
Shallow Review of Non-Ask Fundraising



Non-ask fundraising is quite self-explanatory, and is defined as an event that doesn't immediately ask for donations or heavy volunteer commitments. There are two types of non-ask events. The first kind aims at recruiting new people to the charity while the second kind aims to reconnect and build relations with people already involved with it.

Non-ask events targeting new members aim to educate people on a charity, and recruit them to become involved initially in some non-monetary form, such as signing up for a newsletter or making a small volunteer commitment [1]. The theory behind this is that it is easier for people to commit to a charity without any financial ties or heavy volunteer commitments to begin with, which makes intuitive sense. Once people are involved and comfortable with a charity, they will be more open to donating their money and time to it, and thus will gradually increase their contributions [2].

Non-ask events focusing on current members aim to boost their personal connection with the charity and provide opportunities for continuing their education. These events could potentially also have current members bring new people into the charity. In theory, building

up the personal connection of members with a charity makes them more likely to donate their time and money [2]. Education is an inherently valuable pursuit, and also provides the benefit of keeping members up-to-date on both the charity's latest developments and events that they can participate in. The more educated people are on effective giving and on Charity Science's activities, the more likely they will be to donate money.

In addition to building positive relationships with current members, this second type of non-ask event can also be made into a hybrid non-ask event, where people can bring friends who aren't already involved with the charity. This would have the added effect of bringing new people to the charity.

Research

Non-ask events by nature produce more intangible and long-term benefits, so it is difficult to measure their effectiveness. However, in a 2011 paper [3], economist Anna Breman showed that when charities asked people to increase their monthly donations, those who were asked after two months had a mean increase in monthly donations 32% higher than those who were asked to do so immediately. It's possible that the relationships that produced this result could extend to non-direct fundraising events, and that waiting to ask people for money could lead to larger donations in the long-term. In addition to this study, the consensus among experts suggests that non-ask events are important for building relationships and contact lists, and are generally more effective than asking for money immediately.

Various experts vouch for the benefits of non-ask events for recruiting new donors. A report done for Canadian Heritage by consultant Ken Wyman cites the various benefits of non-ask events, such as improved publicity, image, credibility, education, motivation, community relations, and commitment [4]. Likewise, an article by the Fundraising Authority cites how the dividends gained from growing a prospect list and volunteer network through non-ask events is more beneficial than immediately raising money [5].

In addition to praising the merits of non-ask events for recruitment, experts consistently cite the importance of cultivating relationships with existing donors, which can be achieved through these events. In one study, Adrian Sargaent ran a massive survey ($n=10,000$) of defected donors from all major types of nonprofits (medicine, general welfare, international aid, children and animal protections). What he found was that one in ten respondents had no memory of supporting the organization and over a quarter cited finding a more deserving cause as their reason for defection[6]. These results demonstrate how necessary delivering ongoing and specific feedback to donors is. For this reason, non-ask events showcasing Charity Science's activities and use of funds could be very valuable for retaining donors and building relationships, which would increase donations to effective charities.

In addition to Sargeant's study, a different study on applied relationship management theory by Richard Waters showed that major gift donors have stronger feelings of trust and satisfaction. The study also revealed that multiple-time donors reported a stronger relationship with the charity than one time donors [7]. Waters states that these findings stress the importance of donor cultivation and of demonstrating financial and social accountability.

With this being the case, non-ask events seem like they could be a great way for Charity Science to showcase its outstanding accountability and build relationships with donors through direct contact.



In yet another study, Waters found that relationship nurturing, responsibility and sharing of tasks are the only three variables with a significant influence on the donor involvement of major gift donors [8]. For this reason, keeping donors involved through methods such as non-ask events is very important.

One significant issue with non-ask events is the lack of research on them. Likely because of their indirect nature, few charities have tried to measure the benefit that these events have. Thus, running a non-ask event experiment would come with many unknowns. In addition, because they are indirect, it would be difficult to measure the success of non-ask events. Keeping track of the people these events bring to the charity would be essential for future measurements on the benefits of them.

Subjective Sense

In addition to recruiting volunteers and donors to Charity Science, a non-ask event in the form of a presentation to students would educate them on the concept of effective giving. Even if they didn't become directly involved with Charity Science after the event, they would still gain an increased awareness of effective giving. Hopefully, this would inspire the student to give more to effective charities. Although this effect would be difficult or even impossible to measure, the intangible benefit of it would be real and worthwhile.

In addition to the benefits of education, increased future donations and volunteer service, there are some issues with non-ask events. First, there is a risk that by not immediately asking for donations, we will lose the ability to get certain people to donate; some people may be willing to do quick one-time donations without wanting to get very involved with the charity. However, research shows that people are less inclined to give immediately, so the

sum of missed donations would likely be quite small. Furthermore, if people attending a non-ask event did feel inclined to give a one-time donation and wanted to take the initiative, they would still be able to.

One problem with non-ask events for existing members is Charity Science's small size. With our small size, it might be difficult to attract a considerable attendance to an event like a dinner and movie screening for current members. In addition, without an office, it would potentially be awkward to host open houses, which are a customary non-ask event. However, we could also use this small size to our advantage by hosting non-ask events that are more intimate. Although this probably wouldn't mesh well with all prospective donors, my subjective sense tells me that many donors would prefer an intimate atmosphere to a more corporate one. Overall, based on the various benefits including improved organization-donor relationships and low cost, (elaborated on in "Running an Experiment") combined with the few disadvantages, experimenting with non-ask events seems like a good idea.

