

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Major Donor Giving in Northern Ireland

A Toolkit Based on the Experience of Local Charities



Community Foundation
NORTHERN IRELAND

Background



There have been a number of research documents on philanthropy in Northern Ireland which have made reference to the current situation in relation to major donor fundraising. These include the **Philanthropy Market in NI** commissioned by The Vision in Philanthropy Project Partnership and Giving NI's **Giving by High Net Worth Individuals in Northern Ireland**.

The Major Donor Project (MDP) was conceived as a way of enhancing the body of learning in the practice of major donor fundraising in Northern Ireland.

As well as these local studies there have been a number of other national reports on major donor fundraising or fundraising in general. For instance, the Heritage Lottery Fund commissioned a major report 'Capacity Building Needs of Heritage Organisations' which included Northern Ireland in its survey.

Based on research and anecdotal evidence, the general conclusion in relation to philanthropy is that Northern Ireland has not realised its potential and there are a number of 'blockers' to growing income from philanthropic sources. On the supply side the view is that there are not enough wealthy people giving to charitable sources for a variety of reasons linked to culture and attitudes to charity. Moreover, many who give do not do so in a strategic way which is the essence of philanthropy. On the demand side, many charities in Northern Ireland have a strong community fundraising base but neglect or ignore the potential of major donors.

The **Major Donor Project (MDP)** was conceived as a way of enhancing the body of learning in the practice of major donor fundraising in Northern Ireland. The model used for this pilot project, while not unique, did attempt a different approach based on taking the theory of major donor fundraising and seeing what actually works in Northern Ireland. The learning from that model and general feedback from participating organisations and others is reflected in this toolkit. The project also sought the views of individuals who had experience of major donor fundraising locally.

Many of the fundamental principles of major donor fundraising apply whatever the jurisdiction, including Northern Ireland, but cultural and other differences can make the task more difficult if a 'one size fits all' approach is adopted. This project intends to add to rather than duplicate the body of knowledge and many sources published on major donor giving. The toolkit is intended for practical use rather than a repetition of the theory of major donor fundraising which is largely based on the culture and experience in other jurisdictions.

In summary, the **MDP** worked with a number of charities who met basic selection criteria. It provided a grounding on the theory of major donor fundraising and was informed by any information and research previously compiled locally. Some charities, particularly the few locally who have had a history of major donor fundraising, such as universities, may have had a different experience but this pilot project is confident that it has addressed many of the issues which deterred charities from undertaking a major donor campaign.

This toolkit outlines the generally accepted principles and main elements of major donor fundraising and then reflects the experience of major donor fundraising locally. For organisations considering a major donor campaign, studying one of the standard major donor books in conjunction with this report would be a good starting point.



As part of the **MDP** a series of consultations were undertaken with charities to assess their interest and readiness to participate in the project.

Project Design

From the outset the **MDP** was conceived as a pilot and was not attempting to provide fundraising support for the entire charitable sector. The charities were selected from a long list which attempted to cover a range of charitable activity which would allow the learning and toolkit to have wider relevance to the charitable sector.

The major donor projects undertaken by the participants included capital, research and revenue projects. None of the participants fitted the category of 'constituency fundraising' where there is a large membership body or beneficiary group such as a university, church or school.

In the first stage the participating charities came together to look at the theory or common practice of major donor fundraising throughout the world. As a generalisation, this practice originated in the United States and while there have been a host of 'good practice guides' produced in the UK and some in Ireland, the US model has formed the basis

of major donor or big gift fundraising. In this first stage we also shared peoples' experiences of trying and in some cases getting major gifts, although most agreed that their experience was limited and hardly constituted a 'campaign.'

We agreed to give the participants confidentiality so we could share the experiences with the wider charity sector without inhibitions. We would like to thank the participants who were willing in most cases to test a new area of fundraising amid the many day to day pressures of meeting the 'annual target'.

Perceived 'blockages' to major donor fundraising

It may seem obvious that all charities should have considered major donors at some stage in their fundraising activity but the feedback from charities which participated in this project and from a wider number consulted about possible participation produced some general reasons why this is not the case. They include:

No organisational track record of engaging with high net worth individuals



Many of the charities had received the occasional large donation but in almost all cases it appeared to be unsolicited and not part of a major donor campaign. Surprisingly most charities did not follow up with the individual to seek further support in the years following a large donation and it appears that in some cases the major donor was treated in the same way as small donors who contributed via, for instance, direct mail.

