



22 Powerful Questions

that Reveal Your Donors' Case for Support

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Why do your donors give?

By answering this question — and uncovering your donors' case for support — you unlock the secret that can make your organization essential in their eyes and inspire lifelong support.

Connecting with your donors this way is more important than ever, as post-COVID charitable giving levels out and returns to pre-pandemic norms. Add economic woes thanks to continued fiscal uncertainty, and donors will soon be faced with difficult decisions.

As household budgets tighten, donors will look for ways to save. This could mean reducing the amount of their monthly gifts or cutting some organizations altogether to focus instead on the one or two that truly fit their values. That's why you must get to the heart of what matters to your donors — and make sure it aligns with your mission.

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Why *Their* Case for Support Matters

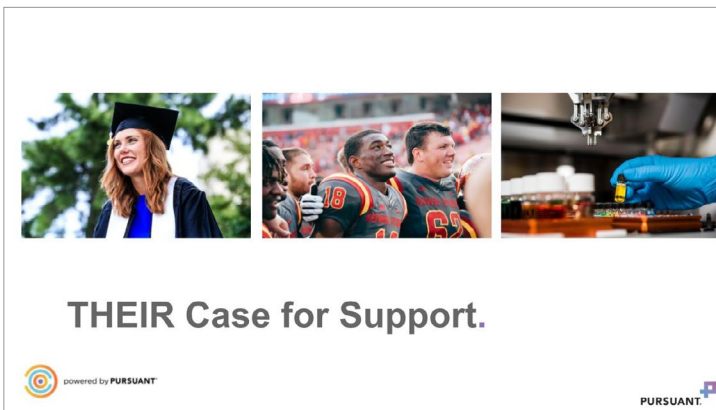
Becoming essential to a donor means you've resonated with them in a deeply personal way. It goes beyond being listed among organizations the donor cares about; instead, your organization stays in their budget regardless of uncertain times; you have become essential. You've shared your case for support, but you also understand *their* case for support.

"Charity of choice" is the common language nonprofits use, but what we're really talking about is donor motivation: why they give to you specifically.

Are you essential in the donor's mind? This difference matters. You're not just relevant; you're part of the donor's identity.



When you know your donors' case for support, you can tailor your campaigns and messages to them. Consider how you communicate across the donor pyramid. Is your outreach relevant to you, or is it expressing what matters to donors? For instance, a college's case for support might be illustrated by a beautiful campus, but a donor's might align with their specific interests, like scholarships, the athletic program, or academic research.



The words and images you choose can mean the difference between being someone's *charity of choice* — which is great — and becoming *essential* in their minds — which is next-level.

Using Data to Uncover Their Case for Support

The donor's case for support is where the magic happens. One way to find it is by *leveraging your data*.

The rich insights in your donor database can support your strategies, uncover opportunities, and build relationships. What outreach are people responding to? More importantly, what are they giving to — your year-end appeal, a summer campaign, or something else?

As you analyze your data, stories about your donors will emerge. Demographics, communication preferences, disposable income, and other data points will paint a more colorful and detailed picture of your donors. As a result, you'll be better positioned to deliver a customized experience that gets to the heart of what your donors want to achieve through their charitable giving.

However, data alone may not be enough to reveal the donor's case for support. For example, think of a retreat center. The organization may see its case for support as the amenities and opportunities it provides for church groups and families. But it's important to remember that people come to the retreat center for different reasons, so there are other aspects of the center that they'll want to support and preserve.

You can use a combination of data points to make a best guess at why people donate to your organization. But you can often get to the point faster by simply asking them.



How to Gather and Track Donor Responses

We can't succeed without you.

Please take the following survey to help us better communicate with you.

I prefer to be contacted through:

- Email*
- Phone*
- Direct Mail*
- Not at all*

How often would you like to receive updates?

- Daily*
- Bi-weekly*
- Monthly*
- Not at all*

Be strategic in how you pose questions to your donors.

This shouldn't feel like an interview. Instead, use a variety of tactics to get the answers you need:

- Test variable copy, stories, and images in communications to see what donors respond to
- Send a new donor welcome series that includes a simple, one-to-two-question survey
- Conduct more robust annual donor surveys via digital focus groups or in-person experiences
- Note changes in behavior, such as adding a one-time gift to their monthly donation



You likely have the tools you need to get these questions delivered and answered. For instance, most organizations have a survey tool — don't be afraid to use it. At a basic level, social media platforms and some email service providers have free, built-in surveys you can create and share.

Also, if you haven't already, ask donors for their communication preferences. How do they want to hear from you? How often?

Send these questions in a welcome email, along with one or two others that encourage them to share what motivated their gift. Learning more about them up front will build goodwill and trust.

What will you do with all this data? Your organization should have a database or customer relationship management (CRM) system that lets you capture the answers to these questions at the donor level. That way, anyone who looks up a donor will see communication preferences, giving history, and other essential information.

Finally, you should also have plenty of **zero- and first-party data** that can be used to craft personalized messages to donors. Any additional information you can append through third-party tools like **GivingDNA** will help you further tailor your outreach and identify which questions to ask.

The Powerful Questions You Should Be Asking Your Donors Now

Use these questions to get to know your donors better so you can uncover their case for support.

While some questions are more appropriate for your mid- and major-level or annual fund donors, most are suitable for all your constituents.





Annual Fund Questions

Vision-Casting Questions: A key part of our role in donor development is helping donors embrace the vision that's possible by accomplishing the mission through their gifts. These questions allow your donors to see themselves as central to the opportunity to build with you a solution that will change the world.

