



Who Gives to Endowment and Why: A Practical Donor Strategy

The Power of Permanence: A Two-Part Endowment Series



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01

Bringing Your Endowment Practice to Life

May 20, 2026

12:00 – 12:45 PM EST

02

Who Gives to Endowment and Why

June 24, 2026

12:00 – 12:45 PM EST

Today's Speaker



Suzanne Eden

Partner
CCS Fundraising



About CCS Fundraising

A Trusted Strategic Fundraising Consulting Firm

75+ Years

Most recommended strategic fundraising consulting firm

800 Client Partners

We work with nearly 800 nonprofit organizations each year

600+ Professional Staff

Largest and most experienced staff among leading firms

15 Offices

Throughout the United States and across the globe

10x Return

Our client partners experience five to more than ten times return on their investment

\$32.4B Campaign Goals

CCS manages over \$32.4B in cumulative campaign goals each year

8 Core Services

- Campaign Planning & Feasibility Studies
- Data Analytics Audits & Assessments
- Training & Leadership
- Campaign Management
- Strategic Planning & Development Projects
- Systems & Change Management
- Interim Development Management

Today's Agenda

01

Setting the Stage: The Current Giving Landscape

02

Best Practice #1: Know your Endowment Donor Profile

03

Best Practice #2: Build and Work Your Pipeline

04

Best Practice #3: Cultivation is What Moves Donors

05

Key Takeaways and Q&A

A quick **pulse check**...

Who Gives to Endowment and Why

Trends in Endowment Giving

More nonprofits are prioritizing endowment

Endowment fundraising is no longer niche

Many nonprofits are actively starting or expanding endowment programs

Seeking to strengthen financial resilience and diversify revenue streams

Recently accelerated after COVID-era funding disruptions and continuing government cutbacks

A small but growing share of total giving

Endowment giving is growing but remains concentrated

Large in dollar impact but small in share, typically driven by major and planned gifts

Donors expect clear, designated impact

Most endowment gifts are restricted by donors, often tied to specific purposes like scholarships, faculty chairs, or programs

This can limit institutional flexibility, but organizations can align gifts with their areas of greatest need and where they can offer measurable outcomes

Planned giving and wealth transfer support long-term growth

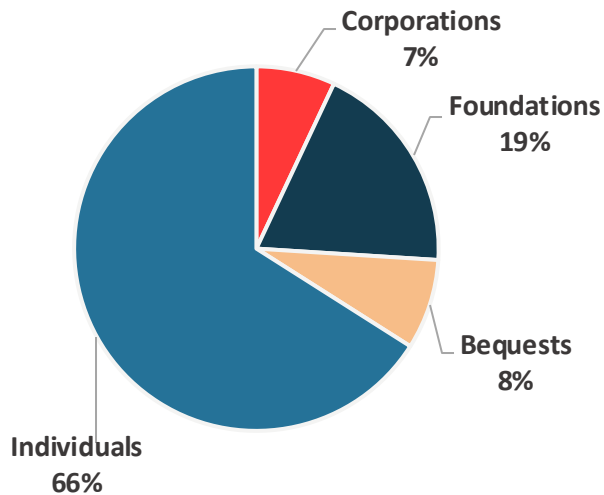
Bequest giving growth in 2025:

