A Practical, Business-Minded Guide to Donor Personas—Modeled After How Profitable Companies Actually Grow

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Where Knowledge Meets Momentum and Talent Finds Its Purpose

The Ideal Donor Persona™

How Non-Profits Grow Faster When They Separate Who They Serve from Who Funds the Mission

Introduction: Why Most Non-Profits Struggle to Grow

Most non-profits are built on **heart**, not **strategy**.

They know:

- Who they serve

- Why the mission matters

- What outcomes they want

But they often **fail to clearly define who actually pays for the mission**.

In for-profit businesses:

- Customers buy products or services

- Revenue funds operations and growth

In non-profits:

- **Beneficiaries receive the services**

- **Donors fund the organization**

These are **not the same persona** and treating them as one is one of the most expensive mistakes a non-profit can make.

This book fixes that.

Chapter 1: The Retail Business Parallel (This Changes Everything)

In a retail business:

Role	Purpose
Customer	Buys the product
Revenue	Funds the business
Business	Improves product + marketing

In a non-profit:

Role	Purpose
Beneficiary Persona	Uses the services
Donor Persona	Funds the mission
Organization	Converts funding into impact

Key Insight:
👉 Your *donor* is your **customer**.
👉 Your *beneficiary* is your **product outcome**.

Once this clicks, everything else becomes easier.

Chapter 2: Why Mixing Personas Breaks Fundraising

Many non-profits try to raise money by:

- Speaking emotionally about beneficiaries

- Asking donors to "care as much as we do"

- Using generic messaging for everyone

This leads to:

- Low donor retention

- One-time gifts instead of recurring support

- Donor fatigue and confusion

Why?
Because donors don't give to *use* the service.
They give to **solve a problem they emotionally, socially, or strategically care about**.

Chapter 3: The Two Core Personas Every Non-Profit Must Define

Persona #1: The Beneficiary Persona (Service User)

This answers:

- Who receives help?

- What problem do they face?

- What outcome do we provide?

This persona shapes:

- Program design

- Service delivery

- Impact measurement

Persona #2: The Donor Persona (Mission Investor)

This answers:

- Who funds the work?

- Why do they care?

- What outcome do *they* want to see?

This persona shapes:

- Messaging

- Fundraising strategy

- Retention & growth

They must be defined separately. Always.

Chapter 4: What a Donor Persona Actually Is

A **Donor Persona** is a clear, documented profile of the type of person or organization most likely to:

- Believe in your mission

- Fund it consistently

- Advocate for it publicly

It is **not**:

- "People who care"

- "Anyone who wants to help"

- "The general public"

Those are *audiences*, not personas.

Michelle Gibson Nonprofit donor example

"I think your charity does incredible grassroots work and inspired by your ambitious vision."

Age: 27
Sex: Female
Work: Professor, NYU
Location: New York, NY
University: Graduated from Penn State University

Communication Style

- They like straightforward communication that is action-based and honest.
- Fluffy stories and buzzwords turn her off.
- She uses Facebook on a daily basis and tweets whenever there is a big event that affects her.

Goals

- Giving back is something she's was raised to do
- She wants to volunteer her time but is busy for work so she provides monetary donations to make up for it
- Inequality is an important issue to her after spending time in a developing country while in college
- She believes our nonprofit is transparent, human and visionary

Issue-Perspective

- She is not directly affected by inequality but feels she needs to do her part being born into a privileged society
- Describes inequality as the "most important issue facing the world right now"

Common Objections

- She can only contribute once per year
- She can only contribute at the beginning of the year

Chapter 5: Core Components of the Ideal Donor Persona™

1. Donor Identity

- Individual, family, foundation, corporation?

- Age range

- Income or asset level

- Career or business background

2. Donor Motivation

They give because they want:

- Impact

- Legacy

- Recognition

- Alignment with values

- Tax efficiency

- Community belonging

3. Emotional Trigger

What *moves* them?

