



# Time for Bequests

Is your organisation more than ten years old? Does your organisation have a group of committed, long term supporters? Has a dedicated supporter left your organisation a bequest before? If you can answer yes to any of these questions, setting up a bequest program should be something you seriously consider in your overall fundraising plan.

Still not so sure? Let's look at some key facts about giving in New Zealand.

The largest single source of philanthropy in New Zealand in 2011 was personal donations and bequests from individuals, with over one million people giving to charitable causes that year. Of that personal giving, about \$122 million was contributed to the non-profit sector through bequests. According to Philanthropy New Zealand, the average value of these charitable bequests was just over \$100,000 each. And the good news is, trends indicate bequests have actually increased over the previous five years. There were an estimated 8% more bequests left in 2011 than in 2006 and the average bequest value increased by 7.5%, up from \$93,000.

Trends globally in bequest giving also look promising. In America, bequest giving has increased in recent years by 8.7% and a similar situation in the UK with a growth of 8%. In both instances these growth rates demonstrate bequests are growing more rapidly than other donation types.

And, if those numbers aren't enough to convince you, let's consider the bigger picture of the population. Like many developed countries, New Zealand has an aging population. Currently, about 14% of New Zealanders are over the age of 65, but over the next twenty years statistics indicate that this will increase to 24%; almost one quarter of the country's population. Not only is this generation a large one, the Baby Boomers are living longer in their older life than their predecessors. In 1950 the average life expectancy of a New Zealander was 79; now that is 87 years old.

Over the next 10-30 years the world will experience the biggest inter-generational transfer of wealth we have ever seen. Studies indicate that between the Baby Boomer generation and their parents about \$14 trillion (yes, that says trillion) will be passed on around the globe by the year 2052.

With all that in mind, it's easy to see the importance of having a proactive bequest programme in your fundraising mix. Check out these nine key steps in developing a successful bequest programme for your organisation.

## 1. Get your Board On-board

Figures tell us that personal giving has overtaken trust and foundation giving as the single largest source of philanthropy in the country, so we need to shift our thinking, and of course, the thinking of our Boards.

Having the support of our Directors and Trustees is vital to the success of any fundraising programme, but perhaps none more than bequests. Not only do they need to be comfortable talking about bequests, ideally you would have at least one or two that would consider making a bequest for your charity too.

## 2. Develop a Strategy

Having a strategic approach to your bequest programme is crucial and I believe it should always begin with a long term goal for the future of your cause. This goal is more than just your organisation's mission and vision statement – it needs to be a strategic guide for the organisation for the next five to ten years. This way, people who are considering leaving you a bequest know that it is not in vain. If you want your donors to be forward-thinking you need to show them that you are too.

Make sure your strategy incorporates your plan to attract bequestors (some techniques of which follow in these remaining points). If you don't already have one in place, it's at this point your organisation should develop a gift acceptance policy too.

## 3. Mine for Gold

Finding bequest prospects should always be part of any good bequest programme and one of the easiest ways to do this is to search in your own backyard. Yes, your current database will already have the majority of your best prospects in it; you just need to sift through and mine that gold!

Things to look for include donors with the longest history, those that are committed and regular in their giving (giving at least annually) and, of course, donors over the age of 65 (if you are privy to this information). Don't forget your long-standing volunteers too! They can often be great bequest prospects.

## 4. Consider a Donor Survey

A donor survey is a fabulous donor care tool that you should be doing every year or two, but for many charities it also serves as an excellent method of securing leads for bequests. To do this, ensure you have a question in your survey about bequests. It might be something like, 'Would you consider leaving a gift in your Will to XYZ charity after your family and loved ones are provided for?' Then provide a handful of options for them to respond to including 'Yes, I am considering this' and 'Yes, I have already left a bequest in my will'. Individual responses will guide you to potential leads for your bequest programme.

## 5. Establish a Recognition Society

When we receive such a generous gift as a bequest it comes at a time when we can no longer thank the donor personally for their kindness. A recognition society is a way of acknowledging and thanking your bequestors during their lifetime and can sometimes be a prompter for those that have made a bequest to notify you. When someone advises your organisation of their intention to

leave a bequest to your charity you can invite them to become members of your recognition society, and as such, they are honoured for their special commitment to your cause's future. In setting up a recognition society it is important to choose an appropriate name as well as define the benefits of membership. You will also need to consider a solid engagement plan for members, as meeting with others and connecting with your cause regularly can often be one of the best benefits for bequestors.

## 6. Launch your Programme

When you have prepared a strategy, identified potential prospects and developed your recognition society it is time to launch your program. You can do this by inviting key supporters to a small function, sharing it in your newsletter and even through a targeted mail out to current supporters. Let people know all about your long term vision and why you hope supporters will choose to support your cause in this way.

## 7. Market, Market, Market

Once you've set things up it is important to market bequests and your bequest programme. Be sure to have your website up to date with accurate information and make sure it is easily accessible for visitors to your home page. Don't have the bequests page hidden under many other pages and layers. As making a will and leaving a bequest is not something done very often, the ideal marketing plan for a bequest programme is a drip-feed strategy that regularly promotes bequests and the programme in bite-sized pieces. This includes having something in every newsletter and each mail appeal comprising a tick box for people to let you know if they have left a bequest or would like more information about it.

In New Zealand, approximately 60% of people don't have a will so as part of your marketing strategy for bequests you should consider encouraging and



educating your donors about making a will to ensure their loved ones are looked after, and then potentially considering gifting to a cause close to their heart.

## 8. Actively Cultivate Bequests

In addition to your drip-feed marketing strategy you want to be sure that you are actively cultivating bequests. Follow up on any leads that come through and manage communications with your prospects. This should include both phone calls and mailings as a mandatory, with personal visits as a nice-to-have if your resources allow. A pipeline document containing your leads, even if it is contained in a spreadsheet, is a great way to manage this process.

## 9. Be Accountable and Transparent

People are motivated to leave bequests for a number of reasons. It could be because they or a loved one have experienced first-hand the benefits of your services, they want to leave a legacy for their children, grand-children and future generations, but possibly most importantly, it's because they trust you and believe in your mission.

In addition to delivering great programmes with social impact, make sure your organisation is always accountable and transparent with donors. It is these traits that build trust and create donor loyalty. And hopefully, this loyalty will lead to the ultimate gift of a bequest.

Facilitating a bequest to your organisation

can be one of the most humbling ways you can truly see out your goal as a fundraiser; connecting donors with your cause. A bequest is often a gift of such significance, and one that the donor often could not make during their lifetime, that by leaving a gift in their will to your cause bequestors are bestowing upon you one of the highest privileges – to help carry out their legacy.

So, now you are placed to begin the journey of creating a successful bequest programme. What you do in this space can generate benefits for your organisation's future and ensure you are able to deliver your mission for many more years to come.



### Bianca Crocker

Bianca Crocker, aka The Fish Chick, is the woman behind Fish Community Solutions; a business that works with small or start up non-profit organisations to build sustainable funding models so they can create positive change in our world. In 2012 she was awarded FIA's Young Fundraiser of the Year and was a finalist in the Global Fundraiser of the Year. Bianca is a passionate and enthusiastic fundraiser who holds the Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) accreditation. Learn more about her at [www.fishcommunitysolutions.com](http://www.fishcommunitysolutions.com) or by following @TheFishChick on Twitter.