

# Checklist for Building a Sustaining Donor Program through Direct Withdrawal via ACH



## What is Direct Withdrawal via ACH?

Direct withdrawal via ACH is a type of electronic payment in which funds are withdrawn or debited from a donor's checking or savings account and transferred electronically to your organization. Direct withdrawal via ACH payments are processed through the Automated Clearing House, an electronic network at the center of commerce in the U.S. that moves money and information from one bank account to another through direct deposits and direct payments. It serves as an efficient means for nonprofit organizations to collect donations. For more information on ACH payments, visit [electronicpayments.org](https://www.electronicpayments.org).

Direct withdrawal via ACH offers a strong opportunity to build a sustaining donor program. A campaign powered by direct withdrawal via ACH accomplishes two program goals:

- 1.** Provides an easy opportunity to migrate one-time contributors to sustaining donors.
- 2.** Helps your organization avoid the hassle of updating credit card expiration dates for current sustaining donors.

# A Checklist for a Sustaining Donor Program Powered by Direct Withdrawal via ACH

The following checklist details the steps you need to take to strengthen your sustaining donor program with direct withdrawal.

## 1. Develop Project Plan

- Establish internal team to manage program development and implementation
- Identify senior manager–advocate for sustaining donor program using direct withdrawal via ACH
- Establish team lead
- Identify team participants from communications, IT and database management, finance, donor development, and donor support, as well as, customer service

- Establish scope and purpose

- Identify name for sustaining donor program using direct withdrawal via ACH (For example, Capital Public Radio uses “Evergreen” to identify its direct withdrawal via ACH sustaining donor program) to be used on website, direct mail, emails, etc., to highlight program, rather than giving method

- Determine objectives
  - Goals
  - Deliverables

- Identify assumptions and constraints

- Identify potential system upgrades and vendors

- Set timeline

- Determine budget

## 2. Identify Method and Vendor for ACH Origination

- Check with current financial institution
  - Branch Manager
  - Treasury/Cash Management Officer

- Determine capabilities of current vendors for website and accounting, or identify and interview new vendors

## 3. Identify System Changes or Updates

- Evaluate website needs
  - Establish direct withdrawal via ACH as default for donations
  - Update website to allow for online giving via ACH – without need to mail in voided check
  - Integrate donations via ACH with accounting systems and donor database

- Create donor database

- Accept direct withdrawal via ACH information for donation signup from website and donor events
- Import information on donations received by accounting to donor database for recognition, thank you notes, annual giving reports, etc.

- Assess accounting/finance systems

- Ensure accounting program can seamlessly import, post and report donations via ACH

## 4. Develop Communications and Promotion Plan

- Use program name for direct withdrawal via ACH in all communications to promote donations via ACH

- Ensure that communications to potential sustaining donors clearly state that sustaining donors are signing up for an ongoing monthly donation

- Clearly state how easy it is to sign up for ongoing monthly donations and how donors can easily stop the monthly donations

- Celebrate the anniversary of the member becoming a sustaining donor and promote increasing their contributions

- Consider recognizing and rewarding sustaining members who donate via ACH by automatically enrolling them for all prize opportunities. *(Could be used as a way to differentiate between sustaining donors that contribute via ACH and those that contribute using a credit card)*

- Implement targeted email program to sustaining members who donate via ACH, asking them to increase their monthly contributions at least annually

- Encourage credit/debit card donors to convert to direct withdrawal via ACH; Point out that with ACH, donors don't have to worry about credit card expiration dates and re-issuance of new cards

- Include information on the direct withdrawal via ACH giving option in all mailings, emails, newsletters, on-air, and phone membership campaigns

## 5. Review Results

- Review results of communications plan to see which messages and strategies are most successful

- Track and report program results to management

- Adjust plans and goals based on successes and responses