

# An Analytic and Collaborative Method for Developing Affinity Ratings



An affinity rating is one way to quantify your constituents' and prospects connection or linkage to your organization. You will already have much of the data you need to calculate a constituent's affinity.

## Components of an affinity rating could include:

- The type of constituent they are (board member vs. Community member)
- Whether they have attended events
- If they are related to members of your board, staff or other supporters
- If they have asked for information through email, newsletter or your website
- If they have engaged in interactive media such as surveys, online quizzes or responded to advocacy requests

If someone contacts your charity and asks that you contact them LESS frequently that still may be an indication of higher affinity. Any proactive communication often represents a closer relationship.

In addition, giving history may also be useful in measuring affinity. Some valuable measures could be

- First gift
- Length of time on file
- Total given
- Largest gift
- Frequency of giving and
- Recency of the last gift

As we become more adept at capturing data from social media sites and interactions, these too may factor into our ratings. Who is following us or likes us on Facebook, who retweets our content on Twitter, or who joins a LinkedIn discussion group might all indicate a prospect with higher affinity.

Many organizations rate their prospects for affinity using a simple scoring model (a business model as opposed to a statistical or predictive model) they develop internally. Others use the more robust process of predictive modeling which they may develop either in-house or with the help of a consultant or business partner.

Following is procedure for developing an affinity rating for your nonprofit. It follows an analytic structure, and encourages inter- and cross-departmental collaboration. This is often a key in terms of getting buy-in and widespread adoption of your completed model.

There are eight simple steps in this process:

1. Brainstorm variables indicative of affinity.
2. Select the top variables you and/or your team believe are predictive of affinity for your organization.
3. Select the criteria the must be met for each variable.
4. Rank the variables in order of importance.
5. Weight the variables to assign relative importance.
6. Bucket the scores to create actionable segmentations.

7. Score a subset of your prospects to test the model and make adjustments if necessary. Continue to test and refine and when satisfied, score the entire constituency.
8. Automate scoring and update procedures if possible.

To promote collaboration, get all possible input, create synergy, and to ensure the highest level of confidence in the rating your produce, it is best to involve all stakeholders in this process. This may include major gift officers, development staff, prospect development staff, information services staff and administrative personnel.

## Step One

As a group, brainstorm the factors or variables that predict affinity to your organization. Let everyone's voice be heard and remain open minded about the value of each person's contribution to the process and unique insights. It may be interesting to compare what major gift officers believe indicates affinity, compared to researchers or database administrators. Forthright and open discussion will lead to interesting insights. As an example, some variables that might be put forth by members of the group could be:

- Number of gifts
- Total giving
- Recency of giving
- Length of time on file
- Consecutive years giving
- Event attendance
- Volunteer status
- Reads the newsletter (click throughs)
- Reads email (click throughs)
- Follows organization on social media
- Has multiple relationships within data base

These are just examples of some of the many attributes your group might come up with.

## Step Two

Select the 4-6 variables from the list generated that are agreed upon as "the most valuable" for predicting affinity or inclination. While there is no limit to the number of variables you can or should include, adding more than six makes the development process more complex, the calculation and recalculation of the score more complex, and often does not have an appreciable impact on the final outcome or scoring of individuals. For our example, our team may select the following five attributes/variables as the agreed upon most predictive:

- Number of gifts
- Recency of giving
- Event attendance
- Volunteer status and
- Reads email

If your group has trouble reaching consensus on the most predictive variables, you can ask each member to put a hash mark next to their top three choices. Those with the most hash marks are the winners.

### Step Three

Select the criterion that differentiates someone with good affinity from someone who has less affinity for each of the variables. Do this by assigning a specific value or occurrence to indicate behavior associated with “affinity.” For instance:

Variable	Value indicating affinity
Number of Gifts	$\geq 3$
Recency of Gifts	$\leq 24$ months
Volunteer Status	Yes or No (Current or past board, current committee member, current event volunteer)
Reads Email	Opened three emails in past 6 months
Event Attendance	Attended onsite event in past 12 months

Both the variables and the values may change as the model is tested and evaluated, so getting it “right,” is not imperative on the first try. Later, members may decide that opening 6 emails is a better indicator of affinity than opening three emails. The idea is to collaborate, test, evaluate, tweak and repeat.

