



Strategic Questions

If you're a fundraiser, you make a living by asking questions and then listening. Listening completely. Ernest Hemingway wrote, "When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen."

You want to get to know your donors. You want to know about their family and their hobbies. A great fundraiser goes beyond those things, though. You want to ask questions that reveal the heart of the donor. You want to get them to articulate the mission of your organization in their words. You want to learn about the gifts they've given to other organizations and **why** they've given those gifts.

How soon is too soon in the relationship to ask these questions? I've asked ALL of them on a very first meeting with a donor. But there have been times I've not felt it was right to ask some of them until after several meetings.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but here are some of my favorite questions to ask. Email me questions or feedback at clark@majorgiftsfundraiser.com. For more fundraising tips, listen to the Major Gifts Fundraiser podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Just search "Major Gifts Fundraiser."

1. Of all the organizations you could support, why do you support us?
2. Why is our organization so important to you?
3. When you talk with people about our organization, what do you say?
4. What do you think our organization stands for?
5. If you were to summarize the principles or values our organization exemplifies, what would some of them be?
6. I'm sure your mailbox is full of solicitations from lots of organizations. How do you sort through it all?

7. How can we do a better job telling our story?
8. What are you most passionate about?
9. "As you look ahead, is there something else you'd like to accomplish? A dream you have yet to fulfill?" (This is a great question to ask CEO's who have stepped away from their careers).
10. If you were the CEO of our organization and you knew you could achieve any one objective, what would you want to undertake?
11. What in your life has given you the greatest fulfillment?
12. What most impresses you when you meet with someone who is trying to win your support? What builds trust and credibility with you early on in a relationship?
13. Of all the activities we engage in as an organization, if you were to boil it down, what would you say it is that we really do?
14. What would you say is the mission of our organization?
15. When someone asks, "Tell me about your organization?" Respond by saying, "What would you like to know?" This ensures that what you're about to tell them is of interest to them.
16. What's the most important thing you think we should be discussing today?
17. What impact do you think it would have on our world/country/community if we were to move forward with *this* project?
18. What impact do you think it would have on the life of a young person to be able to experience *this*? (One of my FAVORITE questions to ask when I was at the Reagan Ranch).
19. Of all the gifts you've given, what gift has given you the most joy?
20. Why do you give?
21. What made you want to start giving money away?
22. Have you ever been disappointed by a gift that you've given?
23. If you were to give a gift above and beyond anything you've ever given before, what would you want to accomplish?

24. What would it take for you to view our organization in the same light that you view FILL IN THE BLANK. [INSERT ORGANIZATION YOU KNOW THE DONOR IS SUPPORTING AT A MUCH HIGHER LEVEL].
25. If a donor is talking about a gift to another organization, simply say, *“Well that must have been a significant gift...”* More often than not, the donor will tell you the exact amount of the gift and tell you about the gift in detail. They’re proud of their support and they want to talk about it!
26. If you feel like you have already established good rapport with the donor, the next logical question to ask would be, *“What would it take for you to give that kind of gift to our organization?”*
27. If the donor is talking about another organization and it’s clear that they’re involved with that organization in a significant way, ask questions like....
- a. “Do you have a contact at the Museum who you work with?”
 - b. “Oh, it sounds like you’ve been quite involved with the Museum. Have you gotten a chance to get to know the Director?”
 - c. “Has anyone from the Museum ever come out to visit you?” (If the donor says, “Oh, sure. Every time the director comes to Florida he always stays at my house,” that tells you something).
 - d. “Have you served on any committees at the Museum?”
 - e. NOTE: What I am doing with these questions is trying to assess if the donor is getting touches from top-tier leadership at other organizations. If the director of the museum stays with the donor whenever the director goes to Florida, chances are pretty good that you’re talking to a major donor to the museum.
28. If you’ve established that the donor has given to another organization in a significant way, ask, *“How did that come about?... Did someone from the organization ask you to make that gift?... What was it that compelled you to give such a special gift?”*
29. Of all the organizations you support, where would you say we rank?
30. What would have to change to get us higher up on the list of organizations you support?

31. How does the mission of our organization dovetail with your own personal mission?
32. Do you have any guiding principles that govern the way you make your philanthropic decisions?
33. If you were directing a charitable foundation that had to distribute a million dollars, what would you want to accomplish?
34. If every non-profit organization were suddenly being traded on the New York Stock Exchange, would you buy us?
35. You indicated that you'd be willing to consider a gift above and beyond anything you've given before. What would be an appropriate amount to ask for?
36. Were your parents givers? Did your parents talk with you about the importance of giving? Do you talk with your kids about the organizations you support?
37. When you're ready to ask for a gift and need a transition simply say, "Do I have your permission to ask for a gift?" Gets the donor saying yes before you've even made the ask.
38. Have you made provisions in your estate for some of your favorite organizations? Would you consider including us in your estate plans?
39. What would you like for your own personal legacy to be?
40. In retrospect, are you happy that we scheduled this meeting?
41. Do you think this meeting was a good use of our time?
42. Do you love us?

Biographical Questions

1. How did you get started?
2. Have you always been in finance?
3. How did you decide to do that at the time?
4. Where did you go to school?
5. Have you always lived in Boise? No? Well, how did you end up here?
6. Oh, you grew up in Indianapolis. Do you still have family there? Do you ever get back to Indiana?
7. A donor mentions they have a daughter. "So does your daughter live close by?... Do you have other kids?... Grandkids?... Where are they located?... What do your kids do?"
8. What do you wish your younger self had known about that you know today?
9. How do you like to spend your free time?
10. Who have been influential role models or mentors in your life?
11. What was the toughest lesson you've had to learn?
12. If that had fallen through, what do you think you would have done? What would have happened?
13. How did you and your spouse meet? How'd you end up together?
14. What are you passionate about?
15. What's the greatest disappointment in your life?
16. How do you like to communicate with people? Email? Text? Social media?
17. What are some of your favorite books?
18. **Tell me more...** Use this or some variation of this often. **Tell me more...** Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by that? Could you elaborate on that? That's really interesting... I'd love to hear more about that.