AFP Information Exchange

Recognition Donor Wall Planning Guide

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The purpose of this planning guide is to provide the non-profit organization with some ideas and guidelines in the designing of their recognition donor wall. There are scant few resources available to help, so this discussion is of the questions that you should address before you get too far down the road.

Goals and Objectives:

These need to be both for the recognition program in general and the donor wall in particular. What do you need these to accomplish? A lot of times staff looks at this question with a “Isn’t it obvious?” look, but if you actually get to writing these goals and objectives down, you find that every organization looks at this differently.

• What are the objectives for this donor wall?
• What are the policies that determine what names are eligible to go on the wall?
• Are all donations acknowledged in some way, regardless of size?
• How are major donors handled, both in general and in regard to the donor wall?
• What do you do for donors besides the putting the name on the wall? Hand written letters, small gift of thanks, personalized art glass or plaque?
• Do you have naming rights? Rooms, areas, sections or buildings? How are they tied into the donor wall?
• Does the donor wall serve any other communication purpose, such as recognizing volunteers, staff, or other programs that staff may be involved in?
• How will you use this donor wall as a marketing tool to solicit other donations?
  o New donors seeing the wall should be encouraged to picture their name up there.
  o Existing donors should think about cumulative donations and even moving up to the next giving level.
• Do you have a separate capital campaign?

Space Issues:

• What is the space available on the wall for this display?
• Is this a main traffic area?
• Is potential congestion a concern?
• How will the display serve to get people to stop, look at it and interact with it?
• Do you have outside distractions that might impact the effectiveness of the wall, such as noise, animal areas (zoos), traffic, classrooms, weather?
• How comfortable is the viewing of the donor wall? Seating, sun, interior lighting, windows, outside distractions?
• What will need to be done to the background to prepare it for the installation of the donor wall? Painting or panels needed?
• What is behind your donor wall? Will this present any distractions?
• Lighting, electrical, IT resources available?
• Vandalism Prevention: What type of environment is this donor wall in? How will this impact materials used in construction?
• Other architectural or physical issues that should be raised in the planning discussion?

Design Elements:

• Past recognition elements, historical considerations, current themes – How to incorporate all these into the new design? The more information shared at this stage, the more consistent the donor wall is likely to be in regard to overall themes and messages within the culture of the organization.
• Are there previous installations that you are trying to match?
• Should the design be forward focused, or have a historical perspective? What is your organization known for, and how can that be incorporated into the concept? What heritage material is available to bring into the design? Do you have any historical buildings, old donor walls that have been taken down or other elements that can be incorporated into the construction?
• Who is your audience? Who are you reaching out to? What is the donor experience that you are trying to evoke? What message do you want to convey?
• What is the overall larger recognition picture that this donor wall will be a part of, what other issues should be made aware of in planning?
• Are there any future logo changes or rebranding planned for or being discussed that could impact the design of the donor wall?

Donor Wall Message:

• What is your message, and who will develop that? Does your content echo the rest of the organization in a consistent message? Is special content required that may necessitate outside approvals?
• Who is involved with developing the donor wall? Staff, donors, volunteers, committee, board members, development manager, CEO?
• Who will be providing all the text, images, video, photos, logos, graphics and other content? Do you have these available in appropriate digital format? Graphics in EPS, Name lists in Excel, Content in Word are usually best. Ask your supplier what they need. Expect typesetting to carry additional costs, the more provided digitally, the better.
• Do’s and Don’ts: Colors, materials, images, finishes – what are the issues that should be avoided or must be used?
• Donor Wall names: Approval of published list – who decides? How names are displayed – who decides? Proofing of list – who checks?
• Is all content written and in digital format? Do you have a graphics standards manual?

