

# Becoming a Priority for Today's Donors

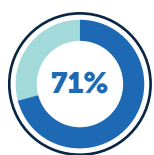
## What's Holding Donors Back—and How to Break Through

In EAB's 2026 Advancement Leaders Survey, leaders across institutions reported growing pressure to expand the donor pipeline and revenue. Yet even as teams increase their focus on engagement, the gap between effort and results continues to widen. **So why aren't donors giving—and what needs to change?** The findings point to clear opportunities to rethink how institutions engage and earn their place as a priority for today's donors.

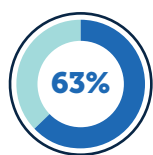


### What Leaders Are Focused On

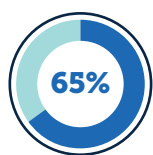
Advancement teams are prioritizing engagement and pipeline growth as they work to increase revenue, often with limited resources.



71% rank increasing engagement as a top priority



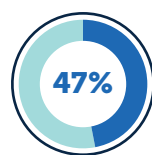
63% are prioritizing expanding the donor pipeline



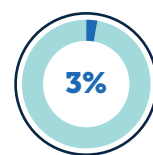
65% say their teams are doing more with less than they were three years ago

### What's Actually Happening

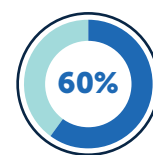
Despite this focus, engagement is declining, and large portions of the donor base remain inactive.



47% say declining engagement is a top challenge



3% say they are not affected by donor decline



60% of alumni are never-givers, and 14% are lapsed donors

### So, What's Holding Donors Back?

72% of leaders believe donors do not view giving to higher education as a priority. Why is that and what will it take to change it?



#### Financial Limitations

Donors are more cautious about how they give and are making trade-offs.

50% believe donors aren't giving due to financial limitations

#### WHAT TO DO:

- ▶ Offer giving options at multiple levels so participation feels accessible
- ▶ Highlight how even modest contributions make a difference



#### Perceptions of Higher Ed

Perceptions of higher education are shifting—and not always positively.

35% believe donors aren't giving due to negative or uncertain perceptions of higher ed

#### WHAT TO DO:

- ▶ Share how your institution contributes to society beyond campus
- ▶ Reinforce credibility through outcomes, partnerships, or external impact



#### Unclear Use of Funds

Donors lack clarity on where their money goes.

33% believe donors aren't giving because they don't understand how funds are used

#### WHAT TO DO:

- ▶ Break down where donations go in simple, concrete terms
- ▶ Use examples tied to specific programs or outcomes



#### Lack of Excitement for Funding Priorities

Institutional messaging is not resonating.

28% believe donors aren't giving because current priorities aren't compelling

#### WHAT TO DO:

- ▶ Highlight stories that bring your work to life
- ▶ Introduce new or timely initiatives to create momentum

### What It Takes to Break Through

These are the core capabilities every advancement strategy needs today.

#### Digital to Increase Visibility and Engagement

Digital allows you to stay visible between asks and reach donors beyond your existing lists. Without it, your message is easier to miss.



32% of leaders say their teams are not using paid digital advertising, and only 15% rank expanding digital marketing as a top priority

#### Data to Make Engagement More Relevant

Without data, outreach remains broad and untargeted. Using it helps you focus your message on the donors most likely to respond.



Only 47% say their team uses data to personalize messaging or refine strategy

#### Stewardship to Showcase Impact

When impact is not reinforced, donors lose sight of the difference they make. Consistent stewardship keeps that impact visible and strengthens long-term connection.



Only 28% report engaging donors "very consistently" across most or all segments

