

# Solicitation 101

FUNDRAISING FUNDAMENTALS | 2023



**CCS**  
FUNDRAISING

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## Introduction: How to Use This Resource

CCS is proud to present this **Solicitation 101 Guidebook**. For over 70 years, CCS has partnered with nonprofit organizations to make a bigger impact—locally, nationally, and globally. Drawing on our firm’s experience, we are excited to provide this quick reference guide for emerging individual fundraising programs seeking to implement industry best practices. Within this book, leaders will find resources to:

- Provide an overview of how to seek financial support for your organization
- Review the nine principles of fundraising
- Identify common fundraising approaches and their function
- How to effectively close a gift and maintain relationships with your donors

## CCS Fundraising Diversity Equity and Inclusion Statement

CCS is committed to building and developing a global team of compassionate professionals that reflects the world and communities in which we live. One where our employees – regardless of race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, parental status, national origin, different abilities, age, veteran status, or other invisible traits – are valued, are provided the opportunities to contribute equally, and are rewarded equitably. We believe in the importance of creating an equitable environment where everyone receives fair treatment, recognition for their accomplishments, and equitable compensation. CCS will ensure that everyone has equal access to leadership development and growth opportunities within the firm. We are committed to be a workplace that supports our team members to achieve the highest level of success.

We know and exemplify that there is strength in diversity. We believe that building a fair, just, and equitable world begins right here with us.

To fulfill this vision, we commit to taking specific, measurable actions to recruit talented professionals and encourage retention, support professional development, respect, and learn from all cultures, and create a vibrant community.

### CREATING A VIBRANT CLIENT COMMUNITY

We strive to ensure that our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is reflected in the organizations and communities with which we partner. We know the importance of understanding and addressing the unique needs specific to our client partners around the world.

## The Nine Principles of Fundraising

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of seeking financial support for your organization through gifts, large and small. Whether you have no donors, a small pool of nominal annual supporters, or strong annual support and an emerging major gift program, this resource should help you identify next steps to build or strengthen your individual giving program.

Before getting started, it might be helpful to familiarize yourself with some common fundraising language. Below are two resources that provide an overview of key terms and definitions.

- [Glossary of Fundraising Terms](http://www.cfre.org) (www.cfre.org)
- [33 Fundraising Terms](http://www.themodernnonprofit.com) (www.themodernnonprofit.com)

As you dive into fundraising, knowing some basics of donor psychology can be helpful in crafting strategy and enabling us to be confident fundraisers. Keep these nine key principles in mind while fundraising.

<b>1</b> People give to people, not organizations	<b>2</b> People give because they are asked	<b>3</b> 90% of money comes from 10% of donors
<b>4</b> People give to a worthy cause	<b>5</b> People give in relation to who asks	<b>6</b> Giving is contagious: big gifts attract more support
<b>7</b> Previous donors are the best prospects	<b>8</b> Stay upbeat and remember to be bold	<b>9</b> Personal visits result in larger gifts

## Fundraising Approaches

The following illustration offers a general overview of common fundraising approaches, ranked by the amount of time required. We suggest starting with annual gifts first.



### ANNUAL GIFTS

Solicit donors annually through email/mail.

**Time Commitment:**

Take the time to craft letters and create a strategy to solicit and upgrade annual gifts. Email solicitations with a link to online giving will cost less and take less time than mail.



### MAJOR GIFTS

Cultivate meaningful relationships with donors and ask them for a significant gift.

**Time Commitment:**

This will take multiple conversations and significant strategizing, but for a bigger gift!



### GRANTS

Applying for funds by writing a grant application.

**Time Commitment:**

Writing the perfect grant application can take a lot of time and success isn't guaranteed. Grant applications are more successful if you have a personal connection with the organization or individual and have had a conversation before sending in your application.