These questions should be asked in a large-scale way at least once a year, such as through surveys or phone campaigns.

- What is the greatest impact (*ORGANIZATION*) can have in the community/country/world?
- As you think about (*ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS*), how do you see this aligning with (*VALUES EXPRESSED*)?
- As you read/heard our plans for the future, what most resonated with you?





For Mid/Major Donors

Ask-Building Questions: Many fundraisers struggle with the transition from envisioning what's possible with more philanthropic support to a specific invitation to give. These ask-building questions are intended to facilitate a shift from a discussion of the vision to a discussion of the gift:

- What would you like to accomplish with your money that is meaningful to you?
- How do you prefer to give? Have you ever considered a *(PG OPTION)* gift?
- What's your take on the economic outlook? Are you optimistic or cautious? **Important Note:** *This lets you know the degree to which the economy is impacting the donors, so it's a question better suited for major donors.*

Questions to Help You Make the Ask: These questions often lead to simple yes or no responses. But at this point, it's vital that the ask be clear and concise — no more than a sentence or two at the most.

When it comes to making the ask, it's important for the fundraiser to find and stick with a few “asks” that work for them. This creates donor confidence. Otherwise, when a gift officer stumbles over the ask or seems hesitant, it translates as a lack of confidence or clarity on their part. Use these questions to frame the all-important ask:

- Would you consider making a special gift of \$__ to partner with us in *(CAUSE/ISSUE)* so that *(OUTCOME)* can be accomplished?
- I'd like to invite you to join fellow *(PEER GROUP)* in taking a stand for *(CAUSE)* by joining the *(GIVING SOCIETY)* with a gift of \$___. Will you consider joining us?
- Is there a leadership-giving level at which you see yourself?
Important Note: *This is effective when referencing a leadership-level gift range chart or similar visual.*



For Donors at Any Giving Level

Relationship-Building Questions: Questions are most powerful when they're filled with purpose and the answers are strategically noted. Such questions form the foundation of casual conversation with a donor, and it's one of the most under utilized portions of the visit.

Too often, we waste opening conversations with the donor on throw-away questions about things like the weather. But with seemingly simple questions, we can begin to understand what the donor values, their beliefs about the world around them, and how they prioritize their personal life.

Use these questions to dig deeper into the donor's wants and needs:

- How has *(EXTERNAL/PERSONAL ISSUE)* impacted your work/business?
- How has *(EXTERNAL/PERSONAL ISSUE)* impacted your family?
- How are you and your family doing right now? **Important Note:** *Because this question can prompt a very personal response, it's best suited for the mid- or major-level donors with whom you already have a relationship. Use it to further the connection. By contrast, a prospect or one-time donor may find it intrusive.*

Organization Discovery Questions: Looking at a donor's previous giving to your organization is a great starting point for understanding their interests. However, when we rely only on historical giving to frame our ask, we may unintentionally miss the mark.

These discovery questions are intended to help validate both their current area of interest and, more importantly, why that matters to them:

- Tell me your *(ORGANIZATION/PROGRAMS/SERVICES)* story.
- What makes you passionate about *(ORGANIZATION/PROGRAMS/SERVICES)*?
- Do you have a special “mission moment” of an experience with our *(ORGANIZATION/PROGRAMS/SERVICES)*?

Cause & Values Identification Questions: Your major donor prospects are likely giving to other organizations in addition to yours. In fact, you may not even be the largest beneficiary of their generosity. To fully understand your donor, it’s critical to move past their connection with you to identify the causes or issues they’re most passionate about.

Here are some questions to help with that:

- What is the meaning of *(SITUATION/ISSUE)* in your own life?
- How has your work with *(ISSUE/CAUSE)* changed you?
- What are the essential causes you care about?
- Where do we fall in your philanthropic priorities?





What's the Most Powerful Question in a Gift Officer's Toolbox? The Follow-up Question

Some of the most powerful questions are also quite simple. Powerful questions may push donors to go past the edge of what they know about themselves. In these instances, follow-up questions become critical to both the donor's and the gift officer's understanding of their opinions, values, and concerns.

Here are some examples of great follow-up questions:

- You mentioned _____. I'd love to hear more about why you feel that way/say that.
- Why is that?



One Last Question

If you've posed these questions but the donor still doesn't consider you essential in their philanthropic giving, that's okay. There's one final question you should ask:

Who might you know?

Don't hesitate to ask for a referral. The donor may know someone in their social circle who better aligns with your mission, so ask if they'd be willing to introduce you. This question is best saved for those at the mid and major levels.



Use This Data to Meet Donor Expectations

By aligning your organization with a donor's case for support, you can ensure the donor will continue to give even when times are tough. These questions can help you get to know your donors on a more personal level and reveal what truly matters to them.

Again, make sure donor responses are accessible to anyone on your staff who might need it by tracking them in your database or CRM. We've also seen fundraisers save their donors' answers and data as word clouds to help staff better understand what truly resonates with the donor.

At the end of the day, the goal is to uncover the personal reasons a donor would be willing to become a lifelong supporter of your organization.

How We Can Help



In addition to a donor database containing zero- and first-party data (at minimum), a third-party platform like [GivingDNA](#) can layer on additional data such as giving preferences and behavioral changes. A variety of filters can uncover trends and stories that help you get to know your donors.

Finally, it's vital to use the insights from your data to reframe your case for support so that it aligns with the donor's. The experts at [Pursuant](#) would be happy to help you identify and better understand donor motivations.

To chat with us about ways your organization can integrate these powerful questions into your donor messaging or to find additional resources, [contact us today.](#)