

Cleveland Clinic

Applying Prospect Research and Management Strategy to Drive Growth

For Steve Fitch, Prospect Management Director at Cleveland Clinic, integrating the Research/Prospect Management group with the development staff has become a personal mission. “When I first joined Cleveland Clinic in 2002, we had three researchers who were hidden away, never to see or meet with development officers. Today, there are five of us and Research/Prospect Management has evolved into an essential part of the fundraising team.” The results can be found in the total dollars raised—overall fundraising has grown by 54% since 2002.

Proactive Research Nets Major Gift Prospects

Cleveland Clinic is in prospect research mode every day. For example, Research Supervisor Shaw Mumford uses prospect research to identify a prospect’s real estate, stock holdings, philanthropic donations, business ownership and foundation leadership positions to determine a donor and/or prospects propensity to give to the Clinic. From the research, the team assigns ratings and giving capacity to support cultivation approaches and ask amounts. Sometimes, success comes swiftly. For example, Development Researcher Lisa Tersigni recently had a string of big hits—in a three day period, she identified four \$5M prospects who were already giving to the Clinic at modest levels. In another case, a first time, \$250 donor was found to have a \$5M capacity.

One important component to the program is monthly grateful patient screenings. Staying well within HIPAA guidelines, the value of grateful patient screenings helps target those constituents at a time when they have the highest propensity to give—within 3 months of care. Due to the large number of patients visiting Cleveland Clinic, a screening can quickly identify prospects for various campaigns, allowing the development team to focus first on those with the greatest potential at each gift level.

Prior to the initiation of the monthly screenings, development officers cleansed their pipelines, tightening their donor and prospect lists. “We wanted to make the most of every opportunity, focusing first on those with the greatest potential. Now, we are really on track in knowing how many records will be returned at a major gift level from each monthly screening,” says Fitch. “It has become a predictable and critical business process—which is critical to our planning, especially as it pertains to broader fundraising goals. From this strategic approach, our new challenge is what we’ll do when each development officer hits their threshold of manageable prospect names. A full pipeline is a great problem to have.”

“Prospect research is a critical part of our fundraising process. It helps us to ascertain giving capacity among recent donors and identify our best prospects. We also use regular, monthly grateful patient screenings to prioritize and segment our prospect lists into manageable groups. The result is simple—our development officers’ pipelines are full and the ratings and analytics we apply to our ask amounts ensure that ask amounts are on target.”

—Steve Fitch, Prospect Management Director



Adapting to the Surge of New Prospects

One side effect to the screenings and surge of higher level major gifts prospects is what to do with those prospects that are still promising candidates, but at lower gift levels. Suzanne Sopa, Director of Annual Giving, explains, “With the development officers’ plates full, we didn’t want to lose a chance to cultivate those who fell into our mid-level range. If we followed our traditional Annual Giving process, these prospects—still at fairly high gift levels—would be moved to telephone and direct mail campaigns. Instead, we created a new ‘Special Gifts’ category to offer a higher touch approach so that we don’t reduce gift levels from those we consider to be the ‘magic in the middle.’”

“Because of our screening success, we’ve had to rethink where mid-level prospects fit within our gift programs. We are testing the theory that those in our mid-range will give at higher levels if they receive a high touch approach over traditional phone and direct mail campaigns. We believe that this strategy will result in a greater return on investment from those we deem to be the ‘magic in the middle.’”

—Suzanne Sopa, Director of Annual Giving

Looking Ahead

Fitch is prepared for the continued growth in their prospect management program. “Monthly patient screenings are a big part of our ongoing fundraising efforts,” says Fitch, “As well, the team is focused on creating more structure and formalization to their prospect management process, especially through improved evaluation.” Overall, Cleveland Clinic has found success by unifying their prospect research and management platform, instituting a strategic grateful patient screening program, and adapting to the surge in prospects by creating new gift categories. Today, they’re poised to reap the rewards from a consistent screening program and a flexible, fully integrated development team. Explains Fitch, “Every day our team takes another step that will ultimately make each patient and donor’s experience better. Planning, research and adaptability have helped us achieve remarkable results over the past eight years—consistency and accountability for our work is what will take us to even new heights.”