues should be communicated to development staff before such promises are made. Every effort should be made to keep promises of stewardship or donor relations simple and clear.

** These items are candidates for the overall project introduction or overarching assumptions for the work of all committees.*