

Making The Ask

This document provides useful language, phone scripts, and resources for framing the “ask” to potential donors.

Sample ask language: Scripts

Asking a friend:

"As you you might know, Sally, I'm involved with [name of group] and one of my roles is fundraising -- so I'm contacting my friends to see if they can help. Asking for money is a little awkward, but I'm really excited about the work and I want so much for our group to succeed. If you're willing and able to make a donation, that would be great. If you have other priorities, I respect that -- you and I will be friends regardless of whether you say yes or no. But I sure hope you can help."

Asking a friend for a practice session:

"Sally, I just got back from this fundraising workshop where we learned how to ask for money face to face. It's a bit scary, but I'd really like to learn how to do it well -- so I'd like to come and practice on you. It's a real ask -- I hope you'll contribute -- but frankly, more than the money I need your feedback. I trust that you'll give me good advice. When can we sit down together?"

Framing the ask:

"As you know, I had three goals for this meeting. I wanted to give you an update on our work, and we've done that. I wanted to learn more about your interests and concerns, and I thank you for sharing that with me. And, as you know, this is a fundraising visit -- I'm here to ask for your financial support. We were hoping you would consider a gift of \$. What do you say?"

House party ask:

"Jane, that was a terrific presentation. Every time I hear about our work, I feel more enthusiastic. It's a privilege to be connected to this organization. As you can imagine, I would not have opened up my home unless I felt deeply about the value of this work -- and I do."As you know, this is a fundraising party, and we've set a goal tonight of \$. That sounds pretty ambitious, but I'm looking around the room and I count people -- which means that if each of us gives an average of \$, we can reach our goal. If that's more than you can give, please contribute what you can. If you can give more than that, terrific. The amount is up to you -- my only request is that whatever you planned to give tonight, give a little more. It will make a big difference. "I'm going to start things off with a gift of \$. Let's get out those checkbooks and pledge cards, and I hope you will all embarrass me with your generosity."

Sample letter: Setting up the face-to-face ask

Devon Tackels
1317 F St, NW
Washington, DC 2004

Dear Devon:

It's that time of year again — we're doing our annual fundraising campaign in support of (brief description of your mission). Last year, you made a very generous donation of \$500, which is a big gift for us, and we really appreciate your support. Contributions from people like you helped us to accomplish the following:

- (Big, impressive accomplishment)
- (Not so big, but still impressive)
- (Something interesting the donor is unlikely to know about)

This year, we face a number of challenges:

- (Big, scary challenge — maybe increased demand for your services?)
- (Not so big, but still impressive)
- (Perhaps something related to organizational development, rather than external factors)

To meet these challenges, we are asking our most generous supporters to consider doubling their gifts, which in your case would be a contribution of \$1000. I appreciate that this is a big commitment, so before you decide, I would love the chance to meet with you, give you an update, learn more your interest in our work, and ask for your support. I will be calling you next week to set up an appointment. Again, thank you for your generous and loyal support. I look forward to speaking with you, and meeting with you, very soon.

Warm regards,

Tips for letter Language:

If you're uncomfortable naming a number, consider language like this:

We're asking for gifts of between \$25 and \$100 toward a campaign goal of \$1000. To be honest, I have no idea how much to ask you for, so let's sit down together, discuss it, and you can tell me how much would be appropriate.

If you're soliciting a new prospect, the relevant paragraphs might be:

As you might know, I'm on the board of Everybody Loves Everybody, which works to (brief description of your mission). Our organization has a long history of success, including (insert bulleted items here).

One of my tasks as a board member is to identify new supporters for our work. We've set goal of and we're seeking donations of between \$ and \$ to help meet that goal. I'd like to arrange an appointment so we can discuss the work and see if you'd like to contribute.

Use these letters as templates by adapting the language and tone as you see fit. In writing the letter, keep the following points in mind:

- It's brief — no more than one page.
- It says "thank you." It acknowledges past support or, in the case of new prospects, it thanks them for considering a gift.
- It's explicitly about fundraising. It doesn't hint or use code words — your intentions are clear from the start.
- It includes numbers. It mentions the amount you seek or suggests a range of gifts.
- The purpose of this letter is not to get money, but rather to get a meeting.

It's not necessary to craft a piece of great literature — after all, this is a one-page "I want to meet with you" letter — so don't strive for perfection. It might make sense for one person, perhaps a staff member, to prepare a standard letter that board members and other solicitors then customize. Get it done and mail it out.