

## Just Ask For It

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**Need to raise money? Try asking more people, more often and in different ways, says this fundraising expert.**

At a recent nonprofit conference with some 1,000 attendees, I asked the question: *Why do people give?*

The bulk of the answers were only partly correct: *Because they want to contribute ... Because they went to the college ... Because they know the organization.*

**The real answer to the question is simply: *People give because you ask them to give.*** How you ask them is secondary—in person, via the telephone, through direct mail, or via internet. That's where fundraisers like you and I come in—looking at revenue, cost, and return on investment to determine the most cost-effective way.

In 2002, overall giving in the United States was about \$241 billion. Trends for 2003 indicate that it will be yet higher again.\* Individuals still make up the bulk of the givers, a trend that's likely on the rise. So, asking individual donors to give to *your* organization becomes even more vital.

**Enter the overall development picture, the giving pyramid and the communication stream.** Whether you have donors or members will impact the level of giving. If you have many donors in the top of the pyramid, but your donor base is declining, you probably are not feeding any new donors in to replace those donors who stopped giving. Some organizations may see drops of 25 to 35 percent in their number of donors from year to year. It's important to keep bringing in new donors, reactivating those who stopped giving, and upgrading existing donors to higher levels to bring in more money.

**Review the breakdown of your donors.** How many donors give less than \$100? How many give more than \$1,000? How often do you communicate with your donors now? What are you asking for?

Why do some organizations mail every two weeks and others only mail an appeal four times a year? How can they make money that way?

The answer depends on the mission of the organization and the cases you make for giving. What it really comes down to is a) the number of stories you can tell to motivate donors to give and (b) how many donors you have who like to hear from your organization.

**What have your donors told you?** Ask them how many times they'd like to hear from you, then listen to and execute that wish. You may end up getting more money than ever before.

**Use all the tools available to communicate with your donors—**mail, phone, in person, depending upon the giving level of the donor and his or her desire.

**Here are a few simple but practical ways to get more money from its donors:**

1. Add a reply envelope to a thank-you letter and see what happens. It's not a hard ask and it may generate more than enough to pay for the thank-you letters.
2. If you have a newsletter, include a reply envelope and see what happens. Most of the clients who tried it have made money.
3. Make sure you tell your donors what their money has done. It has been proven that telling a donor in a thank-you letter what a difference their money made, will help tremendously the next time.

Certain golden rules and techniques of fundraising work for all organizations. However, every organization is different, so test what works for your organization and track results. That way, you'll make the right decisions in the short- and the long-term.

\*Source: Giving USA 2002, [www.aafr.org](http://www.aafr.org)