### EVENTS

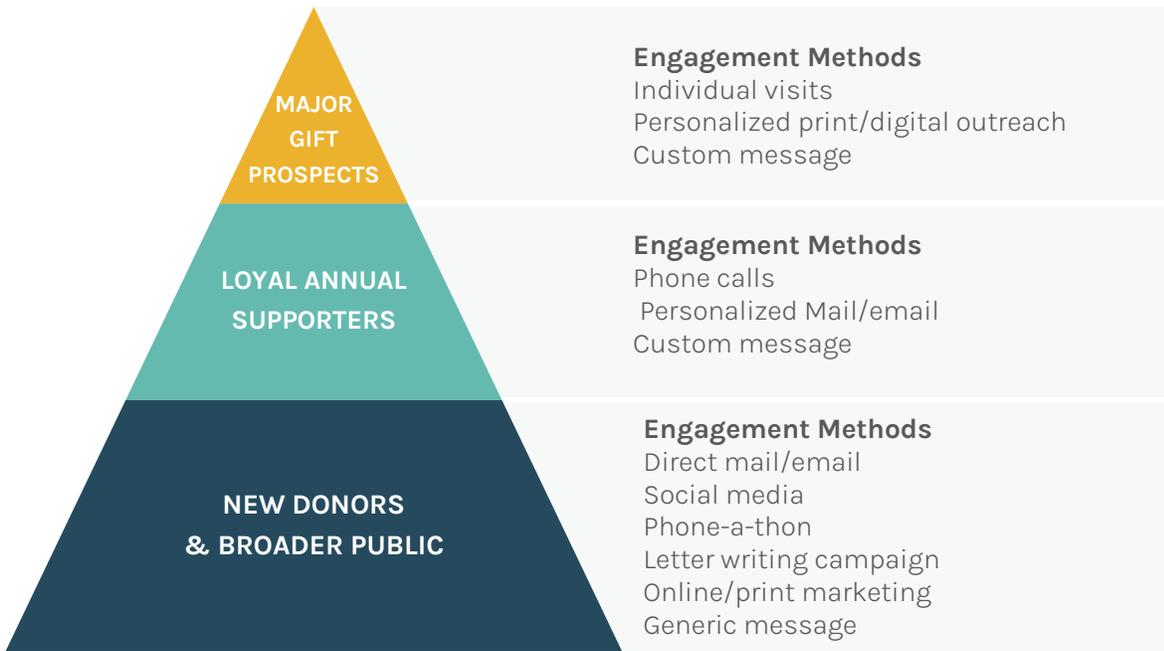
Host an event to raise funds and steward donors

**Time Commitment:**

Events can be a great way to cultivate and steward donors. However, they can be costly and greatly offset the funds raised. When hosting events consider the event costs compared to the estimated funds raised.

## Annual Giving and Major Giving

Annual giving is the gateway to individual giving, as the visual below suggests. It is the most common way to engage new supporters and long-time supporters alike. As your fundraising efforts grow, you might begin to seek larger gifts from a smaller group of individuals, referred to as major gift prospects. Below, we have suggested some donor engagement methods for each level.



Regardless of the size of the gift you are seeking, you should *always engage those closest to you first* as a way to build confidence and momentum.

## Methods Of Solicitation

### ONLINE GIVING

Your organization's website is most likely your first line of communication with prospective and current donors. The digital landscape is transforming how organizations connect with, engage, and activate their audience. Therefore, your website and social media presence is a vital element of your communication and fundraising strategy.

The Blackbaud Institute's 2020 Charitable Giving Report highlights key giving data from 8,833 nonprofit organizations in the U.S. totaling \$40.7 billion in fundraising revenue.

The data reflects giving during an unprecedented year in philanthropy, as organizations responded to a global pandemic, a widespread reckoning with racial and social injustice, and a polarized political environment.

The findings? The year 2020 signified tremendous growth in online giving.

- In 2020, 12.9% of total fundraising came from online giving. This is the highest percentage in history for online giving and marks an important milestone in philanthropy.
- Online giving grew by 20.7% compared to 2019. Taking a more longitudinal three-year view of fundraising from the same organizations revealed a whopping 32.4% increase in online giving.