A view that wealthy people in Northern Ireland are not 'philanthropic' or are very secretive about their wealth



While many people were aware of who some of the wealthiest people in Northern Ireland were (from rich lists etc), there was a view that most were not generous in relation to charity or at the very least it was impossible to find out if they gave to charity.

A view that there was no or relatively no 'big' money in Northern Ireland



There was a general view that Northern Ireland was a region with relatively few wealthy people and that in recent years a lot of wealth had been lost. This made work with major donors a potentially unproductive pursuit or 'very difficult' in the eyes of many charities.

Little experience within the staff, either fundraising staff or others, with major donor fundraising



Few of the fundraising staff had experience of a major donor campaign and to their knowledge no chief executive or other senior management had been previously involved in major donor fundraising. Chief executives were hard to win over to the concept of major donor campaigns.



One of the biggest barriers to major donor giving is asking.

No specific training in relation to major donors



With one exception, none of the charities consulted had undertaken major donor training. Some had attended general fundraising conferences where a speaker had talked about their major donor experience but they did not consider this 'training.'

No or few major donor 'connections' within the board



Most people recognised the importance of having or fostering connections at the right level in relation to major donors (leadership) but commented that their boards were primarily about helping in the administration or general direction of the charity rather than fundraising. Few were able to point to individuals on their boards who could advance major donor fundraising.

Lack of confidence that they would be successful with major donors



Given the feedback above it is hardly surprising that people did not feel ready to develop a major donor campaign. Some did not feel confident in raising the hope within their organisation that they would achieve anything with a major donor campaign. In other words, they were anxious about failing.

Availability of other, more accessible sources of funds



Some organisations suggested that grant sources such as charitable trusts, lottery, peace funds, government etc, were high on their list when it came to big projects. Partly as a legacy of the troubled past, Northern Ireland has had access to more grant sources than other regions and many fundraisers and organisations build their major fundraising campaigns around the potential of securing major grants. Grants have the significant advantage of being open calls where the criteria and application process are well known.

Major Donor Stages

The MDP acknowledged from the outset that there is nothing inherently wrong or flawed in the classic model of major donor fundraising as practised in many jurisdictions. However, its slavish application is perhaps the reason why, amongst other factors, major donor fundraising has not progressed as far as it should in Northern Ireland. The approach of this project was to take the theory of major donor fundraising under the following headings and then see how it worked out in practice.

1

**Understanding
Major Donor
Motivation**



2

**Developing the
Campaign Case
and Goal Setting**



3

**Researching and
Assessing Potential
Major Gifts**



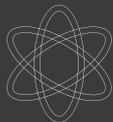
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**Recruiting
Volunteers and
Cultivation Process**



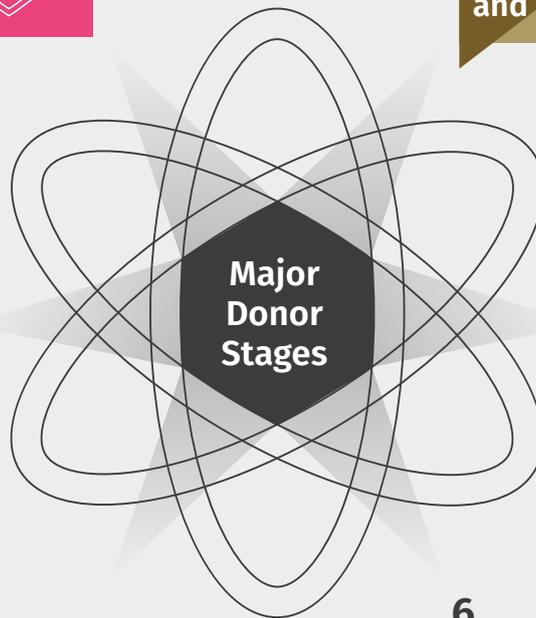
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**Making the Ask/
Solicitation Process**



6

**Recognition and
Stewardship**





“ Seeing the difference my donations are making to people’s lives is hugely rewarding. I’ve really enjoyed being able to make a difference and it actually makes you want to do even more. ”

Mervyn McCall, **The McCall Foundation**.

What is a major gift?

One of the first questions discussed with the group was the definition of a major gift. Some of the characteristics of a major gift are:

- Large relative to majority of other gifts
- Often evolve over time
- Often solicited face to face
- Can be paid upfront or over time



How much?

