

THE GENEROSITY SIGNAL PLAYBOOK

A simple way to help your board and
staff find new donors

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Most donors won't walk up and say, "I'd like to give your nonprofit \$500,000."

Instead, they drop small hints—signals of generosity, interest, or capacity. It usually starts with a comment. Something simple, like "I didn't know your organization did that," or "I've always wanted to help families like that."

Fundraisers are trained to hear those comments as the starting line of generosity. But what if everyone at your organization could catch them too? The receptionist. The program director. The board chair.

Suddenly, you'd have dozens of extra sets of ears helping you find new donors.

So how do you get other people to help you find donors without turning them into fundraisers?

Easy.

Show them the three steps below. They'll start hearing generosity in everyday conversations and know exactly what to do next.

Step 1: Tune your radar

Tell your team, "You don't have to be a fundraiser. You just have to notice."

Here's what to listen for:

Interest Signals (they're curious)

- "I didn't know you did that."
- "That sounds like important work."
- "You really seem to love your job."

Generosity Signals (they already give elsewhere)

- "I went to a great fundraiser last weekend."
- "We give to a scholarship fund every year."
- "That thank-you note really meant a lot."

Capacity Signals (they could afford to give)

- “We just bought a cabin at the lake.”
- “We’re traveling a lot now that we’re retired.”
- “Our kids are grown—it’s fun to have more flexibility.”

When you hear something like that, pause. You’ve just found a possible donor.

Step 2: Do *this exact thing* next

Don’t overthink. Don’t pitch. Don’t pull out a brochure.

Just do these three simple steps:

1. **Acknowledge their comment.**

Say something natural like:

- “That’s wonderful—you clearly care about helping others.”
- “That’s amazing. I love hearing that.”

2. **Make a mental note right away.**

If you can, jot it down on your phone or a sticky note. The details fade fast. Write what they said and where you were.

3. **Pass it along.**

Within a day, tell the fundraising person on your team. You can say:

- “Hey [Fundraiser’s Name], I met someone who mentioned they’d like to do more for families in need. Should I connect you?”
- “A neighbor said she loves what we’re doing and wants to learn more—thought you’d want to know.”

That’s it. You don’t need to do any asking. Just hand off the signal.

Step 3: Keep it light and positive

If you’re the one receiving a lead from a colleague, always thank them. The moment you make it feel easy and appreciated, they’ll keep doing it.

You might say:

“Thanks for listening for those signals—that’s really helpful. I’ll follow up with them and keep you posted.”

A quick loop back after you talk to the person (“That was a great lead, thanks again!”) reinforces that their effort matters.

Step 4: Expect small things to grow

Most big gifts start small—sometimes with a passing comment over coffee. When someone in your network catches that moment and shares it, they’ve just multiplied your reach.

These little handoffs don’t feel dramatic, but they often lead to new relationships, event invitations, or future gifts.

And yes, this really works. I personally know of a situation where a casual comment—someone saying they’d like to help families less fortunate than their own—eventually grew into a \$500,000 gift. It happened because one person was listening, passed the message along, and trusted that the next person would follow through.

Quick Win: Try this at your next meeting

At your next board or staff meeting, say:

“Let’s spend five minutes on something that can make a big difference. Here are examples of the kinds of comments that signal generosity. If you hear something like this, just tell me. That’s all you need to do.”

Print the list of steps above or share it by email. You’ll be amazed how quickly people start coming to you with stories.

Most people in your organization already talk with community members, parents, volunteers, or local leaders. Once they know what to listen for—and that all they need to do is *pass it along*—they become a powerful part of your fundraising team.

Keep going

Want to learn how to turn those early conversations into story-driven donor relationships that inspire giving?

Join us at the [Nonprofit Storytelling Conference](#). You’ll discover practical ways to build generosity through storytelling—and leave ready to raise more, faster.