- Children

- Veterans

- Education

- Faith

- Local community

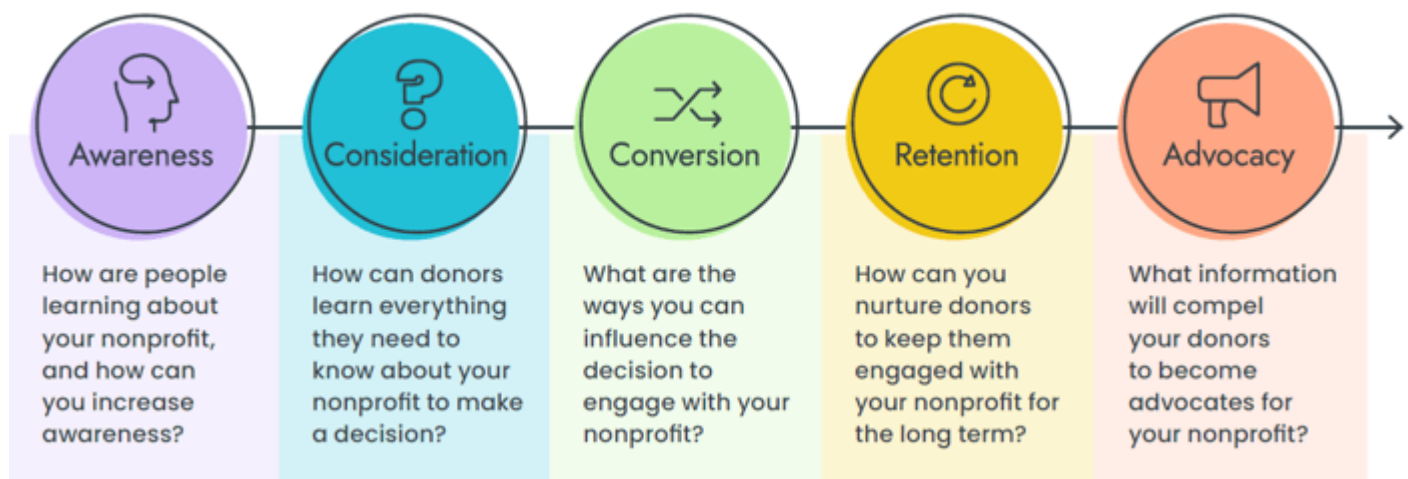- Crisis response

- Long-term solutions

4. Logical Justification

How do they rationalize the donation?

- Proven outcomes

- Financial transparency

- Clear metrics

- Efficiency

- Scalability

5. Giving Behavior

- One-time vs recurring

- Small monthly vs large annual

- Event-driven vs relationship-driven

Awareness	Consideration	Conversion	Retention	Advocacy
How are people learning about your nonprofit, and how can you increase awareness?	How can donors learn everything they need to know about your nonprofit to make a decision?	What are the ways you can influence the decision to engage with your nonprofit?	How can you nurture donors to keep them engaged with your nonprofit for the long term?	What information will compel your donors to become advocates for your nonprofit?

Chapter 6: Donors Are Investors—Treat Them That Way

High-performing non-profits treat donors like:

- **Investors in impact**

- **Partners in the mission**

- **Stakeholders in success**

This means donors want:

- Updates

- Progress reports

- Clear use of funds

- Proof of effectiveness

Not just thank-you emails.

Chapter 7: The Donor Value Proposition (DVP)

Just like businesses have a **Unique Value Proposition**, non-profits need a **Donor Value Proposition**:

"When you give to us, here is what *you* accomplish."

This must answer:

- Why *this* organization?

- Why *now*?

- Why *this* level of giving?

If you can't articulate this clearly, donors will default to safer, more familiar charities.

