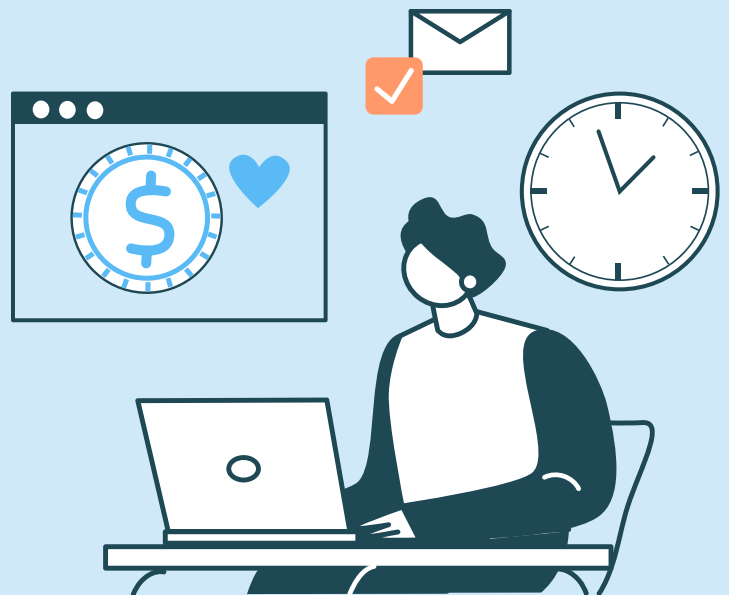# 7 Common In-Kind Donation Program Mistakes

(and How to Fix Them)

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In-kind donations are an amazing way for businesses to invest in their community, live their values, and strengthen their brand. Whether you're offering hotel nights, restaurant gift cards, game or event tickets, merchandise, or memorabilia, companies can support worthy causes and show employees and customers that you care.

But non-profits will request in-kind donations every way they can: fax, phone, email, in-person, and snail mail. It's a recipe for administrative chaos, especially if you're qualifying and tracking requests manually, or working with limited inventory.

Whether you're reorganizing an existing in-kind donation program or starting from scratch here are seven common in-kind donation program mistakes, and how to avoid them.

1

Ignoring Requests

If you are part of a large community and a well known business, chances are you receive a high volume of requests. This can get overwhelming, but it is important to **acknowledge every request**, whether or not you're able to grant it.

Similar to job applicants, you want to confirm receipt, and then transparently update nonprofits when their request is approved or denied. And it's even better if you can politely explain why requests are denied.

FIX

Create a simple acknowledgment template, and clearly define who sends the response and within what timeframe.

- Acknowledgement of receipt should be as fast as possible, and certainly within 24 hours.

- Automation is your friend, where form–fills automatically trigger an acknowledgment email, and helps set expectations. This ensures nonprofits feel respected, and it will limit back–and–forth emails flooding your inbox.

2

Saying "Yes" to Every Cause

Supporting every request may seem generous, but it spreads your resources thin, and makes your program unsustainable. It can also create unrealistic expectations with nonprofits assuming you'll automatically approve every request.

To truly maximize your impact, you need to **prioritize requests that connect back to your mission and values**. By narrowing your focus, you not only protect your resources, but also strengthen the visibility and effectiveness of your giving.

FIX

Create clear criteria for what aligns with your mission. Saying no to causes outside your scope allows you to focus your giving deeply where it matters most.

3

Keeping Your Program a Secret

If requesters don't know how to apply, they will call, email, and show up in person. This creates confusion and wastes valuable time for both your team and the nonprofit. A lack of clarity can mean missed opportunities, frustrated staff, and nonprofits feeling ignored. By making your process **easy to find**, you signal transparency cut down on unnecessary back-and-forth.

FIX

Link your donation form clearly on your website, ideally in your website footer and on your Contact page, so it's easy to find.

Consider adding step–by–step instructions and FAQs to make the process even smoother for everyone involved. Set clear expectations, and then keep your word.

4

Too Many People, Not Enough Coordination

When multiple people manage requests without coordination, requests can easily get lost, duplicated, or delayed. This is especially true for mult-location businesses, like restaurant chains. It can also frustrate staff who are unsure who owns which step of the process.

Ultimately, this **lack of structure undermines the impact** of your program.

FIX

Define one process and ensure every team member follows it.

- Don't silo work in locked spreadsheets.
- And embrace modern project management tools to keep requests, approvals, and delivery on track.
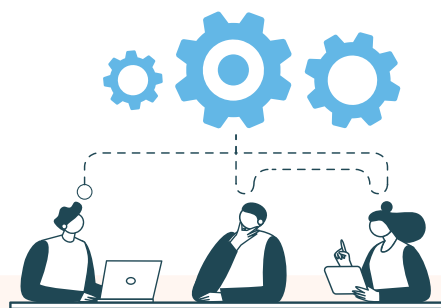
5

Not Sharing the Process Internally

If only a few staff know the rules, others may unintentionally misdirect nonprofits or give conflicting information. Lack of internal communication also increases the chance of missed opportunities and inconsistent messaging. By keeping the whole team informed, you make sure **everyone delivers the same clear and professional response**.

FIX

Train all staff with a simple script on how to handle requests.

When everyone knows the process, nonprofits get the right information the first time, and your program runs more smoothly.

6

Accepting Requests Through Too Many Channels

Accepting requests by fax, email, letter, in-person visit, and phone calls increases the risk of lost requests. Having information scattered across different channels makes it difficult to track, slows down response times, and often leaves nonprofits waiting without clarity.

This patchwork approach also prevents your team from collecting consistent details, leading to even more back-and-forth. When nonprofits feel ignored because their request was lost in the shuffle, it weakens the trust you are working hard to build. Streamlining how requests come in creates fairness, consistency, and saves your team time.

FIX

Go digital. Use one online form to collect and manage requests.

Add every field you need to discern if the nonprofit is aligned with your mission. And gather fulfillment details like mailing addresses upfront. It is easier for nonprofits and far less of a burden on your team.

6

Treating Requesters as "Just Requesters"

Every nonprofit that contacts you is a potential partner, advocate, or future customer. Ignoring this connection is a missed opportunity that could limit the reach of your program.

Each interaction is a **chance to strengthen community ties, highlight your brand's values, and open the door to future collaborations.** When nonprofits feel valued beyond a simple yes or no, they are more likely to become long term allies and advocates. Taking the time to connect meaningfully also reinforces your reputation as a socially responsible business.

FIX

Use your responses to share more about your organization, such as community programs, volunteer opportunities, or other ways to connect.

These small touches can turn requesters into long term allies.

Conclusion

A well run in-kind donation program is more than a nice-to-have, it is a powerful way to strengthen relationships, build credibility, and showcase your company's values in action. When managed effectively, it becomes a true win-win: less stress for your team, better experiences for nonprofits, and a stronger impact on the community you serve.

About ApproveForGood by FrontStream
Hundreds of companies use FrontStream to streamline donation requests, manage inventory, and report on impact – all while cutting processing time by 80%.

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