+20%

Largest single-source increase in 2025

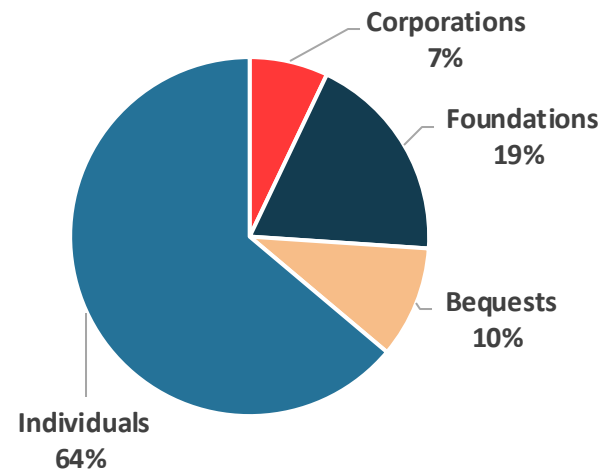
2024

2024 Total Giving: \$592.5 Billion



2025

2025 Total Giving: \$617.2 Billion



Total giving tracks market performance, with less volatility

Market swings are

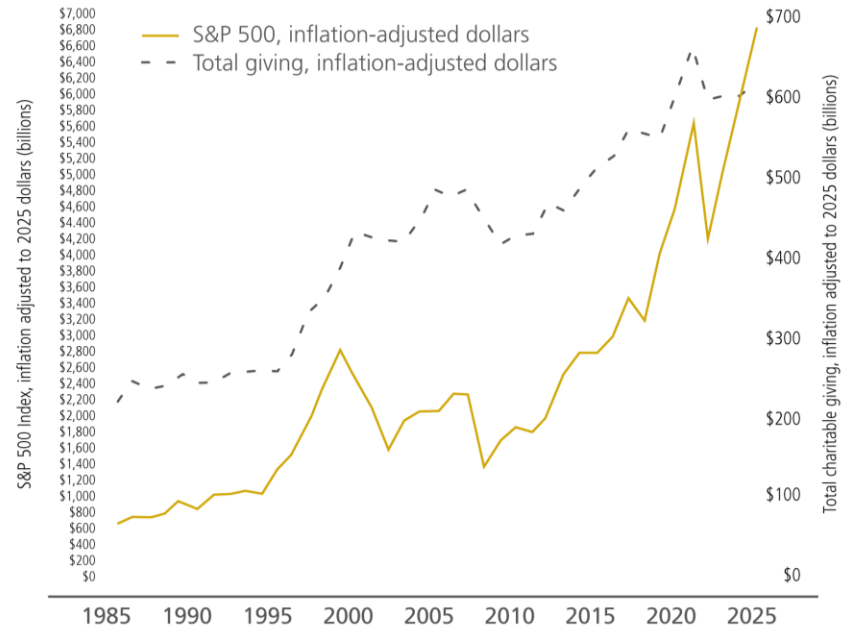
~2-3x

larger than changes
in **total giving** over
the past decade

Total Charitable Giving Relative to the S&P 500

1985-2025

(in billions of inflation adjusted dollars, 2025 = \$100)



Who Gives to Endowment and Why

Best Practice #1: Know Your Endowment Donor Profiles

Your best endowment prospects are already in your database



What we assume

Endowment requires a "different kind of donor"



What's actually true

Relationship depth, values alignment, and desire for lasting impact

The Four Donor Profiles



Loyal Annual Donor

- 5+ years of giving
- Deeply connected to mission
- Most overlooked
- Loyalty = strongest predictor of endowment readiness



Major Gift Partner

- Already investing significantly
- Looking to deepen impact
- Naming opportunity = natural fit



Values-Aligned Donor

- Motivated by specific mission area or legacy
- Responds to: "What does your gift make possible forever?"



Planned Giving Prospect

- May already be thinking about estate
- Important to note that endowment isn't only about planned gifts

What to look for across all profiles:



5+ years of consistent giving



Expressed connection to a specific program, person, or outcome



Life stage moments: retirement, inheritance, sale of a business



Participation in a major gift or campaign conversations

Who Gives to Endowment and Why

Best Practice #2: Build and Work Your Pipeline

How does your
organization currently
**manage endowment
prospects?**

The Pipeline Framework

Signal Tracking:

What tells you a donor may be ready?

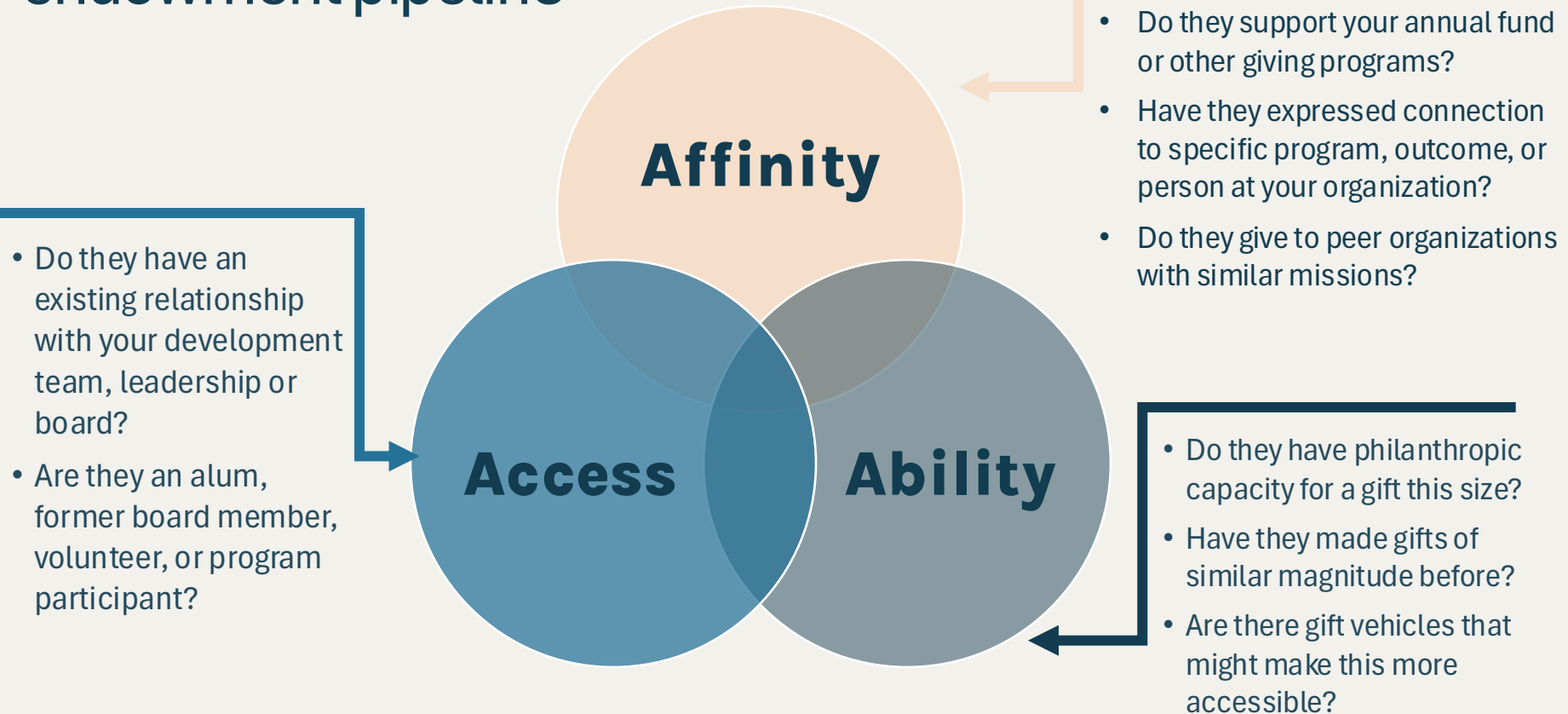
- Increased giving year over year
- Unsolicited comments about the organization's future
- Deeper event engagement
- Life stage transitions