Chapter 8: Mapping the Donor Journey

A donor journey mirrors a customer journey:

1. Awareness – They discover the mission

2. Interest – They understand the problem

3. Trust – They believe you're credible

4. First Gift – They test the relationship

5. Reinforcement – They see results

6. Recurring Support – They commit long-term

7. Advocacy – They bring others

Each stage requires **different messaging**.

Chapter 9: Donor Segments You Should Define

Most non-profits have **multiple donor personas**, such as:

- Small recurring donors ($10–$50/month)

- Mid-level mission partners ($1K–$10K/year)

- Major donors ($25K+)

- Corporate sponsors

- Foundations & grants

Each segment:

- Buys a *different outcome*

- Needs a *different conversation*

- Responds to *different proof*

Chapter 10: Common Mistakes That Kill Donor Growth

❌ Talking only about need, not results
❌ Treating donors like ATMs
❌ No clear donor persona documentation
❌ Same message to everyone
❌ No follow-up or reporting

Chapter 11: The Donor Persona Worksheet

Name Your Donor Persona:
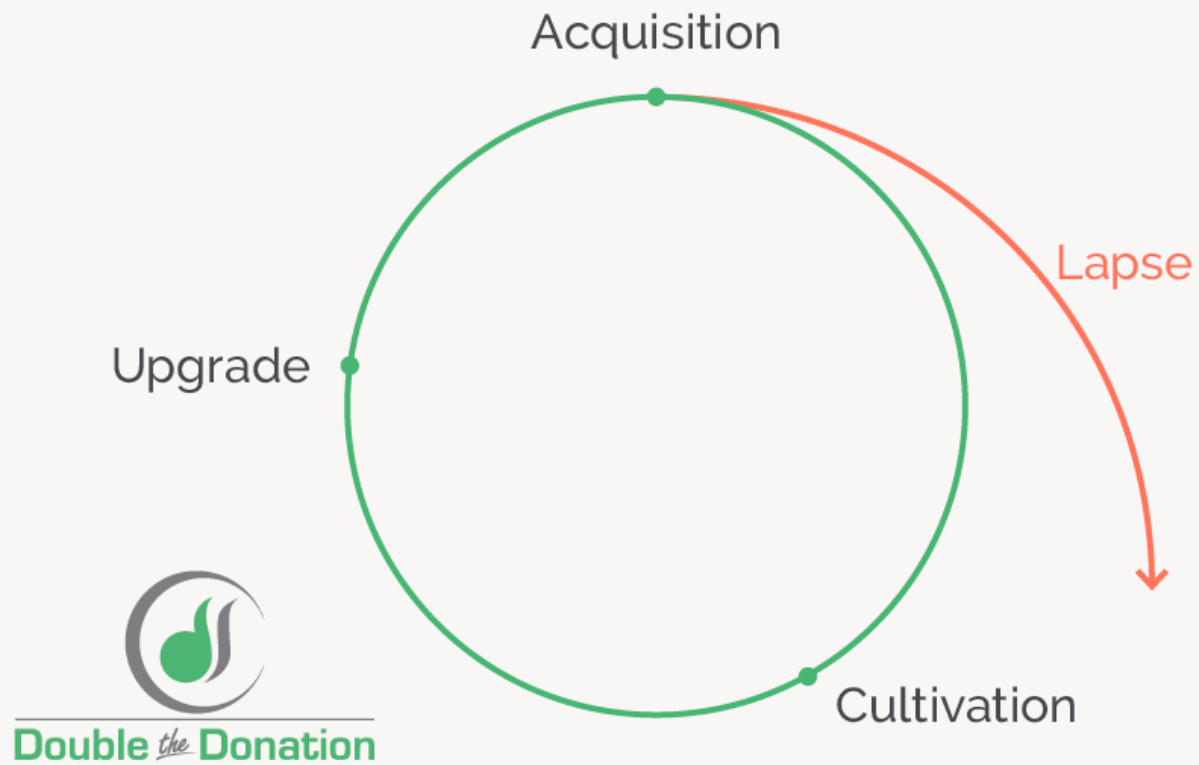(e.g., "Community Impact Investor")