### Step Four

Rank the variables in relative order of importance. For this step, pair rank each variable against every other variable. You can do this using a table like the following:

Variable	Pair Rank	Order	Weight
A. Total number of gifts $\geq 3$	///		
B. Most recent gift in past 24 months	//		
C. Volunteer (board, committee member, event volunteer)	////		
D. Opened 3 emails in last 6 months			
E. Attended an onsite event in past 12 months	/		

Compare each variable to the ones below it, for instance, “Is variable A more important than variable B?” If A is more important, put a hash mark in the Pair Rank Column next to A. Then compare A to C. If C is more important than A, put a hash mark in the Pair Rank column next to C. Continue this process until you have compared every variable to every other variable. When complete, you will have 10 hash marks in your pair rank column. There should be a unique number of hash marks next to each variable – if you find you have a tie, try doing the exercise again as you have made an error or inconsistent choice.

In our example, there are four hash marks next to Current Volunteer, three next to Total Number of Gifts, two next to Last Gift within 24 months, and one next to attended event in past 12 months.

This corresponds to our rank order of the variables, with Volunteer status being most important, and emails opened being least important.

We can now fill in the third column, Order, assigning Volunteer status a “1” and emails opened a “5.”

Variable	Pair Rank	Order	Weight
A. Total number of gifts >=3	///	2	
B. Most recent gift in past 24 months	//	3	
C. Volunteer (board, committee member, event volunteer)	////	1	
D. Opened 3 emails in last 6 months		5	
E. Attended an onsite event in past 12 months	/	4	

### Step Five

The next step is to weight each variable in terms of relative importance. Is variable C twice as important as variable E? Three times? One way to accomplish this is to assign a possible total of 100 points to be divided among the variables depending on the weight or importance you assign to each.

For instance, looking at the “Weight” column in the table below, Volunteer Status is twice as important as Event Attendance and three times as important as Emails Opened.

Variable	Pair Rank	Order	Weight
A. Total number of gifts >=3	///	2	25
B. Most recent gift in past 24 months	//	3	20
C. Volunteer (board, committee member, event volunteer)	////	1	30
D. Opened 3 emails in last 6 months		5	10
E. Attended an onsite event in past 12 months	/	4	15

Using the points, each constituent can be scored on a scale of 1-100 for affinity based on the agreed upon criteria and variables.

## Step Six

In order to make the ratings actionable, it is important to “bucket” them, or divide the scores into groups. A score of 1-100 is too granular to be useful. For instance, there is not a significant difference between someone scoring “80” and someone scoring “85.” You will need to give some thought to appropriate groupings, but for our example, the following “buckets” or groups are a good starting point:

Scores:

70-100=A  
46-69=B  
26-45=C  
10-25=D  
0-9=E

Group “A” represents those with the highest affinity (in our example, they met at least three criteria including volunteerism) and “E” being the lowest affinity (in our example, they met no criteria).

## Step Seven

Before a full deployment, test your score on a subset of constituents, some well-known to the group. Determine if the assigned scores reflect the participant’s knowledge and understanding of specific constituents. If not, the system can be tweaked and re-tested. When participants in the process have agreed there is a viable score, deploy it by scoring the entire constituency. Remember, it is flexible and can be changed multiple times before you arrive at a final, successful and useful scoring tool.

## Step Eight

Once you have a functional score, you can take this a step further by asking your technology support to automate the scoring. If a constituent attends an event, makes a gift or changes status, the score can be automatically updated in your Donor Management System (DMS).

This process may be too complicated for some, and it may be too simple for others. Either way, it has several advantages:

- Anyone can do it, as it requires no special skills and no special software or resources.
- It can (and should) be done as a group activity. Allowing multiple stakeholders with unique perspectives to be a part of developing the score not only results in a more robust outcome, but produces more confidence in the resulting score and therefore more utility.
- The score can be easily revised and adjusted when circumstances change or if new insights or information come to light. Because the score was developed using relatively few variables, and a simple scoring mechanism, it is not a huge project to do initially, nor to update or overhaul it as circumstances dictate.