

Expand Your Major Gift Pipeline

Struggling to move beyond the “usual suspects”

Fundraising revenues have soared in recent years, powered by mega-gifts at the top of the giving pyramid. Yet a look behind the scenes reveals profound unsustainability. Fewer donors contribute a greater share of total returns, and advancement struggles to build a pipeline of new major gift prospects.

To survive, and thrive, in the years to come, advancement leaders must take an innovative approach to prioritizing prospects, incentivizing fundraisers, and managing portfolios. EAB's pipeline development research aims to help chief advancement officers and their teams do just that.

Campaigns are growing larger...



127%

growth in median higher education capital campaign goal

...but we're relying on fewer donors...



36

gifts, just 0.3% of the total, contribute 63% of all fundraising revenues

...while we overlook new opportunities



80%

of high-potential prospects go uncultivated

Assigned but overlooked prospects

PROBLEM:

Major gift officers (MGOs) deprioritize cold-calling, choosing instead to focus on a small number of their best donors. As a result, they **overlook prospects** who are at the start of the major-gift pipeline.

Advancement leaders should **incentivize prospect coverage**

- 1 Rethink assignment protocols to focus on verified warm prospects
- 2 Create “act now” urgency to nudge MGOs toward the pipeline
- 3 Prioritize prospects who are not just wealthy, but also likely to take a visit

Bryant University developed a discovery visit likelihood score. All prospects are assigned a score from 1 to 20, and MGOs prioritize the most highly rated prospects. Those rated as 20s take discovery visits at a 65% rate.

High-potential unassigned prospects

PROBLEM:

Most prospects **linger in portfolios** for years without being moved toward a solicitation. This stagnancy clogs already overfull portfolios. As a result, MGOs cannot add new prospects to their pools.

Advancement leaders should **accelerate portfolio churn**

- 1 Destigmatize disqualifications to minimize unproductive outreach
- 2 Require MGOs to formalize cultivation strategies for prospects they qualify
- 3 Expedite the ask by time-boxing cultivation stages

Colorado State University automatically sunsets unresponsive prospects. Fundraisers can avoid automatic sunsetting by manually moving prospects out of their portfolios. In the past two years, manual disqualifications have increased 32%, and MGOs have focused more on high-inclination prospects.

Tomorrow's Prospects, Too Soon to Assign

PROBLEM:

Prospects who we are not being actively managed **fall off a “cultivation cliff”** of one-size-fits-all outreach, leaving them cold. Without high-quality cultivation touches, these prospects' inclination builds slowly or not at all.

Advancement leaders should **scale personalized cultivation**

- 1 Warm unengaged prospects by developing nurture campaigns
- 2 Prioritize overlooked prospects for targeted alumni relations programming
- 3 Mimic the major gift experience through annual giving

Davidson College hired a digital gift officer to carry a portfolio of 1,000+ high-potential prospects. The DGO uses a multichannel, remote approach to cultivate and solicit donors at scale.



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