



Alumni Stories Drive Annual Fund Success

We believe in the power of story.

Stories are the foundation of donor engagement. As communicators and fundraisers, we use stories every day to help constituents and donors see themselves in our missions. At Publishing Concepts, we take story to a new level. We believe every alumnus/a, donor, member, and constituent has a story to tell.

With the right questions in hand, we engage your constituents, explore their autobiography, and discover what it is they care about most. They share with us why they give, participate, and the impact they want to have both today and in the future. We believe capturing these stories and the experience donors have telling them bonds them in a unique way to your mission.

The Oral History Project is a unique program designed to capture your alumni, member, and donor stories at scale. Our skilled interviewers record up to 10,000 stories per day. To ensure quality, we survey each of the people we interview after our interaction. Presently, 98 percent of respondents who share their story say it was a positive experience.

We know that OHP has an extremely powerful program to drive engagement. This one-to-one interaction is a forum for alumni, members, and donors to share experiences, desired impacts, and future intentions. What we wanted to explore further is the impact the program has on future donor behavior. The purpose of this whitepaper is to share our findings.

Over the past four years, we have collected more than 1.5 million stories from donors, alumni, and members of myriad organizations.

Methodology

To get a read on donor behavior, we first need a framework to view it through. Our approach looks at classifying donors in a lifecycle for each fiscal year. Donors perform differently in each lifecycle and as a result, donor strategies, communication cadence and design creative is often customized to maximize success in acquiring, retaining, or reactivating donors.

Lifecycles Defined

NEW DONORS –

Donors giving a qualified gift for the first time – regardless of source. New donors are where we invest to grow our donor pipelines. New donors are the point of entry.

MULTI-YEAR DONORS –

Two or more years of consecutive giving. These donors are the heart of the revenue for any annual giving program. Multi-year donors are also the most likely to move to both major-gift and planned-giving portfolios. Retention and growth of this segment is the life blood of any organization.

RECENTLY LAPSED (13-24 MONTHS) DONORS –

Donors with no gifts in the prior fiscal year but gave in the year before. Reactivation is the primary goal with this segment.

2ND YEAR FROM NEW DONORS –

Donors that were new in the prior fiscal year and are now in their second year. We categorize them separately because getting that all-important second gift doubles the retention rate of new donors.

2ND YEAR REGAINED DONORS –

Previously lapsed donors who were reactivated in the prior fiscal year. The goal is to keep them engaged and active.

MULTI-YEAR LAPSED (25+ MONTHS) DONORS –

Evaluate the existing mid-level key performance indicators and understand past performance of the segment. You want to understand the current retention within the segment, average number of gifts, average giving, channel preferences, and donor life cycle of the current mid-level segment.

After assigning all donors and prospects to the appropriate lifecycles, we created two segments to analyze donor behavior: those who participated in an interview and shared a story, and those who did not. Our hypothesis is that donors/prospects who engaged and told a story would participate at higher levels as it relates to giving.

We also wanted to examine how behaviors changed in the 12 months after the interview took place. We selected two institutions that completed programs more than 12 months ago. Both were higher education – one was a public university and one a private college.

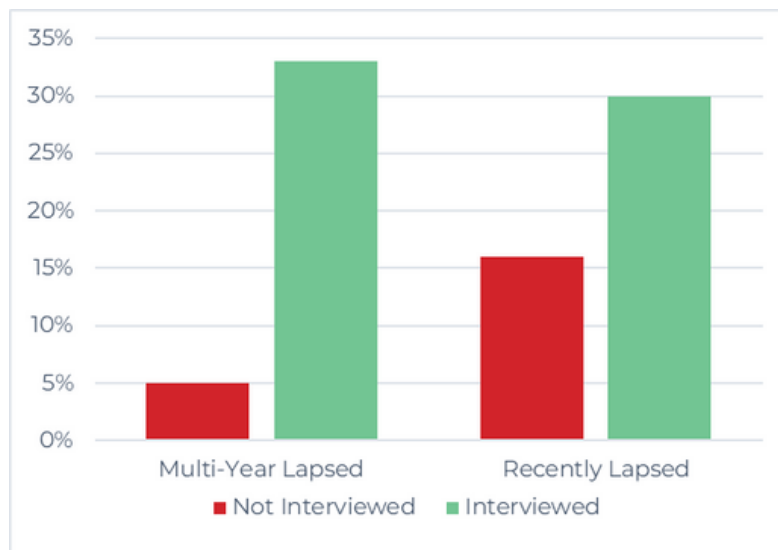
We then looked at the trends of our two groups – those interviewed and those not interviewed. We looked at how those donors behaved in the 12 months prior to the interview then again in the 12 months after the interview by donor lifecycle.

