

Conversation Questions for Cultivation and Asking Meetings



General Questions

Conversations flow more easily when you find common ground—shared values, overlapping relationships, or mutual interests. Most people will enjoy telling you about themselves, and in those general discussions of families, work, leisure activities, travel, and volunteer work, you will establish a foundation of common interests that will support your more specific discussion of their gift.

These questions often come at the top of a meeting, when you're "settling" into the conversation and getting on the same page.

Use questions that begin with what or how. These questions are open-ended, more engaging, and less threatening than who or why questions. Simple questions like these often work well to get the conversation started.

- How is your family?
- What are you focused on at work?
- How was your weekend?
- How are the kids doing at school?
- How did you enjoy your volunteer work last week?
- What do you think about the...(elections, sports game, local issue)?

If the Prospect has a Relationship to the Organization

Many of the people you speak with will already know the organization. Questions that explore the reasons for their interest in it will help you make a connection between their lives and the organization.

- How did you first get involved with XYZ Day Care Center?
- What motivates you to give to the XYZ Day Care Center?
- What resonates most for you about the work of XYZ Day Care Center?
- What are you hoping XYZ can accomplish in the coming years?
- What programs would you like to know more about?
- When you think about gifts you've made in the past, do you have a vision of how those gifts may have been used?

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If the Prospect doesn't yet have a Relationship with the Organization

If your prospect is new to the organization, you can ask questions about the donor's giving to other organizations. This will help you understand his or her charitable interests. You can also get a sense of how the prospect would like to interact with your organization as s/he gets to know it better.

- What are some of the charities you are most passionate about supporting and why?
- How do you make decisions on when to make charitable gifts and how much to give?
- What volunteer commitments do you have? Do you sit on any boards? Have you previously?
- What information is most important to you when evaluating organizations?
- How do you like to be engaged with an organization?
- Would you like to hear from us regularly?
- Would you like to visit a program to see our work in action?

If You're Asking for a Gift

The beauty here is that there is one way to ask that has been proven most effective so you just have to practice this line:

- Would you consider a gift of \$_____ for _____ (or to XYZ Day Care Center)

This wording is open, inviting, and conditional. "Would you" is less directive than "will you." "Consider" is open and non-threatening. People respond to "gift" – it conveys something positive and reflects generously on them. And you must ask for an exact amount – the donor will be expecting you to do so.

If the donor agrees to make a gift

- Thank you so much. That is a wonderful commitment. Your gift will help the XYZ Day Care Center impact the lives of hundreds of families.

If the donor will consider your request

- Thank you so much for considering this request.
- Is there any additional information I can provide?
- Would you like to know anything further at this time?
- Would it be helpful if we had another meeting?
- Would it be helpful if we met with your wife, or with both of you?

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... but says the amount is definitely too high

- I understand. Would you consider a gift of \$_____. Would that be possible?
- Would that amount be doable if it were spread over multiple payments?
- Would that amount be doable if it were spread over two or three years? (for special projects)
- Have you considered a gift of appreciated securities? That could save you on capital gains and make the gift more manageable.

...but says the timing is wrong

- May I come back in a few months (or early next year) to continue the discussion?
- Is there a time that might be better?
- May we come back earlier in the next year?
- Would you consider a pledge at this time to be paid in the future?

...but doesn't like the project

- I'm sorry. I thought that project might be a match. What is it that interests you most about the organization? What would you be most excited to support?
- Could you share with me what you don't like about the project? It would be helpful to have your perspective and then perhaps we can talk about other projects at the organization.

If the Donor Flat Out Rejects You

- I understand. Might you consider a gift in the future? May we keep in contact with you and reach out next year?
- I understand. You've been an important donor over the years and I hope you will still consider us in the future. Do you think you'd consider supporting us again at some time?
- I understand. It would be so helpful if you could share with me why you are not considering a gift. Would you share that with me?