Therefore, it is a no-brainer that your organization should prioritize making your website easy to navigate and safe to monetarily support your cause through a donation page. There are several online donation services that can help manage this for your organization. Once you have set up a donation page, very little management is needed. Below are three tips to maximize your digital giving toolkit:

- **Click Here to Donate.** Your “DONATE” button should stand out prominently on your website and digital platform. This should be the first thing donors see when they visit your homepage. The donate button offers a clear and compelling way for people to act now. Make it big, bold, and bright. Once donors click to donate, it should be as easy and seamless as possible for them to make a gift online. Your gift processing form should be clear and simple to navigate on both a computer and mobile device.
- **Consistent Messaging.** Ensure consistent communication across your platforms. Your digital presence must reflect a cohesive organizational brand and message that resonates with supporters, yet it should also be tailored to each platform and the distinct audience you seek to engage. What are you trying to communicate, and how will your call to action look differently on a computer versus a mobile device?
- **Streamline Operational Activity.** Mobile-friendly websites, social media, and online donation forms should work together seamlessly to maximize a donor’s giving experience. Make sure you have the infrastructure and processes in place to manage a high volume of mobile transactions and regularly test your platforms to ensure optimization.

## DIRECT MAIL

Direct mail is a term used to describe letters or emails sent to prospective donors asking them to give a specific amount. A letter should include a space for donor’s contact information (ideally merged in by the organization) and suggested giving levels based on donor’s previous giving. An email will include a link to your giving website.

In your letter or email, it is important to focus on stories, not just statistics. Including the human element is very important. You want your message to be emotionally moving and written in short paragraphs that recipients can read through quickly. The focus should be on the donor (liberal use of the word “you” is impactful) and the difference their giving can make. Use formatting to your advantage – highlighting, underlining, and bolding key sentences or phrases can help draw your reader’s attention where you need it. This includes the request! Be sure to ask for a specific amount, based on previous giving. (E.g., “Your gift of \$25, \$50, or even \$100 today can help to...”)

## PHONE CALLS

Strategically placed phone calls to prospects – especially those who have supported you in the past – can be especially impactful. Always prepare a script! It should be short and conversational, and always follow a mailing or email. Thank the prospect for their previous giving and/or interest in your organization (you got their phone number somehow!), and ask them what drew them to your organization, if you don’t already know. Giving prospects an opportunity to give you feedback or insight as to who they are as a donor will be helpful in the future. Always keep good notes! Be prepared with a story of recent impact, and your request sentence. Always ask for a specific gift!

## MAJOR GIFTS

Major gifts are the largest gifts an organization receives. A major gift will vary from nonprofit to nonprofit and depend on the past and average gifts you receive as well as the size of your organization.

Studies from the Association of Fundraising Professionals have shown that, on average, *over 88% of all funds come from just 12% of donors*. Given the transformational impact of these big gifts, it’s clear to see why they have become a priority for many thriving organizations.

## Where To Start?

1. **Review your stewardship process:** A well-organized thank you process is imperative to sustaining fundraising success. Sit down with your team to make sure everyone understands their roles in the stewardship process.
2. **Review the accuracy of your donor information:** Is your team inputting information correctly and consistently? Everything from donor information to gift details needs to be entered properly to ensure credible reporting, data review, and development of future strategy.

3. **Identify your top 10 prospects:** Determine which of your donors meet the golden trifecta: strong past giving, current affinity to your organization, and accessibility to a member of your fundraising team. Those who meet these three criteria are your most promising donors. If you don't have a top ten, start with top five - or top two!
4. **Make an individual plan for each of your top 10:** Each donor has unique characteristics and needs. Create a plan for each donor which reflects their place in your donor pipeline and map out how you will get them to a gift request. Honoring where donors are in your pipeline will allow you to have an authentic and honest conversation about how they want to be cultivated and how realistic their potential support will be.

