



The Nine Fundraising Nos

This download argues that fundraisers don't need to be afraid of the word 'No'. Most of the time when donors say "no" they are simply asking you to ask a better, more targeted question. This article explores the motivation for donors to say "No" and the better question you can ask instead.

People won't always agree with your fundraising proposal. Even when you use the most sophisticated influencing approaches, the reality is that you are still likely to get a "No" more often than a "Yes". The difference between a successful and an unsuccessful influencer is that the former doesn't necessarily accept the first "No" as a definitive answer. The successful influencer responds by being curious about what exactly the donor means.

There's Darwinian logic to this, at least in fundraising. Put simply, if you only asked people who would definitely say "Yes," or if you only asked for the size of the donation that you were sure they would definitely give, you'd either:

- Be working with a very, very small sample of potential donors
- Probably tend to "under ask" by framing your proposition very low

And the negative payoff is that you'd possibly:

- Be letting down your cause and the people you're there to help

So to be successful as a fundraiser you need to learn to deal with the possibility of rejection. And in particular you need to deal with initial rejection and be able to analyse it more closely. That first "No" may not be as bleak as it appears.

To help you manage and interpret the possible rejections you might experience we've created a "No" typology. In our experience there are essentially nine fundraising Nos that prospects use. With the first eight of these, if you follow up with a better question you may well get a better result. Only one of these responses – the last one – genuinely means "No, go away." And if you hear this no, you should leave. But remember to still say "Thank you" to acknowledge the expenditure of his or her time.

The nine fundraising Nos are:

1. No, not for this
2. No, not you
3. No, not me
4. No, not unless
5. No, not in this way
6. No, not now
7. No, too much
8. No, too little
9. No, go away

Each of these Nos has an underlying reason or explanation, which a skilled influencer will seek to uncover. And that's why dealing with "No" properly requires that you ask a different or better question rather than simply giving up.

Getting from No to Yes

The table on the following pages explores our "Nine Fundraising Nos" typology. In it we suggest why you might get a particular "No," what the donor might really want from you, and how you could respond in a way that might lead to a more positive outcome.

No	Reason the Donor Gives	What the Donor really thinks – and how you might respond
No, not for this	"You've asked me to support your education program and I'm not interested in working with children."	"Why don't you ask me to support your work with adults or elders? I'm interested in that kind of work." <i>If they are in some way drawn to your work, what might they specifically be interested in?</i>
No, not you	"I'm not comfortable with you soliciting this gift." (The solicitor is maybe a thirty-year-old woman and the donor a man of seventy-plus.)	"I'm seventy years old and want to talk to someone my own age who shares similar life experiences and understands how I feel about the importance of a legacy gift." (Or "I want to talk to someone of my faith, or of the same sex.") <i>Who's the right person to ask the donor, whom they will feel comfortable with?</i>
No, not me	"I'm not the right person to ask – I can't or don't make those decisions."	"I don't make these decisions. You should talk to my partner – she decides about our charitable giving." (Or "You should talk to the marketing director" if it's a company, or "one of the other trustees who has an interest in this field," if it's a foundation.) <i>Who is the key decision maker who will decide whether to back this proposal?</i>
No, not unless	"You don't seem to be offering me what I need or want in return for my gift."	"I need to have my deceased partner's name on this building as part of the gift fulfillment." (Or "No, unless you provide the following commercial benefits" if it's a sponsorship.) <i>What is it they really want, and can you ethically or reasonably provide it?</i>
No, not in this way	"You've asked me for cash and I can't help with that."	"I could help with some other kind of support through my business interests, such as vehicles, printing, and back-office services, but you don't seem interested in other kinds of support." <i>If not money, how else can they help?</i>

No, not now	"I can't help you at this time."	"Why don't you ask me for a donation in a year's time after my daughter has graduated from university?" (Or "When I've sold the company" or "Toward the end of our foundation's financial year when we know the resources we have left.") <i>When would be a good time to make this ask?</i>
No, too much	"I can't give you that amount of money."	"I don't have that sum available or it doesn't fit with my commitment to your cause. Ask me for a different – lesser – sum that will be meaningful for you and is within my range." <i>What sum might be appropriate and acceptable, and still help with your project?</i>
No, too little	"I want to do something bigger and more important, and that sum doesn't relate to that feeling or commitment."	"Ask me for a different – larger – sum that will be meaningful for me and relates to my ability to give. I want to make what I perceive as a really significant difference or impact." <i>What kind of sum is appropriate, and can you use it properly?</i>
No, go away	"No"	"I've thought about your proposition and decided that it isn't what I want to support." Say thanks and back away. <i>Is the door closed, or what might have to change for there to be a possibility to re-establish the relationship?</i>

In truth there are probably more than nine Nos, but these are a good start as they force you to listen carefully and actively to the response – "No" needn't be final.

It's especially important to try to work out which No is being used:

- When you're in a live one-to-one situation in which the initial rejection might seem to be the end of the conversation. It helps you look beyond your own immediate disappointed reaction.
- When you're helping a colleague who's returned from an unsuccessful prospect visit and they need help to identify what else they might have done to recover a situation that was going wrong.

The important thing about the nine Nos is that you can generally plan for them and prepare an appropriate response or have a better – different – question ready.

Further help

The National Arts Fundraising School is the UK's only residential fundraising training programme designed exclusively for the arts and cultural sector. You can find out more about the course and its contents here: www.nationalartsfundraisingschool.com

For further information or to book your place, go to:
www.nationalartsfundraisingschool.com/reserve_your_place or call us on **+44 (0) 20 7978 1516**.

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