Primary Motivation:

Emotional Trigger:

Logical Justification:

Preferred Giving Style:

What Makes Them Stay:

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Chapter 12: Final Thought — Growth Requires Clarity

Non-profits don't fail because:

- The mission isn't important
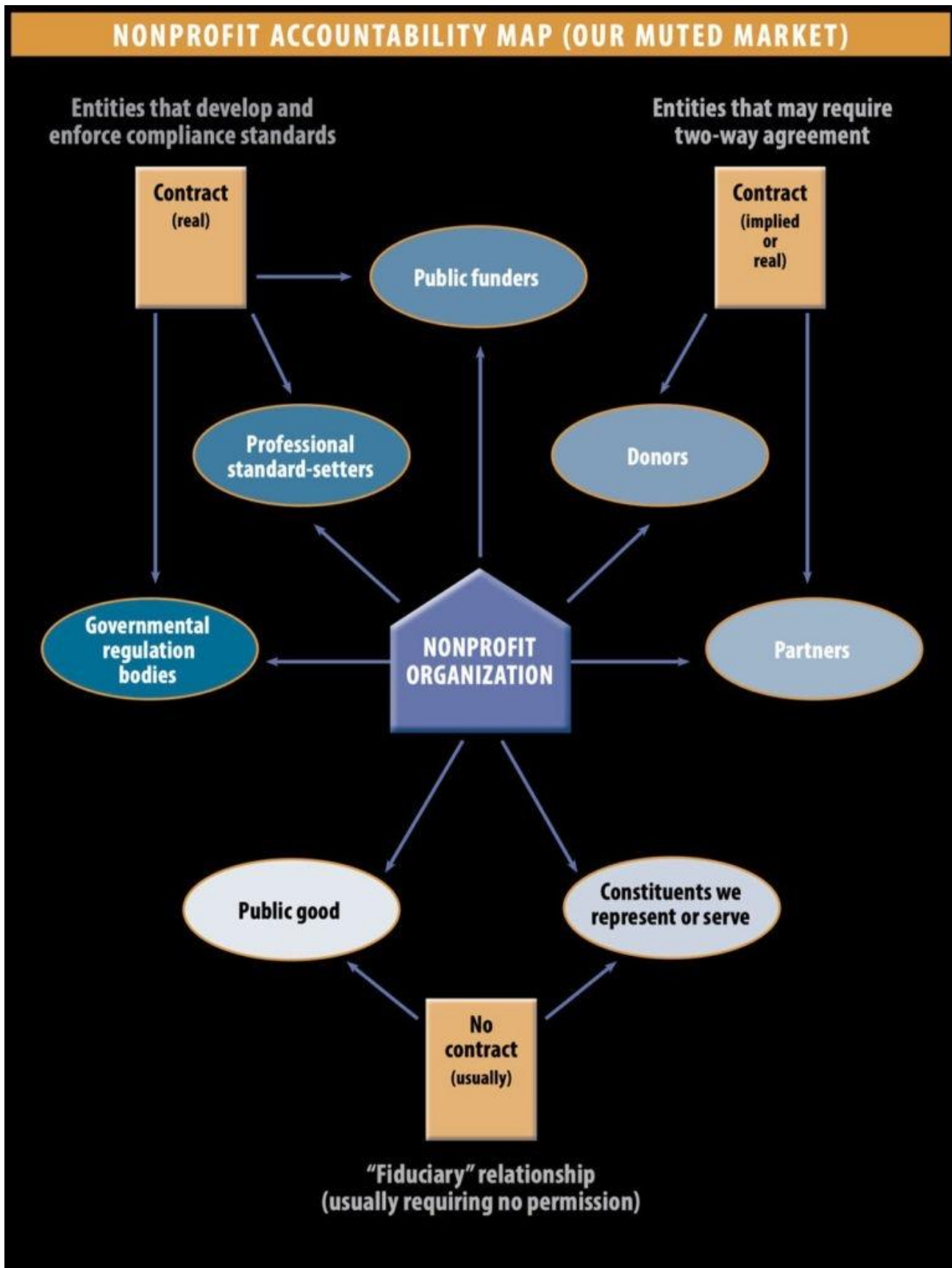
- People don't care

