

How and why do charities use personal data?

1. Keeping people connected to causes that they care about

The vast majority of supporters (over 80%) want to hear from a charity that they donate to.¹ Hearing from a charity is a good thing, people want to know that their support makes a difference, hear about a charity's work, and also other ways that they can be involved in the cause. To do this, a charity needs to ask for personal data and contact details, but they must be clear and specific about future contact with that supporter and give everyone a real and genuine choice about whether they want that contact or not.

2. Wealth screening and prospect research

Wealth screening helps charities to understand their supporters better so that they can tailor their communications and relationship with them. A charity might do this by looking at the information they have regarding that supporter's history and engagement with them, how and when they've supported them in the past, the method of past giving; message that initiated the gift.

In these cases the charity is using information that supporters have given it to decide how to approach and communicate with the supporter in the future. Some charities do not have the expertise or capacity to carry out all this work in-house, and find that a more effective use of their resources is to an agency to compare their own data with publicly available information. This can help to identify people that are likely to have an affinity with a particular cause, and also understand better the type of relationship that they prefer to have with in their philanthropic giving.

By being able to understand existing supporters better and potential new donors, charities can be more cost-effective in their work – sending out more targeted and tailored communications that are more likely to resonate to particular audiences or individuals, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.

3. Telematching/teleappending

Telematching and teleappending are terms given to services that allow charities to keep up to date contact information for supporters. For example, a supporter may have moved house and not updated the charity with their new details.

Telematching is where a charity has a telephone number for an existing supporter, which is no longer correct, whereas teleappending is where a charity identifies a telephone number for a supporter on their database where that person has not provided their telephone details, but hasn't objected to phone calls.

¹ <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/80-per-cent-people-want-hear-feedback-charities-give/fundraising/article/1362485>

NB – the use of adding on and updating telephone numbers is being closely looked at and we hope that there will be clear guidance provided about what is deemed fair and lawful practice.

4. Reciprocals/data sharing and data buying

'Data sharing' is the disclosure of a supporter's personal data from one organisation to another, or via a third party.

Data sharing can take the form of:

- a reciprocal exchange of data where one organisation shares a supporter's information with another;
- one or more organisations providing data to a third party or parties;
- several organisations pooling information and making it available to each other;
- several organisations pooling information and making it available to a third party.

These processes are governed by specific and established rules and agreements and can only take place when it is done lawfully.

Data sharing is not necessarily a bad thing provided it is done fairly and lawfully and in accordance with data protection legislation. As the ICO states in their guidance:

"...under the right circumstances and for the right reasons, data sharing across and between organisations can play a crucial role in providing a better, more efficient service to customers in a range of sectors – both public and private...We want citizens and consumers to be able to benefit from the responsible sharing of information, confident that their personal data is being handled responsibly and securely."

For data sharing to take place among fundraising organisations, charities adhere to higher standards than is mandated by law. The Code of Fundraising Practice explicitly prohibits the selling of data for fundraising purposes, and only allows data sharing to happen with the explicit consent of a supporter.