AUGUST 2025

FREE DOWNLOAD

THE REAL DEAL FUNDRAISER'S QUICK GUIDE TO DONOR QUESTIONS

GROUNDING VALUES

This guide is built around four core values that reflect both ethical fundraising and a community-centered mindset:

- **Respect for Donor Autonomy** – We provide clear choices, not pressure. Our role is to invite, not convince.
- **Transparency** – We share the truth about how donations are used, including the less glamorous parts that keep missions moving.
- **Agency and Inclusion** – We recognize that every donor, regardless of size or timing, contributes to the whole. We honor participation over prestige.
- **Mission-Centered Clarity** – We keep the focus on the impact, not on making donors feel like heroes. We center the mission and those it serves.
- **Shared Ownership** – We view fundraising as a collaborative act, with donors and organizations co-creating the future together.

This guide isn't about avoiding tough topics – it's about meeting them with honesty, clarity, and care. The goal is to build trust, not just close a gift.

THE LASC FRAMEWORK

These responses are built on a simple, effective structure:

- **Listen** – Hear what's really being said – not just the words, but the emotion behind them.
- **Acknowledge** – Reflect back what you heard to affirm the donor's perspective.
- **Support** – Share your message clearly and kindly, rooted in truth.
- **Continue** – Bring the conversation back to the shared purpose or next step.

“WHY DO YOU NEED MY GIFT IF YOU ALREADY GOT A BIG ONE FROM [ANOTHER DONOR]?”

"That was such a generous gift, and we’re incredibly grateful. I hear you asking how your gift fits into the big picture – and that’s a great question. Our mission is bigger than any one donation. Every gift – large or small – plays a distinct and critical role. In fact, we were hoping yours could support [specific aspect or area] – where there's still real need."

Pro Tip: Don’t get caught comparing donors. Stay focused on their unique role.

“WHAT PERCENTAGE OF MY GIFT ACTUALLY GOES TO THE MISSION?”

"Totally fair question. 100% of your gift supports our mission. That includes the people, infrastructure, and tools that keep programs going strong. We believe in full transparency, and you can always review our IRS Form 990 to see how resources are stewarded."

Pro Tip: Don’t shy away from the unglamorous parts of nonprofit work. They’re essential.

“ARE YOU A VOLUNTEER OR DO YOU GET PAID FOR THIS?”

"I’m a full-time staff member here at [nonprofit], and I also work closely with volunteers and leadership. Our board believes this mission is so important, they invested in professional staff to make sure it’s well-supported every day."

Pro Tip: Be proud of your role. Professional fundraisers are mission-builders.

“CAN I TRUST YOU’LL USE MY MONEY WISELY?”

"Absolutely – and thank you for asking. It’s smart to want accountability. We work hard to be transparent and thoughtful with every dollar. If you ever want to walk through our financials or impact reports, I’d be happy to do that."

Pro Tip: Accountability builds trust. Offer access, not defense.

“WHAT WILL MY GIFT REALLY DO?” (UNRESTRICTED)

"Thanks for asking. Your gift allows us to meet needs as they arise – especially the unexpected ones. Unrestricted gifts give us the ability to adapt, plan, and sustain our mission over time. That kind of flexibility helps us serve the community more effectively."

Pro Tip: Link flexibility to real-world readiness.

“WHAT WILL MY GIFT REALLY DO?” (RESTRICTED)

"100% of your gift will go toward [program or project]. We’ll honor your intent and make sure your contribution supports what you care about."

“WHAT WILL MY GIFT REALLY DO?” (ENDOWMENT)

"Your gift will be invested along with others, and the earnings will provide ongoing support for [gift purpose]. It’s a way to keep giving – even decades from now."

“WHAT IF I CAN’T GIVE RIGHT NOW?”

"That’s completely okay. Timing matters. We can set up a pledge if that feels better for you, or just stay in touch until you’re ready. Knowing your plans helps us plan, too. What would feel right on your end?"

Pro Tip: Flexibility signals respect. Let them lead.

“HOW DO I EVEN MAKE A BEQUEST?”

"It’s simpler than most people think. You can include us in your will, trust, or retirement accounts. We can share sample language and encourage you to talk with your advisor to make sure it fits your overall plans."

Pro Tip: Keep the door open and the tone low-pressure.

“WHAT’S THE SMALLEST AMOUNT THAT REALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE?”

"Every gift matters. No exaggeration. Some of our strongest programs are powered by lots of smaller, consistent gifts. It’s not about the amount – it’s about being part of something bigger."

Pro Tip: Emphasize collective power over individual size.

“DO YOU ASK EVERYONE FOR THIS MUCH?”

"We base our asks on a number of things – past giving, interest, and what we believe could feel meaningful but doable. That said, you know your budget best. Whatever amount feels right to you, we’re grateful."

Pro Tip: An ask is an invitation, not an expectation.

“CAN I MAKE THE SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA VERY SPECIFIC, LIKE FOR A RIGHT-HANDED TROMBONE PLAYER FROM SMITHVILLE COUNTY?”

"I hear how much you want this scholarship to reflect something meaningful from your story—and that’s really special. When criteria get very specific, though, it can become hard to award the scholarship each year—or at all. What I’d recommend is that we list those details as preferences, rather than requirements. That way, we’re honoring your intent and maximizing the chance that we can award the scholarship consistently. How does that sound?"

Pro Tip: Affirm the sentiment, then guide toward impact.

IN CONCLUSION

This guide is a jumping-off point. Let it support you as you navigate conversations with honesty, flexibility, and deep respect – for both the donor and the mission you serve.

Let your own voice do the rest. And if you need more support or training, let’s talk about what you need to thrive.

Email me at jcloud@realdealfundraising.com. Or you can call me at 571.438.8333. You don’t have to do it all alone. Wishing you the very best,

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