They fail because:

- The donor persona is undefined

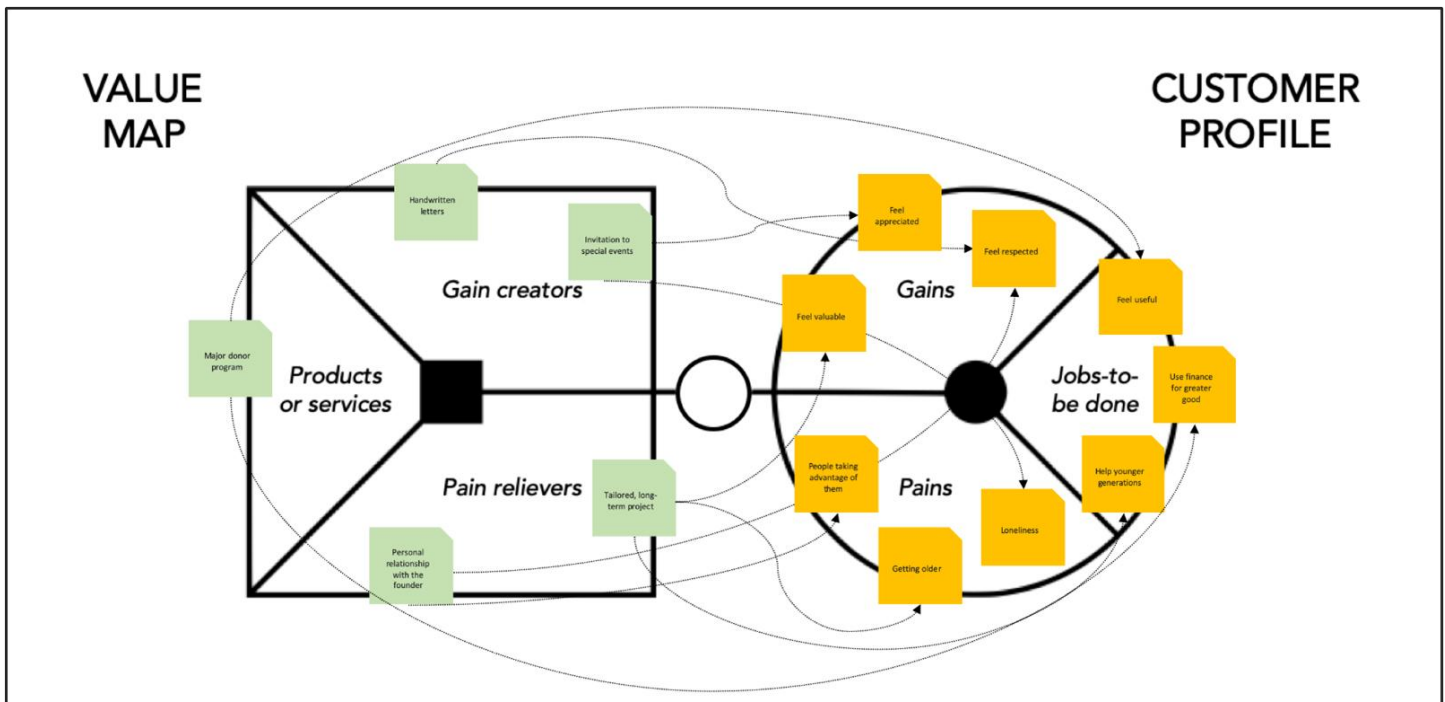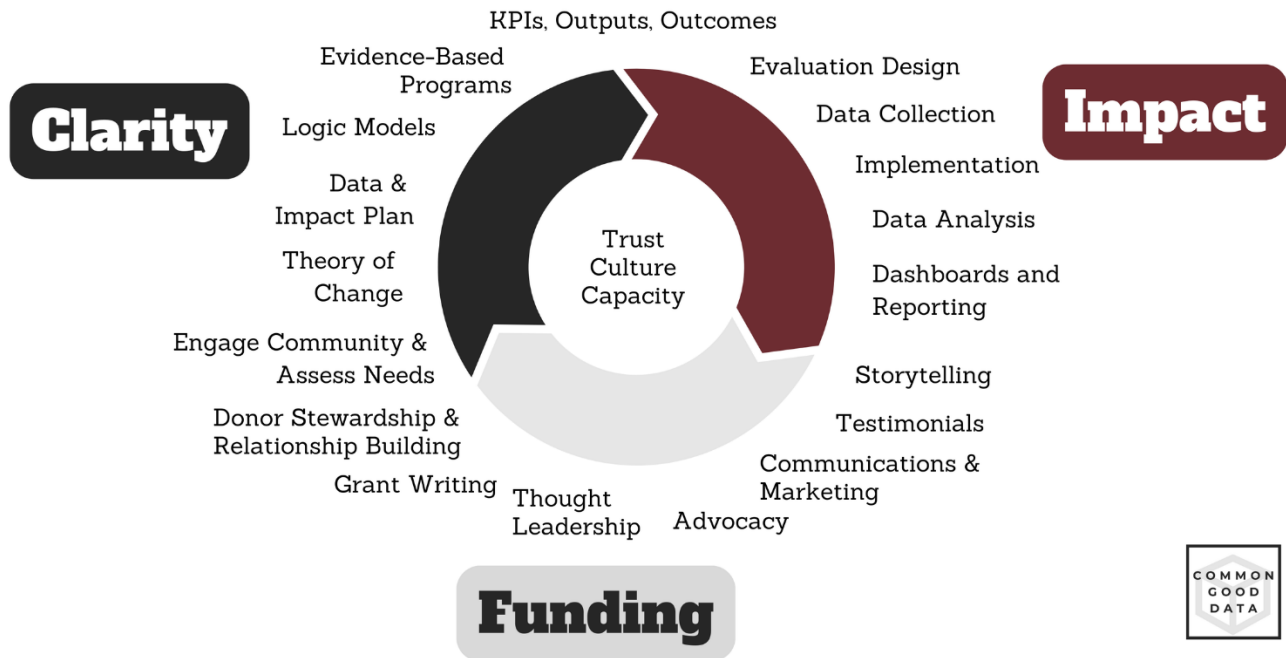- The message is unfocused

