

Donor advised funds are among the fastest growing vehicles through which to make charitable contributions; yet these exciting opportunities present many challenges to prospect researchers. Because financial information regarding these funds is not public knowledge, as is the case with foundations, charitable organizations know very little about the giving capacity a prospect has through that fund. This makes the information that we can access all the more important.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Consider a development officer walking into a face-to-face meeting with a prospect whom he/she has never met. What information might be good for the development officer to know? Ideally, he/she would know:

- *All of the prospect's assets*
- *How that prospect gives money (foundation, donor advised fund, cash, stock, etc.)*
- *The prospect's charitable goals*
- *A detailed biography of the prospect's personal and professional life*
- *The prospect's history with the organization*

This is the standard to which we all strive, but often it is simply not achievable. Some types of information are easier to come by than others, but some information is simply not reported and can only be obtained by word of mouth. And further still, some information is actively tagged not to be released; such is the case with donor advised funds.

CREATING DONOR PROFILES

While a prospect researcher may not be able to identify every asset an individual might hold and every giving vehicle at the prospect's disposal, he/she can develop a strong profile and analysis of a donor using the large amount of publicly held information available; this includes:

- *property holdings*
- *stock holdings*
- *political contributions*
- *charitable contributions*
- *organizational ties*
- *pension data*
- *income*

This information can be used not only to illustrate the prospect's financial situation, but can also act as a "spring board" for further research.

Beyond simple dollars and cents, public filings can contain biographical, geographic, and employment information, which can all be used to refine a prospect researcher's keyword searches & help take a research effort in new directions.

Additionally, Federal Election Commission (FEC) data can help identify the political affiliation of the prospect and, based upon the size and geography of the gifts, how influential that prospect might be in local and national politics.

PROSPECT INFO. = BIGGER DONATIONS

All of this research results in a far more sophisticated final product, and ultimately translates into larger gifts.

Alexis Harrigan, Chief Development Officer at Peaceplayers International in Washington, DC, explains how this information can impact a development effort: "Philanthropy is not simply a financial transaction; successful fundraising is built on personal connections. The more you know about a prospect, the more effectively you can match the prospect with a program in which he/she might be interested; this benefits both the donor and the organization."

Uncovering this data, however, can be a daunting task, as Ms. Harrigan explains: "There is a great deal of information available, but if you don't know how to get to it or you don't have the manpower to sift through public filings, it is of little use to you."

Prospect screenings, whether they are on a single individual or group of individuals, can provide assistance with this. Perhaps equally important to finding the data is being able to easily recall it in the future. Additionally, the ability to customize data and calculations depending on the specific goals of a project or organization can be vital to achieving those goals. For instance, there may be times when an organization is specifically focusing on gifts of stock, in which case it might be useful to adjust the data calculations to emphasize stock information. This type of flexibility not only allows organizations to recognize top prospects for stock gifts, but can also help them make use of numerous gift opportunities that accompany exercisable and soon to be exercisable options.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

So even though you can't find out who has a donor advised fund, you can still learn many, many useful things about a prospect through careful research. This is essential for proper prospect cultivation and should be done on a regular basis for existing donors. Whether your organization is small or large, you need to be able to maximize your resources in order to run a successful prospect research department.

Have you considered doing a prospect screening? What about using a data mining company that combines several popular and informative data sources so you don't have to spend your day researching each database one at a time? When considering a data mining company, maximize your time by evaluating your options—review the number and quality of data sources they offer, ask about their calculations and analyses, and make sure that they have experienced and responsive customer support representatives. Test out the ones you feel might be a good fit, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Prospect screening is an investment; when used correctly, the right screening can help you fundraise for years to come.