

Family Issues in Planned Giving

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When you help arrange a planned gift, you need to pay close attention to your donor's family relationships. An ounce of prevention can save you a ton of trouble. You will do a much better job as a gift planner if you take the time to understand your donor's family.

Get this information while you are cultivating relationships with prospective donors. Ask each donor about his or her family. This helps build rapport on your first visit. People love talking about their families, and they appreciate your interest. Simply by asking, you can learn all about your donor's family.

The most important family member is the spouse. Husbands often take the initiative to arrange a planned gift, yet most wives outlive them. This is why you need to build a strong relationship with both spouses. If your donor's surviving widow ever feels neglected by your organization, you may very well lose the gift to her favorite cause.

Next are the children. With today's longer life expectancy, more and more parents are living long enough to see their own children retire. They may no longer feel a such pressing need to leave their children everything, especially when the children have been successful. Understanding how parents feel about their grown children can open up opportunities for large estate gifts, even from people who have children.

By all means, insist that each donor discuss the gift plan with his or her children. Even if you hear that "it is none of their business," be persistent. Otherwise, you may lose the gift. If the gift comes a big surprise to the children after Mom and Dad have passed away, they may assume that you took advantage of Mom (or Dad) in their frail old age. Suspicions of undue influence can cause legal challenges and put the gift at risk.

On the other hand, if Mom (or Dad) had discussed the gift with the children, at least they would know their parent's decision, even they did not agree with it. They will be much less likely to challenge a the gift, if they know about it ahead of time.

Of course, if your donor has no close relatives, that is an opportunity to ask for a large planned gift. Many people automatically leave everything to their family members, even if those relatives are distant. When we remind them that they can leave their assets to charity, instead of distant relatives, they often embrace the idea of a large estate gift.

Finally, when you receive an estate gift, thank the surviving family members. This is an opportunity to build relationships with the next generation. They may very well be interested in participating in whatever Mom or Dad supported. Make sure you include them in your donor recognition activities, and keep them well-informed about how the gift has helped carry out the mission. This is especially important when Mom or Dad had established a named endowment, as they may develop an interest in adding to it.

Pay attention to your donor's family, and you will be successful.

For more tips on successful planned gift development, visit our website: **www.pgcoach.com**



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