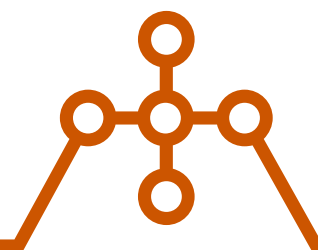




Understanding Legacy Stewardship

March 2019



In today's ever more crowded legacy sector there is a growing emphasis on 'stewarding' legacy pledgers and prospects, as a way of converting, retaining and growing the value of bequests from known supporters. But the tactics used and the underlying objectives vary significantly from one charity to another. And with such a long lag between communications and outcome, evidence on the impact and effectiveness of stewardship activity is inevitably limited.

This project set out to understand more about legacy stewardship from both the charities' and the donors' perspective, using a combination of detailed charity case studies and in-depth supporter interviews. Here's just some of what we learned.

This project was funded by a consortium of 29 leading charities. We are grateful to our clients for letting us share these top-line findings more widely.

Legacy Foresight - www.legacyforesight.co.uk

Britain's foremost analysts of the legacy and in-memory sectors

Ten key lessons from the research

1. In a crowded sector, legacy stewardship is essential

Inspiring a supporter to write your charity into their will is a testament to the strength of their connection with you. But it's just the start of a journey which may take years, even decades to realise. Your legacy donors' continued support cannot be taken for granted. Evidence from our 2016/17 Legacy Marketing Benchmark programme¹ suggests that *on average* only 50% of pledgers who die actually leave a bequest!

There are all sorts of reasons why a pledger might remove your charity from their next will. Our Invisible Legator research² suggests that few supporters would expel a charity from their will unless it did something very wrong on a public or personal level. But over time, circumstances change and allegiances shift, so other beneficiaries – whether charities or family members – may take precedence. To stay top of mind throughout your legacy donor's lifetime, your charity must continue to prove your relevance, show your appreciation and build the supporter relationship.

2. Interest and investment in legacy stewardship is growing

Our member survey revealed that almost all of the 29 leading charities in our consortium expected to be investing more resource on legacy stewardship over the next five years; 42% of them anticipated a lot more investment. But despite the growing interest, nearly half of all respondents (46%) felt that legacy stewardship does not – as yet – have sufficient priority in their charity. Our clients told us that a lack of hard evidence – about what works, the return on investment and actionable strategies – is curbing organisational commitment.

3. Good legacy stewardship *is* effective

The donor interviews we conducted, as well as feedback from the case study charities shows that good stewardship can create engaged, loyal legacy donors who feel assured that their gift is needed and will be well spent. They believe that – far from being a 'waste' of money – stewardship shows they are valued. Satisfied pledgers and prospects spread their good experiences to family and friends and – with the right support – may become more formal legacy ambassadors.

4. The *best* legacy stewardship activities convey magic

The experts we talked to at the start of this project spoke of the importance – and the rarity – of surprising and delighting supporters; 'conveying magic' as one put it. Among our eight case studies³ we came across some great examples of charities doing just that.

5. Think creatively about your stewardship assets

Many case study charities offered legacy supporters 'behind the scenes' access to unique spaces, people and celebrations. From invites to new ward openings (GOSH), to meetings with legendary charity campaigners (Greenpeace), or a walk with a Guide Dog puppy, they made those supporters feel special. Any charity can do this if they think laterally about their stewardship assets – the personalities, places and projects which embody the best of them.

¹ Legacy Marketing Benchmarking 2017, Legacy Foresight, February 2018

² Uncovering the Invisible Legator, Legacy Foresight, December 2017

³ The eight case studies were: Cancer Research UK Regional Stewardship Programme, Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity Bespoke Legacy Stewardship, Greenpeace UK Events Programme, Guide Dogs Name a Puppy for Next of Kin, RNIB Events and Gifts, RSPCA Mass Legacy Communications, Save the Children UK Legacy Ambassadors, WWF UK Bespoke Legacy Stewardship

6. Small personal touches go a long way

Beyond the magic, personal connection is also key. This doesn't have to be big or expensive; authentic small communications, such as personalised cards or tokens of thanks can make the donor feel appreciated and involved. In particular, having a named person to contact seems to make all the difference, providing a conduit into the charity itself.

7. The self-selecting core vs the wider pledger group

Your warmest stewardship prospects are often self-selecting, highly engaged supporters who show they are open to dialogue and expect reciprocation. Based on our research, it appears that this small group of 'cherished' supporters may well be higher value childless and/or residual legacy donors, who will go on to leave significant gifts. But beyond the 'inner circle' of engaged donors is a much larger group of disclosed but apparently disengaged legacy pledgers. Cutting through the 'noise' to target this wider group with *personalised*, compelling communications is a major challenge, but also a significant opportunity.

8. Stewardship costs time and energy, not money

In many cases the direct expenditure on stewardship activities was low, and indeed that was part of the appeal for the supporter. But good stewardship requires a significant commitment of staff time, and the authority and influence to make things happen. The recent Legacy Marketing Benchmark data¹ showed that overall, stewardship represented just 13% of legacy marketing budgets, but 31% of legacy fundraisers' time!

9. Good stewardship requires a special skill set

It appears that the 'soft' skills of the staff delivering stewardship – e.g. listening, empathy, responsiveness and creativity – are critical to success; some of the managers we interviewed argued that those skills cannot be taught – so clearly the right recruitment is vital. There is a danger that if stewardship is just a part of a wider legacy role, these subtle skills may be overshadowed or even overwhelmed.

10. Lack of continuity is a major threat

It must be recognised that while developing the legacy donor relationship takes many years, legacy stewardship programmes often suffer from a sporadic approach. The commitment needs to be maintained through any management changes, with procedures to ensure continuity of donor communications. This is particularly important in the light of high levels of staff turnover, where connections and records may be lost when a key team member leaves.

The next biennial **Legacy Marketing Benchmarking Project**, which kicks off in autumn 2019, will provide another opportunity to deepen our collective understanding of legacy stewardship. This research has highlighted additional measures to include in the analysis, and ways to make previous benchmarks more insightful. The Legacy Marketing Benchmark proposals will be published in Spring 2019; to request a copy contact Meg Abdy on m.abdy@legacyforesight.co.uk.

New from Legacy Foresight, the **Legacy Journey** online platform aims to track and assess the communications received by members' potential legacy donors, whether pledgers, intenders, enquirers or in-memory. For more information on this initiative contact Richard Hill on r.hill@legacyforesight.co.uk.