



allegiance_{group} + PURSUANT⁺

The Cost of Waiting

Why Donor Experience is the New Frontier of Fundraising Loyalty

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The Future of Fundraising is Personal

Fundraising is no longer just about dollars raised. It's about trust earned.

In today's rapidly shifting environment, nonprofit leaders are under more pressure than ever to demonstrate impact, grow revenue, and retain donor support — all while navigating tighter budgets and greater complexity. Yet too often, what we call a “fundraising strategy” is really a campaign calendar built around asks, not relationships.

Here's what we know: **The future of fundraising is personal.**

It belongs to organizations that intentionally design donor experiences, not just donation forms. To leaders who see retention as an outcome of connection, not coincidence. To teams who steward every gift as the beginning of a journey, not the end of a transaction.

This guide explores what happens when we wait to act on that shift — and what's possible when we stop.



The Loyalty Crisis You Can't Afford to Ignore

According to recent research:

DONOR RETENTION RATES REMAIN

below

45%

across the sector

(FEP Report)

NEW DONOR RETENTION HAS PLUMMETED

to

19.2%

GIVING BY INDIVIDUALS REMAINS THE LARGEST SOURCE OF SUPPORT

67%

but giving from lower-dollar
donors continues to decline

Meanwhile, THE COST TO ACQUIRE A NEW DONOR

is

7-10x

HIGHER than to retain an
existing one (Sargeant)

The numbers tell a clear story:

- » We're working harder, spending more, and keeping fewer donors.
- » We're still losing donors not because our missions aren't meaningful — but because our follow-up isn't.

And every day you delay improving the experience is a day you're losing revenue, trust, and future impact.

Waiting isn't neutral — it's expensive. And the cost of inaction compounds over time: declining donor loyalty, rising burnout among staff, and greater investment needed to recover.

“Standing still is moving backwards.”



What Donors Actually Want (And Why They Leave When They Don't Get It)

Most donors don't stop giving because they're angry. They stop because they feel invisible.

Research from Allegiance Group + Pursuant (AGP) and Adrian Sargeant confirms:

- » Donors want to be **treated like people, not portfolios**.
- » They expect **personalization, recognition, and relevance**.
- » They want to understand the **impact** of their gift.
- » And above all, they **want to feel that they matter**.

Too often, we:

- » Thank donors generically.
- » Speak about the organization's greatness instead of the donor's impact.
- » Wait too long to follow up, or miss the critical window for a second ask.

This leads to the costliest outcome of all: **silence**.

When donors don't hear from you, they begin to wonder if their gift mattered. If their story was seen. If the mission is still connected to their values. Silence breeds uncertainty, and uncertainty leads to quiet exits.

"The donor doesn't want to hear less from you. They want to hear more about what they care about."

Donor Experience is Infrastructure, Not Fluff

As outlined in AGP's [Giving Outlook](#) and Donor Journey research, donor experience is emerging as the new infrastructure of sustainable growth. Not just a feel-good tactic, but a **strategic lever for revenue, retention, and brand loyalty**.

A donor experience strategy:

- » Designs journeys based on the stages of awareness, exploration, expansion, and commitment (Donor Journey Framework).
- » Aligns personalization with data, mission, and meaningful engagement.
- » Turns omni-channel from a buzzword into an orchestrated strategy.
- » Builds a culture of relationship fundraising across departments.

And perhaps most critically: **Donor experience is not a communications strategy — it's a growth strategy.**

This isn't theoretical. It's measurable.

Our Donor Experience Forecast Tool helps organizations project:

- » Retention loss in mid-level donor segments
- » Downgrade risk in sustainer programs
- » Missed second gifts from new donors

And then map practical, scalable ways to close the gaps.

“Donor loyalty isn't guaranteed. You have to earn it every step of the way.”

The Real Cost of Waiting

Organizations that delay action see:

- » **Donors lapse quietly.**
- » **Sustainers go unthanked and unengaged.**
- » **Mid-level givers never receive a personal touch.**
- » **Board and staff morale decline as revenue flattens.**

But underneath all of this is something harder to track, but just as real:

The sound of silence.

Every unanswered gift. Every thank-you that was never sent. Every impact story never shared. These moments of non-communication are not just missed opportunities — they are silent signals to the donor that the relationship isn't valued. Over time, these silences add up — and donors leave without ever telling you why.



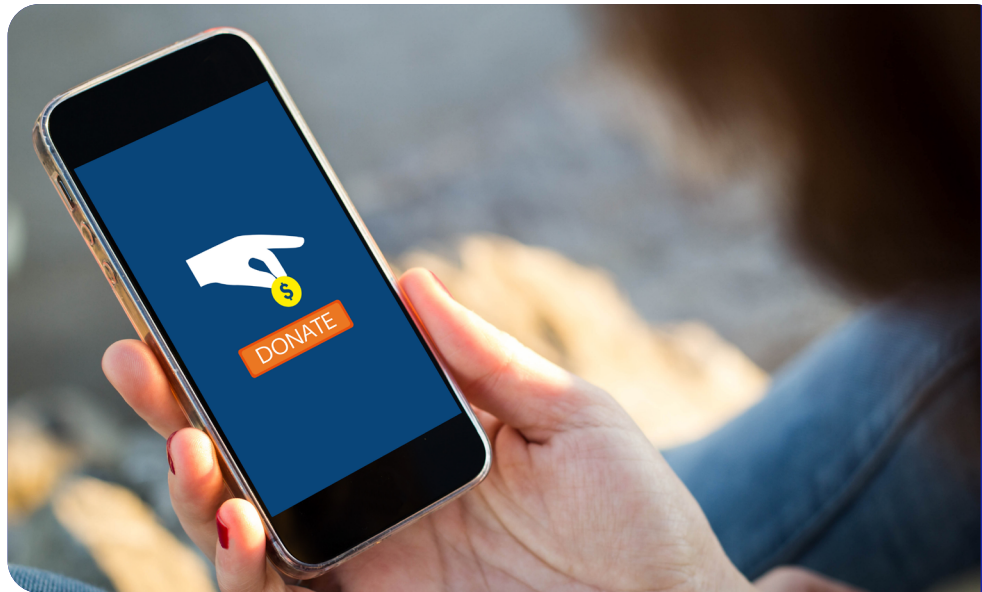
Leaders who wait often underestimate how quickly donor expectations evolve, and how fast competitors fill the gap. Even loyal donors will drift toward organizations that communicate impact, build trust, and personalize outreach.

