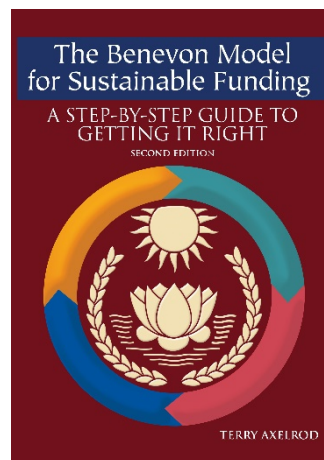


Is Your Donor Ready to be Asked? Can You Answer These 15 Questions?

By Terry Axelrod



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Excerpted from [*The Benevon Model for Sustainable Funding, A Step-by-Step Guide to Getting it Right, Second Edition*](#)

The easiest way to determine donor readiness is to answer these Pre-Ask Questions for each donor. As you go through this list, answer truthfully. Do not guess at your answers. If you do not honestly know the answer, it is a good sign that you may need to have one or more cultivation contacts to find out the answers to these questions before asking this donor for money. After all the work you have done to gently get to know this donor and connect them to your organization's mission, it is far better to take the time to have these additional contacts, rather than rush into the Ask prematurely and risk alienating your donor.

Let's look at each question more closely.

1. *Exactly who will be asked?* Have you cultivated all the key decision-makers? Should spouses, partners, children, parents, or business partners be included? Including them in the asking meeting or call tells them you respect their "vote" in the process. Down the road, one of these other people may become your main donor.
2. *Who will do the asking?* Will it be one person or more? Are these the most appropriate people to make the Ask of this particular donor? Would another board member enhance the asking team? Is the asker too closely connected to the donor? Who is this donor's favorite person at the organization? Looking from the perspective of the donor's self-interest, by whom would they be most flattered to be asked?
3. *Exactly what will be asked for?* Will you ask this person for a one-time gift for general operations or a specific campaign, a five-year unrestricted gift of \$1,000 or more to join your Multiple-Year Giving Society, a single Leadership or Challenge Gift to be announced at your Free One-Hour Ask Event to inspire additional giving, or will their gift be combined with others for a pooled Challenge Gift?
4. *Where will the Ask take place?* The best place to ask is the place that is closest to the emotional appeal of your work. For an arboretum, you might ask outside while walking through the park; for a children's museum, you could ask at the museum café, within earshot of happy, playful children.
5. *What is the bottom-line result you will come away with?* It is good to have a range of Asks, starting with the biggest, then scaling back to the bottom line. It is often helpful to ask for other types of contributions (in addition to the money you will ask for), such as serving as an Ambassador or hosting a Free Feel-Good Cultivation Event.
6. *What makes you think this person is ready to be asked now?* Have there been any recent cues? Have you hinted to the donor that you will be asking for their support soon? Has the donor asked you what you need? Keep putting yourself in the donor's shoes. Will they feel receptive to being asked now?

7. *What are your biggest concerns, fears, and reasons for procrastinating in making this Ask?* Don't be reluctant to list even seemingly trivial things here. Often these are legitimate, especially if they pertain to donor readiness.

8. *Does the person have an abundance of what you are asking for?* If you don't know or are unsure, how could you find out? Who could you ask? Donors want to say yes. Don't embarrass them by asking for something that, from their perspective, they barely have enough of. You may need to do more homework to find out.

9. *What is the person's self-interest in saying yes?* How good would they feel saying yes? How sorry will they feel saying no? Is there enough positive self-interest? Ultimately, their emotional connection to your mission is what will sustain them as a lifelong donor.

10. *What concerns might this person have about saying yes to your request?* Again, put yourself in the donor's shoes. Add in your worst fears. Things like: the donor is still offended that we thanked her too late for her last gift; the donor doesn't like the direction our new program has taken; the donor's true allegiance was to our former director—he doesn't like our new director as well. These will be important for you to know so you can address them in the cultivation process and not wait to address them in the Ask.

11. *What might strengthen this Ask?* What could you add to the Ask that would make this gift most appealing to this donor: a different or additional asker, a memorial gift, a Leadership or Challenge Gift, more years to spread out the payment, or a particular type of recognition?

12. *How would this person most like to be recognized?* Donors will never bring up recognition. You must weave it into the Ask. Let them know how "all donors at this level" will be recognized—at special receptions with the scholarship recipients, meetings with important speakers, dinners at elegant homes, and so on. Try to give them two or three options for special recognition that fit with their preferences, which you should know by the time you make the Ask, especially if their gift will be a Leadership Gift.

13. *How can this person invite others to participate?* Once they have said yes, their natural tendency will be to want to share their enthusiasm for this organization with others—it's good to mention some of those opportunities during the Ask.

14. *What would be possible for your organization if the person says yes?* Spend some time thinking through your response to this question, not only what it would mean for your programs and services, but what it could mean for the donor. Perhaps she would like to be asked to join your board. Think about the donor's Treasure Map. Who else might they naturally want to involve or invite to a Point of Entry?

15. *What other questions are still unanswered?* If you have answered all the questions above thoroughly, you have probably uncovered some new ones. Remember, the more prepared you feel going into the Ask, the better.