Impact on Reactivation

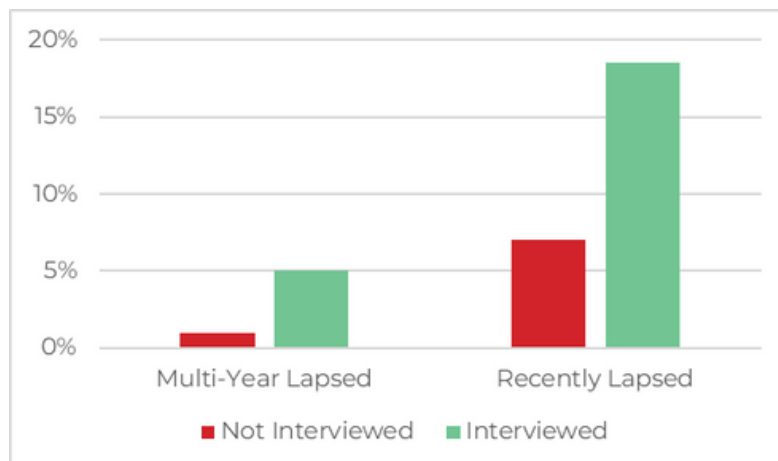
Our first set of questions focused on reactivation. Did those who were interviewed reactivate at higher rates than the donor population who did not participate in an interview? We separated Lapsed from Multi-Year Lapsed in our analysis as these life stages reactivate at very different rates.

Here is what we found:

Institution #1: Reactivation



Institution #2: Reactivation



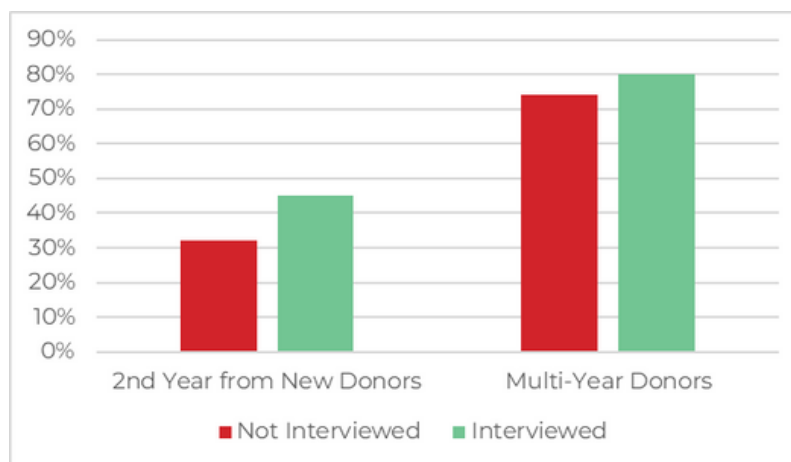
Donors who participated in an interview reactivated at dramatically higher rates in the 12 months post program than those who did not participate. While our team had no role in the reactivation activities, the data points to the fact that had more emphasis been placed on reactivation in the period immediately following the interview, these numbers could have been even more dramatic. The program clearly boosted reactivation rates for lapsed donors.

Impact on Retention

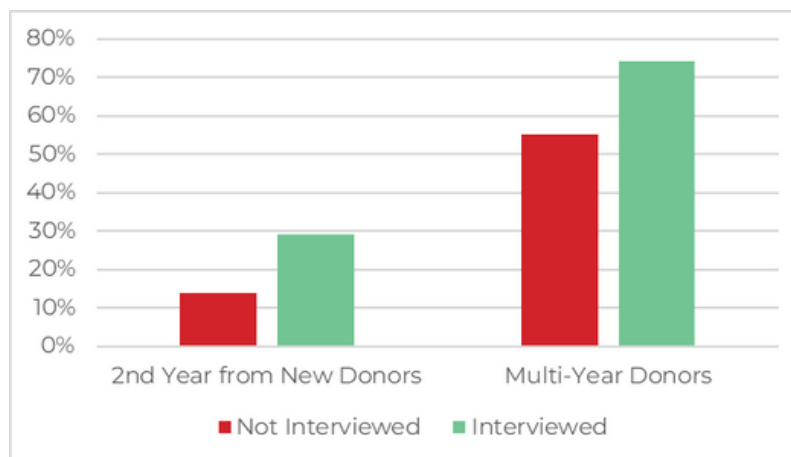
Our next set of questions focused on retention. Did those who were interviewed retain at higher rates than the donor population who did not participate in an interview? We separated the 2nd year from new donors from the Multi-Year donors as the numbers tend to vary greatly.