## Determining The Right Request Amount

When determining the appropriate ask amount, it is important to balance your needs and what is right for the prospect. Consider the following when making this decision:

### WHAT IS THE PROSPECT'S GIVING HISTORY?

- Previous nonprofit donations - Past gifts to your nonprofit are the best predictors of future major gift prospects. Donations to similar nonprofits also indicate prospects who may be apt to give to you.
- Political gifts - Donations to political campaigns and causes demonstrate an affinity for prospects to give to the causes they care about.

### WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THEIR WEALTH?

- Nonprofit service - Prospects who serve on nonprofit boards and foundations not only tend to have resources, but they know the needs of nonprofits and may be more inclined to give.
- Real estate ownership - The monetary value of real estate is a wealth predictor, demonstrating a prospect's capacity to give, so you can formulate more accurate ask amounts.
- Employer info - Many prospects work for employers that offer matching gift programs, some of which are interestingly unique. Focusing on matching gift eligible employees can result in doubled donations, which can be an added boost to your fundraising campaigns.
- Stock transactions - Another wealth predictor, you'll know what prospects invest in and how much.

- Personal information – Glean basic contact info, marital status, hobbies, and other personal data that can make fundraising easier.

#### **WHAT ARE THEIR OTHER CURRENT FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES?**

- Children in college – Especially for big gift prospects with children, it is likely that at some point they will be paying at least partially for their child's education which could impact their giving potential.
- A child's wedding or other life events – Consider other expensive life events that the prospect might have going on that year.
- Any major career, lifestyle, or health changes – Always be aware of major changes in the prospects personal or professional life that may strain their resources.

### **The Rationale for a Formal Solicitation**

1. Gifts are significantly larger (more than two times alternative approaches).
2. Participation rates are considerably higher (more than double other means).
3. Gift decision timelines are measurably shorter (less than half other methods).
4. Prospects are educated and relevant questions/issues are explored and addressed in a timely manner.
5. Private conversations foster a discussion of personal matters and finances.
6. Giving considerations are tailored for individual situations.
7. Stronger relationships and personal connections are sustained.
8. Personal visits allow the solicitor to appropriately thank the donor

## Preparing for a Solicitation

For the best chance of success, make sure you and your team are well prepared for your solicitations. Some key considerations are the solicitation team, prospect strategy, and materials. Don't forget to practice making the ask!

TEAM	STRATEGY	MATERIALS	PRACTICE
Who is the "best" solicitor?	What is the right request amount?	(Pre/Post)	Prepare a script the ask
Who can influence the gift-making decision?	What is the prospect's giving history?	Case for Support	Rehearse and role play
Who should be present at the solicitation?	What aspect of the case would appeal to the prospect?	Request Letter	Anticipate possible objections and responses
	What is the impact of the prospect's gift?	Personalized Solicitation Proposal	Decide who says and does what
	What gift recognition should be presented?	Prospect Profile	Determine what materials to bring to the prospect
		Solicitation Strategy	
		Recognition Opportunities	

## Four Stages of an Effective Solicitation

If you are unsure of how a solicitation visit generally goes, refer to the table below. This won't be your first visit with the prospect, but you can ease into the conversations by thanking them for their time and reminding them of why their involvement would be crucial to your organization.

STAGE	OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE	% OF VISIT
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	Make the prospect comfortable and identify the purpose of the visit.	<p>I asked to meet with you to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Explain how important this project is</li> <li>▪ Talk to you about how you may help us at this point</li> </ul>	10%