Hierarchy of Donor Recognition:

• Will major donors be put in a separate category on the donor wall? How many giving categories will you require? Will some categories be more prominently displayed?
• Is this a closed list or an open list? Will you have a final list of names to go on the donor wall, or is this a donor wall that will be adding names over the years? How many names should be planned for? Would you like something in place of blank names? How frequently will names be updated? As donations come in, monthly, quarterly or annually?
• Name Organization: will this be alphabetical, random, by date turned in, or by amount? Or some combination? If someone gives $5,000 every year for 5 years, is this a $5,000 designation or the cumulative designation of $25,000?
• How do you encourage donors to move up to the next giving level? If a donor does move to the next level, does that change the location and/or size of the donor’s name on the donor wall?
• If a name is to be moved, what is involved with moving the name, and who is to do that?

Multimedia Donor Recognition Walls:

• Will your multimedia donor recognition wall feature video, text, audio and photos? Will you use this to tell donor stories and share profiles? Will historical background or timelines be used? Should the display be interactive or self cycling? Should the display be incorporated into part of a larger display, or stand alone?
• Who is providing the video content? Who is providing the copy to be read? Will the CEO, Staff or Board Members be featured in a special section such as an overview or introduction or closing statement?
• Interactive Donor Recognition provides an opportunity for Donor of the Month profiles, Key Donors to tell their story, and also can incorporate the culture and history of the organization. Do you plan on adding profiles after the initial kick off? What degree of visitor interactivity would you like to see? What is the viewing distance? What size screen will be needed for the space and viewing area?
• Do you require a portable multimedia donor recognition display that can be taken to special events, in a kiosk, podium, monument or other portable display?
• Would a second multimedia display enhance other areas in the organization?
• Should the data be also available on the website for the general public to access?

Donor Wall Budget:

• While there is no firm and fast rule on how much to budget for a donor wall project, 2-4% of the funds raised is an amount that is often used. Do you have funds available right now for the project, or are these anticipated funds? If you exceed your giving target, how does that impact your plans? If you fall short, will there be changes in what you can do for the donor wall?
• Is there an old donor wall that is coming down? Are you moving the names to the new wall? Can you use this opportunity to communicate to your donors of the change in your donor wall, and how this could be a great opportunity for them to move up to the next giving level? Does your budget allow for the dismantling of the old donor wall? Who is going to do the work?
• Does your budget include Campaign Consultation, Initial Design, Fabrication and Installation? Who is doing the updates and how often? Is there a budget for annual maintenance and updates?
• The presentation of a donor wall is usually done with fanfare. What are the costs that may be associated with the unveiling of the display? Are there any costs associated with special events surrounding the unveiling? Are there any marketing costs that should be planned for?

Installation:

• During installation, are there any requirements to cordon off the area, redirect traffic or other safety concerns? How about after hours?
• Will high ceilings require special lifts for installation? What is the timeline for installation? Will any other activities have to be rescheduled or relocated during installation? What other pre-installation issues are there that should be addressed?
Donor Recognition:

- How do you thank your donors at each level of giving? Are you consistent with each office, department, facility and location within your organization? What recognition do you give to the donor that can be displayed in the home or office? Do you seek additional ideas that will allow your organization to set itself apart from others with regards to recognition and acknowledgement?

- Who is in charge of donor recognition information? Who updates the donor lists and keeps it current? Who will draft the thank you letters? Who will sign the thank you letters to donors? Who is responsible for follow-up and how is it done? Will major donors receive personal phone calls, visits, dinners, naming opportunities or other additional recognition?

Kick-off:

- How will you announce your new donor recognition wall to staff, volunteers, public and the donors? If the display is interactive, does it get updated regularly and how is that communicated? Will new staff introduction tours include the donor wall? Will visitors be shown the donor wall as part of a tour of the facility? Do you have any special events that might coincide with the unveiling of your donor wall? Is there a special date that the event should coordinate around?

- Press releases, newsletters, website, e-mail blasts, in-house promotions, internal memos, media lists, blogs and announcements to AFP are a great way to get the word out. Use them all. Make sure your public relations staff is fully informed.
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For more information, see our website: rcbdonorrecognition.com or call us at 1-800-929-9110.