Prioritization Framework

Relationship tenure + gift consistency
+ mission passion + capacity

- Donors who score high on first three of equation are strong candidates (even without major gift capacity)

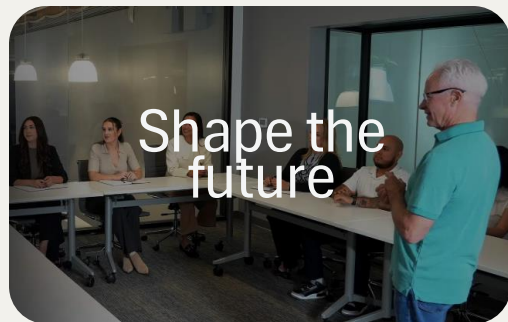
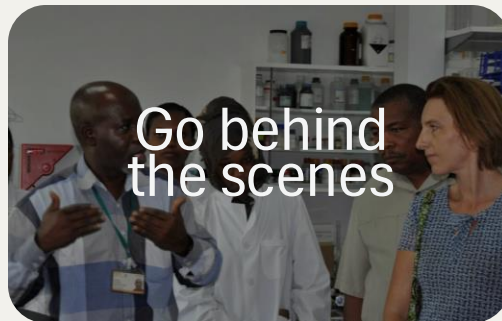
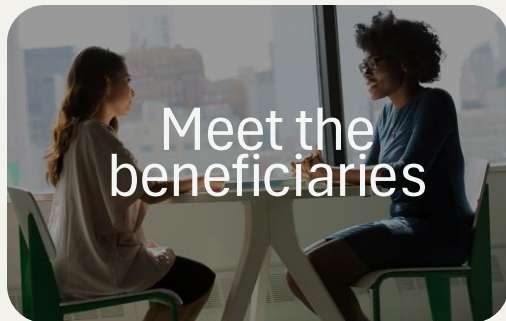
Consider these principles when building an endowment pipeline



Who Gives to Endowment and Why

Best Practice #3: Cultivation is What Moves Donors

Your toolkit for endowment cultivation



Cultivation in Action: Building an Endowment from the Ground Up

Step 1: Find the emotional hook

- "Become a part of the historical fabric and future of the arts."



Step 2: Build the right leadership around it

- Recruited strong volunteer leadership team to open doors and make peer-to-peer asks



Step 3: The result

- Raised over \$84M in under two years

Cultivation in Action: Endowing Research

Step 1: Build the human connection

- Private meeting between longtime major donor and School of Medicine faculty



Step 2: Make them a thought partner

- Invited donor to observe session where researchers evaluated potential initiatives to prioritize (translated into lay language)



Step 3: The conversation

- Contribution to basic science research endowment soon followed

You don't have to ask for a gift to make a donor feel like a partner in your mission

Cultivation in Action: Endowing a Student Cohort

Step 1: Find the right donor + opportunity

- Longtime loyal annual donor
- Introduced an opportunity they didn't know existed



Step 2: Let the mission do the work

- Invited donor to scholarship breakfast & student meet and greets



Step 3: Donor names it themselves

- \$10M endowed student advisement funded via a blended gift of current dollars + a planned gift

Key Takeaways

01 Your best endowment prospects are already in your database. Look for relationship depth and values alignment, not just gift size

02 A disciplined pipeline doesn't require new infrastructure, just a new lens

03 Cultivation does the heavy lifting

04 Your toolkit already exists (scholarship breakfasts, site visits, and beneficiary introductions, etc.)

05 In an uncertain economic moment, permanence is a compelling offer

Want to go deeper?

Q&A



Thank You

