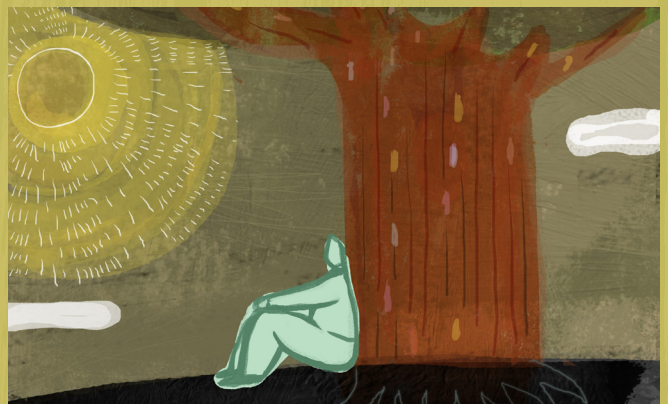


THEATER OF GENEROSITY TOOL #6

DONOR EXPERIENCES

This tool describes creative
DONOR EXPERIENCES.



Our highest human desire is to make a difference—to be valued, to matter. After our basic survival needs are met, we seek meaning and contribution. So it is a particular irony that donors who focus their life energies on making a difference in the lives of others so often wonder about their impact. Only a small portion of the potential euphoria they could experience is ever realized.

Perhaps nowhere should experience design be as inspired as in philanthropy. Yet it frequently falls short. Much of what donors receive from different organizations is similarly bland and disappears into the background. Formulaic letters of thanks, standard communications, and recognitions rarely reach the threshold of being highly memorable, let alone transforming.

The space is open to do something profoundly different—something that awakens dreams and imagination, something surprising and fresh.

REVERSE THE **RATIO**

Donors typically hear from us primarily when we're asking for money. It's fatiguing. What they really want to know is what difference are their gifts making? What life was changed or saved today as a result of gift investments they made last year or five years ago?

To be perceived differently, we must be different. Consider what would happen if you set out to genuinely and creatively communicate gratitude and impact six or seven times, or even a dozen, for every time you ask.

Then think about how far you are willing to go to create experiences of awe and surprise. Are you willing to do something really unusual? Something you've never tried, and the donor has likely never seen? Are you willing to design something outrageous that will be unforgettable in the life of a donor? And are you aiming for "thanks" or "wow"?

The hard truth is that many foundations relate to donors as ATMs—thinking way too much about getting the next gift and way too little about how the gift becomes healing and transforming for the giver as well as the organization.



EXTEND THE INVITATION

People interpret what happens around narratives. If you tell a donor what you are doing as you begin launching unusual experiences, why you are doing this, and what you hope it will mean to them, they have a context—and an anticipation of something extraordinary. In all likelihood, your donors will never have had an organization talk about the kind of experience they want to create for them as givers.

Tell them you want to create something different and that you know donors want more powerful connection to the places where they make gift investments. Emphasize that you care not just about the gift, but about them and what happens after the gift. Ask them to learn with you, to help you discover and refine what you are doing.



ALL YEAR—AND ONE DAY

At the beginning of each year, or at some other time, map the exact experiences you will create for each donor group over the following twelve months. This is your internal plan for orchestrating what happens at various times. In some cases you will want experience maps particular to specific individuals, especially your largest donor-investors.

You may also want to choose one day during which you go for an all-out celebration of one particular donor. This day is like a birthday during which you surround the person with an extraordinary outpouring of gratitude—designing five or six impacts and surprises.

Explore the list below as a shelf of possible ingredients. Those on the top of the list are somewhat more playful in nature. Others in the middle and bottom are designed for impact and more personal transformation. This sampling may also be useful as you brainstorm your own original creations.

- **DELIVER** a flower with a message attached to the stem such as “you make the world more beautiful” (flowers can be donated, volunteers can make the delivery)
- **INVITE** an artist in the community to create a short poem, song, or art piece celebrating the donor and the difference their gift is making
- **DECORATE** the door of the donor’s office or home when they are away with photos and expressions of thanks and appreciation
- **SEND** an article about someone doing something extraordinary and attach a memo that says, “This made me think of you and the inspiration you are to all of us”
- **DESIGN** a blessing tree or other object onto which people who have been helped by the gift (or caregivers) write or tie a blessing or intention for the donor
- **DO** a short video just for one donor similar to those done by the organization Charity: Water
- **INVITE** a physician or nurse from the center the donor supported to write a few sentences about the difference philanthropic gifts are making for patients—leave the message in their handwriting and enclose with a photo (photocopying the original message when needed for larger donor groups)
- **DESIGN** periodic impact cards with a short, powerful statistic about how the gift is changing or saving lives
- **CREATE** an online giving portfolio where donors see all of their gifts and receive periodic updates on the difference these gifts are making



- **HAVE** a patient family who is benefitting from the service write a note (or record a message) describing what it means to them—it's different than hearing from the foundation
- **SEND** a one- or two-sentence email about something exciting that happened today because of the person's gift—make it short and personal
- **DESIGN** an experience where the donor is seeing what they made possible in action with real people, not a tour of an empty room or piece of equipment
- **FIND** a physical way to represent lives saved or impacted by the donor's gift and deliver the symbolic pieces periodically—blocks, pieces, stones, etc. that continually grow as part of a larger art piece or design
- **MAKE** personal visits to describe what is happening as a result of the gift and invite others to accompany you as appropriate
- **HAVE** a child who has made an unusual gift (to anyone, anywhere) describe what they did and thank the donor—this brings an entirely different energy, sense of community, and shared bonding
- **PROVIDE** tools such as the Generosity Deck so a family can more intentionally relate to their wealth and architect their generosity experiences
- **DESIGN** a ceremony just for one donor or couple where three or four, or many more, people gather to describe the impact of the gift on them



- **CREATE** a philanthropic legacy book where the family writes in some sections about why they made the gift and in other sections the organization regularly describes what is happening as a result—it will be a piece handed down across generations
- **HELP** the donor discover the way their giving reflects their life purpose and how they see themselves growing or changing as a result of their gift investments —then architect experiences that enable this discovery
- **SEND** a book such as *The Soul of Money*, *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*, or *The Power of Half* so donors can explore the deeper dimensions of giving
- **DESIGN** immersion experiences where donors enter the world they are assisting—go for raw and real rather than polished and distant
- **SEND** periodic thought pieces about the healing power of generosity or innovations in generosity
- **INVITE** people doing something extraordinary, such as the CEO of Bridgeway Capital Management, a \$2.3 B firm that gives half its profits to charity and caps its partner compensation to seven times the earnings of the lowest-paid employee, to an evening of conversation with a small donor group



About the AUTHOR:

Leanne Kaiser Carlson is a healthcare futurist and thought leader for innovators engaging philanthropists in new ways. She helps organizations discover the healing power of generosity and advises CEOs, foundations, and philanthropists. Leanne is one of three founders of the Kaiser Institute and directs the Program in Philanthropy. She can be reached at 303.659.8815 or info@kaiser.net.

