

# Major Donors: from discovery to solicitation

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# A few disclaimers

- My primary focus is high net worth individuals
- Different takeaways for different folks
- Every meeting will be different

# Starting with the discovery conversation

- Wealthy people are everywhere, not everyone is going to become a major donor (and that is ok!)
- The 80/20 rule
- Asking for money is scary, this method provides a pathway to the ask
- Bold plans come from these conversations

# My agenda for most initial meetings

Thank you for taking the time to meet. I'm excited to tell you about my organization but first, I'd love to learn more about you and your philanthropy.

First: (you may not cover everything here and that's ok)

- Family
- Philanthropy
- Finances
- Their passions and potential interest in your work

Second:

- An overview of my work/organization
- Will they become a donor? Will they make a gift?

# Sample questions

- Family: Who do you consult when you make decisions about philanthropy?
- Philanthropy: What are your top philanthropic priorities?
- Finances: Do you have advisors who you consult when you think about making gifts?

## Takeaways:

- Other important decision makers
- Comfort level with philanthropy
- Decision making process/timeline
- Philanthropic objectives

# Interest in your field

- Tell me about your interest in \_\_\_\_\_.
- What do you know about \_\_\_\_\_?
- When did this become important to you? What is your first memory of \_\_\_\_\_?

## Takeaways:

- Specific interest in your work
- Areas for you to follow up or educate
- Emotional connection to what you do

Tell me more about that...

(works every time)

# NOW the “pitch”

- Fill in where you heard connections with the donor
- Read the room and the donor
- After a few minutes, turn it back to the donor
- Recognize if it doesn't feel like a good fit
- Not sure what to say? Ask the donor!



# Time to ask!

- People don't give unless they are asked, typically for a specific amount
- Asking for money isn't taboo, it's what every other group is doing, and what philanthropists expect
- Don't people get offended when you ask them for money?  
A quick story from one of my first jobs in fundraising
- Discovery work helps you learn a lot about a donor, but making an ask is key to advancing a relationship

# Fundamentals of a good solicitation

- Reflect briefly on what you know about the donor and your work
- Make a **specific** ask for a firm amount (more on how much to ask for shortly)
- STOP TALKING and wait for a response
- Ask questions to clarify the donor's inclination and next steps

# Let's try it...

- I've really enjoyed getting to know you better and it sounds like your philanthropy is closely aligned with my work. I've enjoyed learning about how much you care about \_\_\_\_\_.
- Would you consider a gift of \$10,000 to support my organization?
- SHHHH...Listen for a response. Drink a sip of water and listen. Smile, nod, make the donor comfortable without answering for them.
- Ask follow up questions

# Follow up questions

- If the donor says no or is unsure:
  - If you had unlimited resources, would you make this gift?
  - Can you tell me more about why this isn't a gift you want to make right now?
  - What can we do to bring you closer to our work and earn your support?
  - Do you see our organization becoming a philanthropic priority for you?
  - When is a good time for me to follow up with you about this request?
  - What else can I share to help you make this decision?
- If the donor says YES!
  - Hooray, thank you so much! Time to do the money dance!
  - Think about going back to those discovery questions, the cycle continues...

# How much do you ask for?

- This is often more of an art than a science
- Is there a baseline “major gift” level at your organization?
- Is the donor telling you about other gifts a very high level to similar organizations? Maybe you want to start higher.
- If this a steady long-term donor, always consider asking for an increase.

# What's next?

- Debrief, take notes
- Is there a path forward with this donor? What is it? (If the answer is no, that's also a success, move on and focus on donors who will give.)
- Reflect what you heard back to the donor and think about sending follow up materials that compliment your conversation
- Follow up, follow up, follow up
- This work never ends