Here is what we found:

Institution #1: Retention



Institution #2: Retention



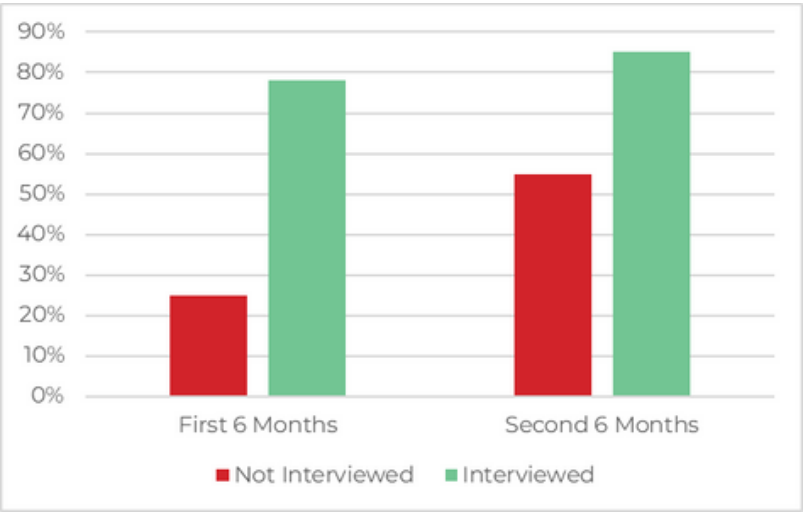
For both institutions, post-interview retention was significantly higher for donors who participated in an interview vs. those who did not. Using the program as an effective engagement tool contributed to increased donor retention in both the 2nd Year from new and Multi-Year donor segments.

Impact on Donor Acquisition

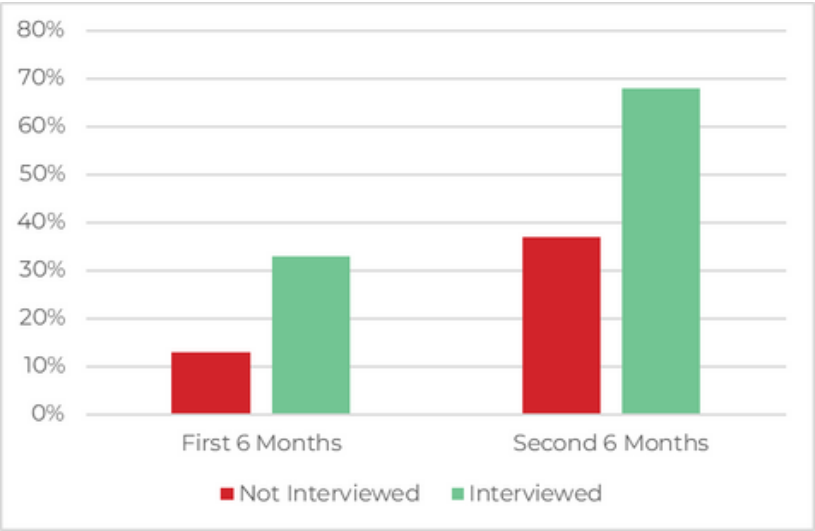
Our next set of questions focused in our analysis was new donor acquisition. We compared how non-donors who interviewed compared in both six months post interview and 12 months post interview versus those non-donors who did not interview. Again, our team did not have any influence on the acquisition campaigns conducted.

This is simply a comparison of new donors who participated in an interview vs. those who did not.

Institution #1: New Donor Acquisition



Institution #2: New Donor Acquisition



For both institutions we saw a significant uptick in newly acquired donors from the population who participated in an interview versus those who did not. Timing in the immediate afterglow of the interview provides an optimal window to conduct new donor acquisition of donors who engaged as part of a program.

Impact on Donor Value

Do purchasers of the Oral History Project make more and bigger gifts to the annual fund?

The short answer? Yes.

For years, colleges and universities have wondered if purchasing a publication would negatively impact giving.

In fact, the results revealed the opposite. Storytellers who also purchased the publication either gave more or stayed at the same level the year following after the OHP.

