

How Donors Decide

Three keys to engagement, and a strategy for each kind of donor

Giving is **relational**, whatever donors say. The goal is never to pressure anyone into supporting something they don't care about. It is to invite the right people into what their support makes possible, and to find out whether joining in would bring them meaning and joy. Most donors don't "give money away." They **join others doing good**.

Three keys to engagement

KEY 1

Make it relational

The basis of the relationship is the donor's **involvement with your organization**. Be clear about that, even when you like the donor. Most donors understand you have a job to do, and respect it.

KEY 2

Make the ask

Avoiding the ask confuses donors. **Have an amount ready**, know how the donor manages their giving, and be confident. A hesitant donor may just be unsure. Helping them decide can be a favor.

KEY 3

Connect the dots

Show **how this gift makes a clear impact** and why it is worth giving. Thinking "how do we get more of their money?" shuts the donor out. Invite a partner instead.

Five kinds of donor, and what works *for each*

- **Socialized.** Raised where giving is the norm.
Usually committed to the community that taught them. Rarely your best first prospect.
- **Socialized, but left.** Still feels the duty to give.
A strong prospect. Appeal in language that echoes the community they came from, without borrowing its vocabulary.
- **Converted.** Moved by a story, image, or video.
Make the first gift very easy. Then do the harder work of getting your message in front of many eyes.
- **Alternative.** A windfall and a tax decision.
Be widely known across many channels, so you are the name that comes to mind when they decide to give.
- **Giveaway.** The lottery winner.
Rare. Don't build a strategy around them. **Donor-advised funds:** donors who give through them often get only a soft reminder to recommend gifts, so keep in touch and remind them.

How major donors manage requests, and *what to do*

DONOR'S APPROACH	ALREADY ENGAGED	NOT YET ENGAGED
Quiet giver Funds a few causes privately	Be one of the chosen outlets. Tend the relationship and ask how much information they want.	Grow your network of advocates.
Small circle Tells a few people their interests	Stay at the top of their list. Keep communicating, as others compete for attention.	Grow your network. Stay connected to other organizations to learn who funds them.
Founder-led foundation Funnel, gatekeeper, or with staff	Follow the guidelines, but keep the relationship with the people behind the foundation. Growth comes from them.	Find the people behind the foundation. Network, study other organizations' donors, and watch for LOI requests.
Generational foundation The next generation decides	Build the relationship with those taking over, early. Offer to guide the set-up.	Submit an LOI.
Established foundation Run by a process	Follow the guidelines. Know the system and make the best pitch.	Submit an LOI.

Donor giving is all relational. *How can we provide greater meaning and value to our donors?*