- The value is unclear

Define your donor like a business defines its customer—and funding becomes predictable, scalable, and sustainable.

PROBLEM	SOLUTION	UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION	UNFAIR ADVANTAGE	CUSTOMER SEGMENTS
Suffer from hunger and disease #beneficiaries	Community development programs	Support for those in need #beneficiaries	Celebrity endorsements	Orphans and other children in need #beneficiaries
Lack access to basic education #beneficiaries	Can write letters to child #donors	Change a child's life and community for good by sponsoring a child #donors		Mothers #donors
Lack sufficient care and protection #beneficiaries	Receive updates about child's progress #donors			
Want to feel a connection to their contribution #donors				
Want trust their funds are being used wisely #donors	**KEY METRICS**		**CHANNELS**	
	Grade 12 completion rate #beneficiaries		Regional offices #beneficiaries	
EXISTING ALTERNATIVES	Mid-Upper Arm Circumference by age #beneficiaries		TV (infomercials) #donors	
International development organizations	Donations #donors	**HIGH-LEVEL CONCEPT**	Advocacy events #donors	**EARLY ADOPTERS**
Oxfam #donors		Relief and missionary work #beneficiaries	Social and search ads #donors	Fragile State Index score above 70 #beneficiaries
Compassion International #donors		Child sponsorship #donors		Christians #donors
				Aged 35-55 #donors