<p><b>Making the Case for Philanthropic Support</b></p>	<p>Explain the “what” and “why” of your organization. Specifically, what we are doing and why we are doing it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This is a defining moment for our city and our organization.</li> <li>▪ The initiative is a big part of this plan.</li> <li>▪ Emphasize case elements that are important to the prospect.</li> </ul>		<p>60%</p>
<p><b>Asking for the Gift</b></p>	<p>Verbalize the gift request - remain silent and wait for the prospect to respond.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Would you consider a gift of \$X?</li> <li>▪ We are asking you to consider a transformational gift of that will enable us to ____.</li> </ul>		<p>20%</p>
<p><b>Handling the Prospect’s Response</b></p>	<p>Answer any questions in a way that induces the prospect to increase the likelihood of making a gift at the requested level.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Thank you! We will follow up to finalize everything. The office will contact you to follow-up in the coming days...</p>	<p>10%</p>
<p>I need more time</p>	<p>Absolutely, let’s meet/speak again at the end of next week.</p>			
<p>I will give, but less than requested:</p>	<p>I want to thank you for the generous offer and let you know that I did not expect a decision today. I just wanted to take the time to explain how important this moment is to the future of our city, and how important gifts at this level are.</p>			

## Handling The Response

It might feel like the ask is over when you make your formal request, but handling a prospects response tactfully is crucial. Below we've outlined some additional language to help.

WHEN THE PROSPECT...	THE SOLICITER MAY REPLY WITH...
<b>Agrees to the Gift Request</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thank you so much! That is a generous commitment.</li> <li>▪ May I ask you to sign the pledge agreement?</li> <li>▪ I will send you a pledge agreement for your signature.</li> </ul>
<b>Agrees to a Greater Amount</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Same as above, but with a bigger smile!</li> </ul>
<b>Asks for More Time to Consider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ May I call you in a week to check-in?</li> <li>▪ Are there any additional questions I may answer for you?</li> </ul>
<b>Offers Less than Requested</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Emphasize one or all of the following:</li> <li>▪ Would you like more time to consider the request?</li> <li>▪ Your commitment will significantly influence others to do the same.</li> <li>▪ We need you to be included among those leaders mentioned earlier.</li> </ul>
<b>Offers Considerably Less than Requested</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you have a concern that we can resolve?</li> <li>▪ May I ask you to review the proposal and these materials? I will call you in a week to answer all your questions.</li> <li>▪ Can we re-visit our request at a later and better time?</li> </ul>
<b>Refuses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Indicate your disappointment-pleasantly.</li> <li>▪ May I ask you to review the proposal and these materials? I will call you in a week to answer all your questions.</li> <li>▪ Thank you for your time.</li> </ul>

## Closing The Gift

Closing the gift means getting a firm answer to your request: “yes” or “no”. Do not leave the solicitation meeting without a mutually agreed-upon next step:

- Deadline for the prospect’s answer or a date for the next meeting.
- Date you will supply the prospect with additional information.

### 24-48 HOURS

- Send personalized thank you note
- Confirm importance of gift, initiative, and prospect

### 1 WEEK

- Call/visit prospect for follow up discussion
- Provide information as promised
- Confirm urgency with important upcoming dates (board meetings, events, etc.)

### ONGOING

- Send additional materials: letter of intent/pledge form, organization news
- Engage peers and special friends to follow up with the prospective donor
- Invite to special events or tours

## Summary & Checklist

Before you head out the door to meet your prospect, review the following checklist for success:

CASE FOR SUPPORT	THE ASK	AFTER THE ASK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use solicitation deck</li> <li>Tell a story, make it personal</li> <li>Share organizational background</li> <li>Keep moving, don't get bogged down</li> <li>Speak specifically about what appeals to you</li> <li>Maintain a positive approach</li> <li>Highlight the opportunity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most important part of the solicitation meeting</li> <li>Do not apologize for asking</li> <li>Be clear, honest, and deliberate</li> <li>Verbalize the specific dollar amount requested</li> <li><u>Key Phrases</u></li> <li><i>Would you consider a gift of \$X?</i></li> <li><i>We are asking you to consider a transformational gift that will enable us to ____.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be silent and wait for response</li> <li>Allow your prospect to process the request</li> <li>Let the prospect speak first after the ask has been made</li> <li>Do not interrupt</li> <li>Listen to the prospect's response</li> <li>Clarify any concerns the prospect raises</li> </ul>