Key Takeaways:

- Lapsed donors who were interviewed reactivated at higher rates than the donor population who did not participate in an interview.
- Donors who were interviewed retained at higher rates than the donor population who did not participate in an interview.
- Non-donors more likely to make their first gift after they told a story.
- Donors who told a story had a higher lift in cumulative giving in the year following their interview versus those donors who did not tell a story.
- Storytellers who also purchased the publication either gave more or stayed at the same level the year following after the OHP.

Conclusion

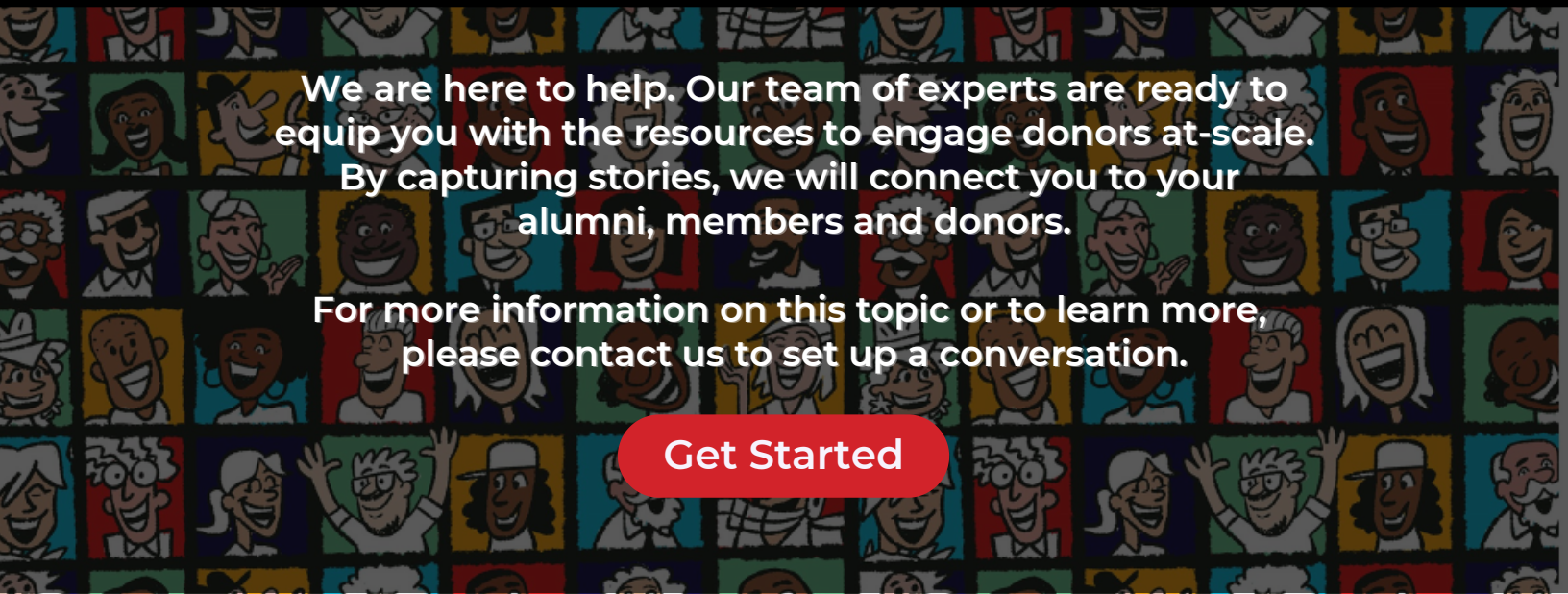
The power of stories can have a tremendous impact on your donor behavior. By inviting and capturing donor stories, we are touching on powerful memories and motivations that bring your mission to the forefront with your donors and constituents. The power of a one-to-one conversation and getting donors to articulate why they give provides fuel for continuing engagement. What we discovered in our research is that when donors share their story, they become closer to you and your organization.

An Oral History Project or Interview Program for your donors can set the table in so many ways for future engagement. Use these programs as part of your strategic planning process for acquisition, reactivation and retention. By intentionally creating marketing and communication streams around the interview process, you can have dramatic impacts on your giving results.

Additionally, these stories provide a foundation for transformational giving. Understanding how a donor wants to have an impact today and into the future will create meaningful opportunities to engage. Stories also provide a wealth of content for communications, campaigns, and impact reporting to your donors.



PCI not the **big** company



We are here to help. Our team of experts are ready to equip you with the resources to engage donors at-scale. By capturing stories, we will connect you to your alumni, members and donors.

For more information on this topic or to learn more, please contact us to set up a conversation.

[Get Started](#)