Waiting can also result in:

- » **Loss of brand relevance**
- » **Fundraiser burnout from outdated systems**
- » **Talent attrition** from lack of results

Meanwhile, organizations that act — even small, consistent steps — unlock compounding returns:

- » Higher retention and lifetime value
- » Deeper engagement from first-time and mid-level givers
- » Clearer visibility into which strategies actually work



“With two emails and a phone call, we retained five donors and raised \$550K.”

How to Start Now (Without Overhauling Everything)

You don't need a new CRM to begin.

You need a clear plan and the courage to start personalizing with what you already have.

START HERE

1. **Map Your Moments of Truth:** Where do you currently delight or disappoint a donor after their gift?
2. **Use Our Forecast Tool:** Get a segment-specific look at what waiting is costing you.
3. **Choose One Priority Segment:** Mid-level donors? Sustainers? First-timers?
4. **Build a Personal Experience Track:** Emails, calls, video, print, thank-you notes — what matters is relevance and rhythm.
5. **Measure and Improve:** Set one or two KPIs: retention, 2nd gift rate, upgrade volume. Watch what changes.

Even lean or overextended teams can move the needle with:

- » Personalized content and segmentation
- » Volunteer-led thank-you calls
- » Authentic, donor-centric messaging
- » Asking for and reflecting donor feedback

“Personally stewarding as many donors as you have capacity for makes a big difference.”

Case Study — How NAMI Designed a Scalable Donor Experience to Fuel Sustainable Growth

What does it look like to stop waiting and start transforming donor experience into infrastructure?

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization, partnered with AGP to address a shrinking donor file. Though active, the file wasn't growing fast enough — new donor acquisition and reactivation lagged behind attrition.

The solution? Shift from transactional thinking to an intentional donor experience.

Together, we quickly built a donor journey that prioritized connection, not just conversion.

WHAT CHANGED

- » **Lowered the giving threshold** from ~\$50 to ~\$20 to increase response — bringing more people into the donor community.
- » **Refreshed creative and list strategy**, enhancing both appeal and reach.
- » **Launched thoughtful welcome experiences** — including coffee kits, affirmation cards, and mission-driven digital content.
- » **Integrated touchpoints** across email, SMS, and print to create a cohesive, donor-centric journey.

THE RESULTS

- » **Donors per mailing increased from 900 to 1,600**
- » **Response rate nearly doubled** (0.40% → 0.76%)
- » **Average gift adjusted to \$34**, helping drive volume and long-term potential



“Working with Allegiance Group + Pursuant has been transformational for our program. Their team helped us reimagine how we acquire and engage donors — pairing smart strategy with a deep commitment to donor experience. The results speak for themselves: more new donors, stronger retention, and a clear path toward sustainable growth.”

**Summer Parrish,
National Director,
Individual Giving &
Development**

Personal is Powerful

The future of fundraising belongs to those who make donors feel seen.

That means:

- » Leading with relationship, not just revenue.
- » Centering donor identity and intention.
- » Creating experiences that match the courage of the donor's gift.

AGP believes donor experience is the new growth engine for philanthropy.

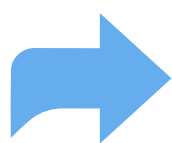
We partner with organizations to move from campaign thinking to connection strategies — across every channel, for every donor.

When we make it personal, donors stay.

They give more.

They invite others.

And they become part of the mission, not just funders of it.



Let's build that future — together.

Start Your Fundraising Forecast
Assessment Today →



More about **Allegiance Group + Pursuant**



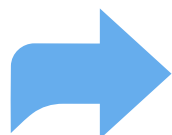
At Allegiance Group + Pursuant (AGP), we help nonprofits turn missions into movements — and supporters into passionate champions. We're a strategic partner to mission-driven teams who want more than short-term wins. Our work blends insight and creativity to strengthen what matters most: deeper connection, lasting loyalty, and the resources to power your mission. We've walked in your shoes. We understand the complexity nonprofits face — because we've lived it. That experience grounds our approach in authenticity, humility, and deep respect for your work.

From donor journeys to brand storytelling, direct mail to digital engagement, and data to design — we bring both intelligence and heart to help you grow what matters. Whether you're looking to inspire action, modernize your strategy, or simply cut through the noise — we will meet you where you are and build from there.

This isn't just fundraising. It's not just marketing. It's how powerful missions take root, gain momentum, and grow.

Choose AGP for Strategy & Consulting, Direct Mail, Web Design & Development, Digital Marketing, Advocacy, Membership Acquisition & Retention, Donation Platforms, and more. Our clients feed the hungry, heal the sick, nourish souls, enrich lives, care for animals, and build minds. You have an important goal, and we're thrilled to leverage our blend of data, technology, and award-winning creative to get you there.

Contact Us! We'd love to connect to learn more about your mission and the goals we can help you achieve.



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