Expected Value

As mentioned above, there is very little research on the expected returns of non-ask events. However, I would estimate that roughly 10% of people who see a presentation would be interested in further involvement with Charity Science. Therefore, for a presentation to a church group of 100 people, we could expect 10 people to be interested. Out of these ten, I estimate that about 50% would be interested in donating about \$50/year and that around 20% percent would be interested in running their own fundraising campaign (e.g., Asking for donations on Christmas or birthday, which we could expect to bring in approximately \$400 each). Thus, a non-ask event of about 100 attendees could expect to bring in about \$250/year in direct donations and an additional \$800/year in donations from personal fundraising campaigns, bringing in a total of \$1050/year for each event.

It should be noted that because of the lack of information on non-ask events, the figures above are purely estimates. After hosting our first non-ask event, we would adjust our estimates as needed.

In terms of running an experiment, neither a large budget nor large staff commitment would be required, which works well with Charity Science's current size. The experiment could be scaled up or down based on the number of presentations or events conducted, and one staff member per event would suffice. The time commitment of the involved staff member would primarily involve the preparation and delivery of the presentations or events. I expect that the preparation and delivery of a presentation would involve a time commitment of 2-3 hours. The cost would include staff wages and possibly some minimal materials for the presentations (posters, handouts). Therefore, after developing the presentations, the variable

cost of hosting a non-ask event would be approximately \$45 for staff wages and roughly \$5 for presentation material, making for a total cost of \$50.

Based on the estimated cost of \$50/event and the expected return of \$1050/event, we would raise a net \$1000 from each event. Based on this excellent ratio and the low time commitment (2-3 hours), the expected value of non-ask events seems quite promising.

Running an Experiment

There are various ways to do non-ask events for recruiting new members. As mentioned above, one possibility would be to give presentations to students. Not only would this provide intrinsically valuable education on effective giving, but it would also potentially lead to future donations and volunteer commitments.

Another option would be to give presentations to corporations and church groups. Church groups receive almost 1/3rd of all charitable donations in the United States [9]. In addition, they also tend to have older demographics, which are associated with increased charitable giving [10]. Therefore, targeting members of large and generous church groups could be very beneficial.

Another potential approach would be to host a booth at a conference. We have done this before, and we got many newsletter signups over three days (around 100) and a chance to present at a workplace. The response rates to those newsletter signups were unfortunately very low.

In terms of hosting non-ask events for existing members, one possibility is to have a relevant movie screening and/or dinner event that could also include a presentation. This could be a low-cost event (we could prepare the food ourselves) that could strengthen relationships with donors. An event like this could also be converted easily to a hybrid non-ask event, where existing members could bring friends interested in becoming involved with Charity Science.

It seems that given the demographics and low cost, a non-ask presentation at a church makes the most sense as a starting place for experimentation. However, a low-cost dinner and movie screening for both new and existing members could also serve as a good starting point.



Running a Successful Non-Ask Event

In order to host a successful non-ask event, there are various points to be mindful of. First, it is extremely important that we highlight our charities transparency and fiscal integrity. One of the most common problems people have with donating to charity is concern over where their money is being spent. If we can clearly show prospective donors that their money would be used in the best way possible, we can overcome a common and significant roadblock to their altruism [11].

Another important area of focus is educating people on ineffective charities, rather than simply explaining why we're an effective charity. Doing this will show them how important our work is and will be more effective for recruitment [11]. A good way to educate people on ineffective charities would be through the games produced by "A Path That's Clear" [12].

In addition, tapping into people's compassion will boost how much our message resonates. Asking potential supporters questions like "What would you do if you had \$1 million to give", or "When did you first learn about giving back", will remind them that helping others is something they are passionate about and want to do, rather than something we are pushing on them [11].

In addition to reminding people of their desire to give, emphasizing that supporting our charity only requires small sacrifices for concrete gains will maximize our effectiveness. Often people are more open to the "little but often" argument where they think of their charitable giving as a series of small sacrifices, like giving up soda or lattes. In addition, when people see their money as having a concrete impact, such as by deworming one child, they can clearly see that their contribution is making a difference, which makes them more open to giving. Therefore, marketing donations as small sacrifices for concrete gains will be highly beneficial [13].

Although by definition, we won't ask for monetary contributions at non-ask events, we can still ask for the attendees' information, such as their email or phone number for a newsletter, or a commitment to an event or volunteer work. By asking for a concrete commitment, people are much more likely to stay involved [13].

Once people are involved with our charity, creating a social profile that documents their volunteer and monetary contributions will be incredibly beneficial. For some people, this recognition will incentivize contributing their time and money to our charity. Even more importantly, creating a social profile will allow us to show potential contributors that others are helping. Expert opinion says that when people see proof of others helping, they become more likely to personally contribute [14] [15].

No matter which way non-ask events are pursued, follow-up will be essential. At the very least, collecting phone numbers or emails must happen. It would be even better to get some sort of concrete non-monetary commitment, such as volunteer work or attendance at an upcoming event. Experts say that people are much more likely to stay involved when they have made a concrete commitment [1]. In addition to creating a higher probability of involvement with the charity, collecting contact information would enable us to keep track of the donations and involvement of supporters who became involved through the non-ask event. This will in turn allow us to measure the benefit of the event.

Another way to measure the benefit of non-ask events would be through before and after questionnaires for the presentations. These will allow us to measure how successful the events were in educating and changing the attitudes of their attendants.

Further Questions

One of the remaining questions on non-ask events regards the logistics of giving these presentations at churches or schools. Contacting these places to figure out when and how presentations could be arranged is the next step.

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