

# Leadership Giving: A High-ROI Path to Pipeline Growth

Advancement teams are being asked to meet ambitious fundraising goals while their donor pipeline lacks the depth and momentum needed to sustain future growth. Meeting those goals requires a more intentional approach to donor development—one that engages donors consistently, builds meaningful connection, and encourages growth in giving. That means prioritizing donors who have already demonstrated loyalty and engagement and focusing on strengthening those relationships over time.

**Leadership donors represent one of the most important and underutilized opportunities in today's fundraising landscape.** With the right engagement, this audience can generate dependable revenue year after year while strengthening the future major gift pipeline.



**Leadership donors are defined as those who give between \$1,000 - \$24,999 in a single fiscal year.**

## The Role of Leadership Giving in the Donor Journey

For many donors, a leadership-level gift represents their first meaningful increase in giving and is a signal of readiness for more intentional engagement.

Despite its importance, leadership giving is often folded into annual giving or major gift efforts rather than treated as a distinct focus. To be effective, leadership giving requires its own approach—one that treats it as a turning point in a donor's relationship and builds engagement beyond a single upgrade or appeal.

Some donors engaged at this stage will go on to become major gift prospects, increasing their giving over time. Others may remain leadership donors for years, providing dependable revenue and stability. In both cases, leadership giving plays a central role in sustaining near-term results and building long-term growth.

### First Gift

Average first gift of major donors is **\$177**

### Consistent Giving

Alumni who give every year for the first five years give **2.7x as much** as other donors by their 20<sup>th</sup> reunion

### First Leadership Gift

Donors on average take **six years** to make a \$1,000 gift

### First Major Gift

47% of major donors **give for 10+ years** before \$25K gift

## Understanding the Leadership Donor Audience

Leadership donors are a distinct and influential group with characteristics, motivations, and expectations that set them apart from other audiences. Understanding who they are and how they think is critical to engaging them effectively and unlocking their full potential.

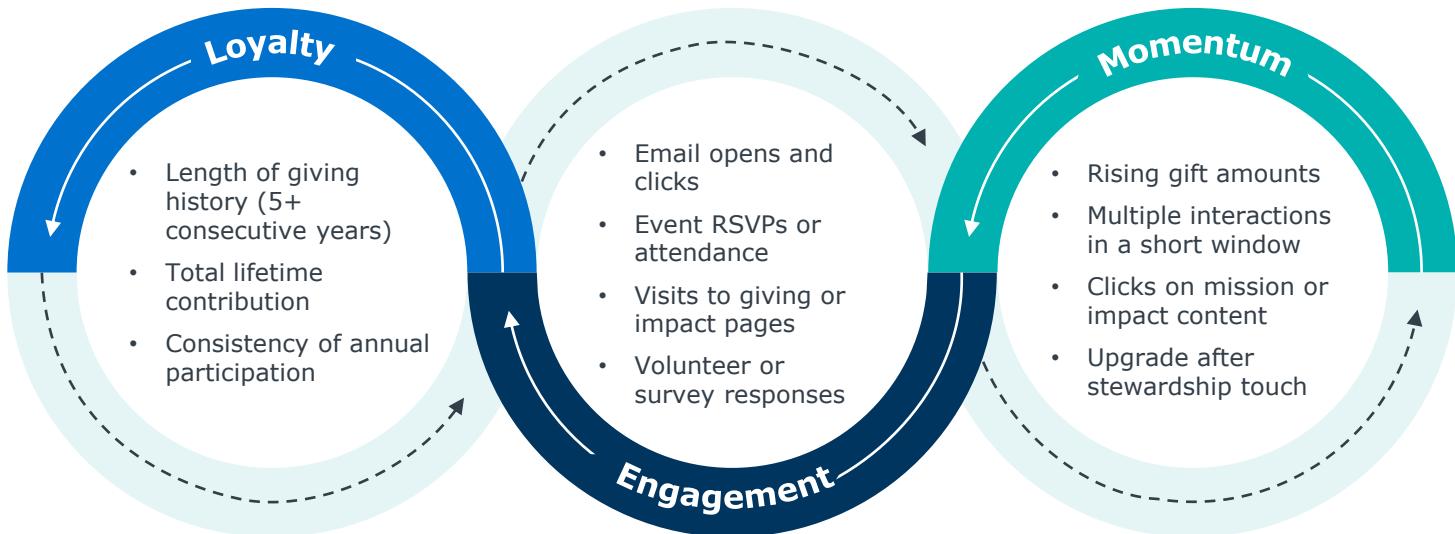


### What Sets Them Apart

- ▶ **Financially established**  
Nearly 70% show indicators of net worth above \$1M, reflecting stable income and capacity to give at higher levels.
- ▶ **Motivated by identity and values**  
Often view giving as an expression of personal values, affiliation, or connection to a mission they care about.
- ▶ **Giving is part of their self-concept**  
See philanthropy as part of who they are, not simply something they do on occasion.
- ▶ **Selective in where they give**  
Thoughtful about where they donate and tend to concentrate giving among a small number of organizations.
- ▶ **Expect thoughtful, consistent outreach**  
Respond best to engagement that is regular, relevant, and demonstrates outcomes rather than volume or urgency.
- ▶ **Outcome-oriented decision-makers**  
Evaluate giving opportunities based on results, progress, and return on impact.

### How to Find Them in Your Database

Many leadership donors already exist within your database. The key is knowing how to find them. Leadership readiness becomes clear when indicators of loyalty, engagement, and momentum rise together.



### Priority Groups to Consider



#### Women

Control a growing share of philanthropic wealth and often prioritize values-aligned giving.

**\$42T+** in assets by 2045



#### Older Millennials

Entering peak earning and giving years and focused on measurable outcomes.

**\$68T** projected wealth transfer



#### Parents of Alumni

Strong gratitude and affinity tied to student experience and success.

**75%** want direct communication

## What Effective Leadership Giving Looks Like

Institutions that see the strongest leadership giving results approach this work with clear ownership, disciplined use of data, and a deliberate engagement strategy that builds donor momentum over time.

### Clear ownership and focus

Has a defined home within the team, with dedicated resources, budget, and clear ownership.

### Consistent omni-channel engagement

Operates with a planned mix of asks, events, and non-ask touchpoints across channels and throughout the year.



### Impact-based messaging

Consistently ties leadership-level support to clear outcomes and the real-world impact donors care most about.

### Ongoing use of data

Regularly reviews donor signals to identify opportunities, adjust focus, and sustain momentum.

### Strong stewardship and gratitude

Follows giving with timely acknowledgment and updates that connect gifts to results.

## Advancement Marketing Services

EAB's Leadership Giving solution helps AMS partners identify priority leadership audiences and deliver tailored engagement at scale. It is currently available in two tiers, allowing you to align support with your goals.

**8.5%**

Average **growth in revenue** (gifts under \$5k) in year 1

**+3**

Points stronger **donor participation** than national trend

**5.4x**

Average **ROI**

**3 - 4**

**FTEs equivalent capacity** added to your team

### Essential

Foundational leadership giving program focused on core donor segmentation with consistent messaging, supported by creative strategy and print execution. Best for institutions establishing a consistent leadership giving approach.

### Enhanced

Enhanced leadership giving program with expanded segmentation and personalization using additional donor variables and data points, paired with advanced analytics and integrated print and digital engagement. Designed to scale giving and deepen results.