



Common Donor Objections

Sooner or later, a donor will come up with an objection to which you don't have an easy answer. If that hasn't happened to you yet, you're probably not speaking with enough donors or asking for enough money.

We have identified eight classic donor objections. One of the most common, especially during a recession, is "I can't give that much" or, "This is really a bad time for me."

It's worth bearing the following in mind:

1. Your current supporters feel terrible about having to let you down. They know as well as you do that these are tough times. If they do cut back, try to empathize with their decision and reiterate the importance of their loyalty, whether or not it can be backed up with a gift. If you stand by them in difficult times, you will be rewarded when the good times roll again.
2. Several funders report receiving fewer applications during the recession. As one funder put it, charities may be 'talking themselves into the recession.' Make sure your charity keeps asking.
3. All surveys we've reviewed suggest that major donors are less likely to consider giving to new charities during a recession. You should therefore do everything possible to cultivate and maintain current donors, and should adjust your targets to suit donor capacity.
4. Foundation giving is likely to dip severely for a year or two, given the timelag between endowment yields and payouts. A greater focus on individual donors at all levels, from major donors to community fundraising, will help cushion the impact of lower foundation grants.
5. Competition for 'new' volunteers (i.e. laid-off professionals) is heating up, with some charities benefiting from the influx of new talent into the sector in areas such as marketing and financial planning. A judicious screening of such volunteers, and the creation of meaningful opportunities for them, will help lay the ground for longer term donor relationships in the future.



What to say when a donor objects to the amount you have asked for:

1. If the donor has reacted with irritation or outright anger, apologize for surprising them. At the same time, reiterate why you have asked for that much (good projects cost money, and it's your job to secure that money). For example:

“We need to be ambitious in asking for support, which means we do occasionally get this wrong. Clearly we have here and I'm extremely sorry. Can we reset the clock and ask instead what might work for you?”

2. Find out exactly what underlies the objection. You might ask directly: “Have we asked for the wrong amount, or is it just the wrong time?” You might also want to find out whether the donor would like to involve other people (spouse, business partners) before making a decision.
3. Clarify next steps. If timing is the issue, ask whether you can keep the door open and come back in a year. If it's the amount, ask what would work for them. Don't suggest a figure. Stay quiet while they think about it.
4. Consider offering a scaled-down, multi-year pledge option (if you haven't already). If you asked for £50,000, for example, ask whether it would work for the donor to consider three annual gifts of £10,000. Be prepared to say what such a gift would achieve, but don't 'over talk' it. You're negotiating money at this point, not restating the case. Less is more.
5. If you have to walk away empty-handed, ask how they want to be kept informed. The more donors can control the communication with you and your charity, the more comfortable they will feel.
6. Negotiate non-monetary outcomes to the meeting that will make both you and the donor feel good about the relationship. These could include: in-kind gifts, introductions to other prospects, an agreement that the donor will consider helping you in the future, attendance at an event, honest advice on your approach.
7. If possible, give examples of other major donors who are giving less for now but who are committed to staying the course.
8. Be frank about giving trends for your charity so that they can help you figure out the problem. Tell them what's up and what's down. Assure them that you have a game plan for survival. Remember: when you want advice, ask for money. When you want money, ask for advice.