COST STRUCTURE	REVENUE STREAMS
Programs: $x	Derivative asset: Progress reports and photos #beneficiaries
Fundraising: $y	Donations: $39 per month per child #donors
Admin: $z	Donor lifetime value: ARPU * 15-year lifetime = $7,020

Lean Canvas is adapted from The Business Model Canvas (BusinessModelGeneration.com) and is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Un-ported License.
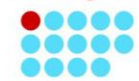
The Clarity, Impact, Funding Framework

KPIs, Outputs, Outcomes

Evaluation Design

Clarity

Impact

Evidence-Based Programs

Logic Models

Data & Impact Plan

Theory of Change

Engage Community & Assess Needs

Donor Stewardship & Relationship Building

Grant Writing

Data Collection

Implementation

Data Analysis

Dashboards and Reporting

Storytelling

Testimonials

Communications & Marketing

Thought Leadership

Advocacy

Trust Culture Capacity

Funding

COMMON GOOD DATA

VALUE MAP

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Gain creators

Products or services

Pain relievers

Gains

Jobs-to-be done

Pains

Handwritten letters

Invitation to special events

Major donor program

Tailored, long-term project

Personal relationship with the founder

Feel appreciated

Feel respected

Feel valuable

Feel useful

Use finance for greater good

People taking advantage of them

Help younger generations

Loneliness

Getting older

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Midwives For Haiti

2013 ANNUAL REPORT

The Problem

7% of children die before age five.

That is 1 in every 14 children.

Maternal Mortality Rate in Haiti
350 Deaths | **100,000** Births

Lifetime risk of maternal death **1** | **83**

Among the poorest quintile (1/5) of women
6% have skilled care

94% are cared for by Matrons or family members

US Rate is
12.7 Deaths
100,000 Births

75% of women do not have a skilled attendant at delivery

Source: UNICEF

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF SKILLED BIRTH ATTENDANTS NEEDED TO REDUCE MATERNAL MORTALITY BY 75% IN HAITI AND ACHIEVE MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5: **563**
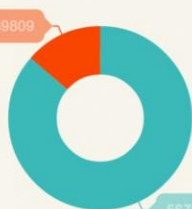
So, we train Haitian nurses to become Skilled Birth Attendants.

We deliver high impact projects to reduce maternal and infant mortality in Haiti. By working collaboratively with Haitian organizations to determine the most culturally appropriate methods, we achieve lasting change for our graduates and the mothers and children they serve.

21 NUMBER OF SKILLED BIRTH ATTENDANTS TRAINED IN 2013

NUMBER OF SKILLED BIRTH ATTENDANTS TRAINED SINCE 2006 **75**

HIGH IMPACT PROJECTS

243000
166402
283365

Grants | 2012 Surplus | Private Donations
2013 Revenue: $697,768

89809
567915

Haiti Programs (86%) | Administrative Costs (14%)
2013 Expenses: $657,724

2,143 births attended by our midwives and students at St. Therese Hospital

$4000 funds the education and training of each student

$3600 funds salary of midwife

32 Traditional Birth Attendants trained in Matron Outreach Program

$1500 funds matron training

5,607 maternal care visits at Mobile Prenatal Clinic

$19,920 funds annual supplies to 16 rural villages

$10,800 funds the salaries of 3 clinic midwives

Special thanks to our 95 volunteers, 924 donors and the continued support of Every Mother Counts, Phalen Family Foundation, SG Foundation, Virginia Women's Center and Bon Secours Health System.

To sponsor a midwife or rural clinic, volunteer your skills, become a partner or corporate sponsor, or to make a tax-deductible donation please visit: **www.midwivesforhaiti.org**

Midwives For Haiti