



Securing a Major Gift in 7 Steps

A Practical Walkthrough Guide

While annual giving creates the basis of sustainable fundraising, securing major gifts can be transformational.

In this guide, we'll take you through the steps to securing a major donation, from defining your goal through to stewarding your new benefactor.

Ready? Let's get started.

STEP 1: Define what a major gift is to your organization

By nature, the term "major gift" is subjective (and it should be!)

Each nonprofit will have a different meaning for a major gift because each nonprofit is different.

Some things to consider when determining your definition of a major gift are:

- Your organization's existing levels of donations
- Your current number of donors
- The donation amount that has the potential to have a significant impact on the organization

Discuss with your board, your development staff and other key stakeholders to ensure you have alignment on your definition.

STEP 2: Narrow down your prospects

Use your data to identify which donors are considered your organization's "top donors." Once you have your list of the biggest donors, narrow it down to your top 10 or 20 prospective donors, based on their historical giving and their connection and involvement with your organization.

A donor's history with your nonprofit is important, because a one-time big donor might not be the greatest prospect for a major gift if stacked up against a donor that consistently gives what your organization has determined as "medium" sized gifts.

Consistent giving often indicates that a donor already feels a connection to your nonprofit and/or your nonprofit's mission. This isn't to say that you can't reach out and build those connections with a one-time giver, but for the purpose of ordering prospects based on current data (and not future potential), this should be a rule of thumb to follow.

STEP 3: Build relationships

You should be doing your best to cultivate a relationship with all of your nonprofit's donors throughout the entire year and this whole process.

You can steward donors with visits, facility tours, prompt and genuine thank you's for gifts, personal stories about your successes, newsletters, annual reports, personal calls, etc. If donor stewardship isn't a major part of your fundraising, chances are your road to a major gift will be much steeper.



Think about it: you wouldn't ask someone to move in with you within the first week of dating them — the same mentality should apply to major gifts. Generally, several conversations and interactions must happen before a potential major donor is ready to make that type of financial commitment to your organization.

STEP 4: Map out your plan for the ask

When mapping out what to say to potential donors, plan on describing the reason the gift is needed and focus on how their gift can make a huge change within the community.

The best approach is to be donor-centric, which means focusing on the interests and passions of the donor.

For example, say your potential donor is a teacher and your organization focuses on education. Explain to them how their gift will help advance education and that you came to them because you know it is a passion of theirs. It shows you have done your research and care about their interests.

Jot down a note to yourself (or keep it in the back of your mind) to **not** talk about how their donation fits into your strategic plan. As previously mentioned, the plan for the ask should be to focus on the donor's agenda and how you're advancing it.

Part of your plan should also include deciding who will make the ask. Securing a major gift is largely about the right person asking the right potential donor at the right time.

STEP 5: Set up a meeting

Picking up the phone and making the call can be one of the hardest parts of the process. Remember that in all types of asks, major or not, you aren't asking for something for yourself; rather, you are inviting people in the community to be an integral part of a bigger cause.

When you make the initial call to set up an in-person meeting, it's important that the meeting be presented as a discussion that the donor can add value to, and not just an ask. Your goal is to make the donor feel like they are important to the organization (because they are), and not an ATM.

At the same time, though, it's very important to be honest. The purpose of the in-person meeting is, in fact, to ask for their support, so don't leave that out of the phone conversation. As the call progresses, don't lose sight that your goal is to get a face-to-face meeting, not to make the actual ask over the phone. In most cases it will be unlikely that you will get a major gift if you can't secure a meeting in person.

STEP 6: Make the Ask

So the day of the meeting has arrived. Don't be nervous! Remember the plan you set up earlier and stick to it.

More than likely your prospect is going to have questions for you, so anticipate these questions and have your answers ready. Also look at questions or objections as a way to share more information about your organization or change the ask.

For example, if the prospect says that your proposed gift amount is too high, encourage them to pledge that amount and give at the earliest convenience or in more manageable installments. Reiterate what exactly their gift will fund, as that makes the idea more tangible.



If your prospect still says no, don't be upset.

"No" does not mean "never," it means "not right now." Leave the door open for other options or for a future ask.

STEP 7: Thank, recognize, and give your donor an update

Immediately following your meeting (no matter the answer to your ask), you should send a thank you note or make a thank you call.

For internal purposes, write notes about the conversation and what key points you touched on and how your donor responded to them. This will not only help you make more effective plans for future major gift asks, but also keep others in the organization in the know concerning this particular donor.

If a gift is secured, another important step is recognizing the gift, no matter the amount. If you plan on publicly recognizing the gift, make sure you ask your donor beforehand! Some donors prefer to stay anonymous, and you should always honor their wishes.



As time progresses, keep your donor updated on the progress of your organization and more importantly what you have been able to achieve with their gift. Once again, word these progress reports in tangible terms. For example, "We have been able to provide 100 school children with school supplies and after school programming all because of your generous gift."