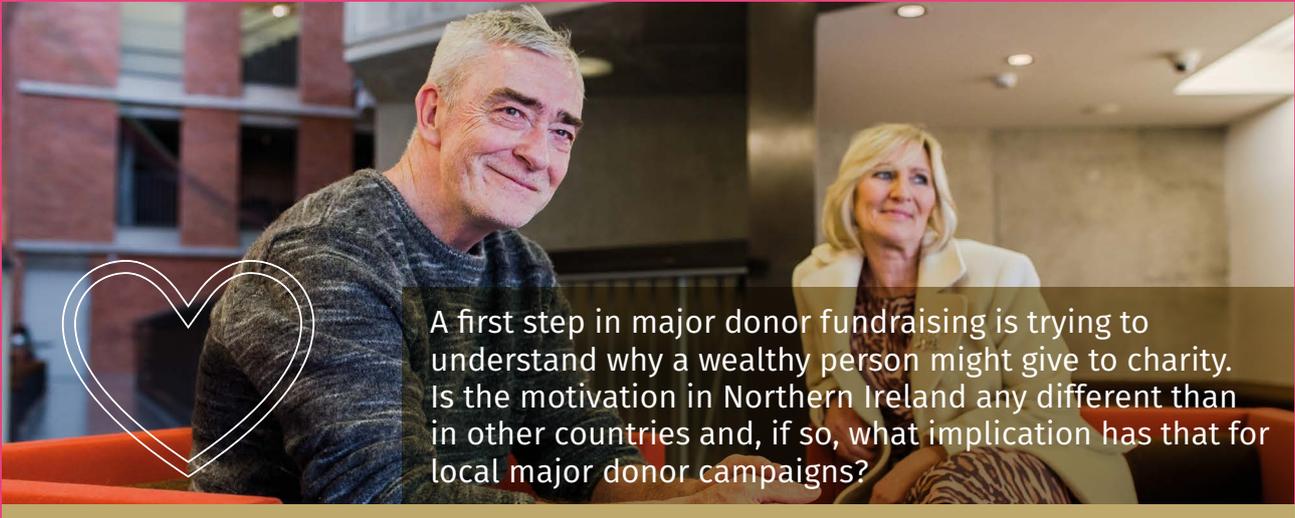
Major gifts are often said to be relative to what the organisation normally gets but that isn’t that helpful when you set out to make the ask. It appears that £5,000, either in one donation or over several years, is the most common big gift in Northern Ireland. The issue we discussed at this point was not setting £5,000 as a self imposed limit as this figure was manageable for a large number of relatively well off individuals as well as very wealthy individuals. In other words, it was important to treat people differently based on their potential.

Previous research undertaken locally was helpful in this regard and showed that gifts from high net worth individuals were often **in the £10-£20,000 range**

Research also showed that :

- Donors at this level were also keen to provide time and expertise to the charity – in other words, they wanted more involvement than just giving money.
- The larger the gift to the charity the more due diligence was undertaken by the donor and about a third used a mechanism for giving such as a trust.
- About a half consulted an adviser but there was also evidence this was more to organise how to pass on the money than seek advice on the charity or charitable cause.

1 Understanding Major Donor Motivation



Research on donor motivations in the UK and USA suggests that wealthy people give because they:

- Believe in the cause
- Want to be a catalyst for change
- Feel a duty to share wealth
- Enjoy the relationships made through philanthropy
- Believe in philanthropy
- Believe in the complementary roles of government and charity
- Believe philanthropy is a good parenting tool
- Appreciate the recognition that comes with philanthropy
- Feel it enriches their lives
- Are asked
- Have been asked by a friend/colleague.





The key finding for motivation was that two factors were most apparent locally – the value or strength of the cause or project and the proximity of the donor to the cause, either for family reasons or because of the experience of friends or colleagues.

CASE STUDY - NORTHERN IRELAND

In this pilot there was in general no perceived difference between Northern Ireland than elsewhere when it came to motivation for giving with the exception that most people involved in the project, based on their knowledge and anecdotally, thought religious charities benefited from a lot of major donor giving. This is also supported by some recent research by NICVA which found that health remains the most popular charitable cause amongst donors while religious/faith based causes are likely to receive the largest average donations from donors.

“Trust in you and understanding and respecting a donors wishes and anonymity are all particularly important and valued by major donors in NI.”

Siofra Healy, *Director of Philanthropy*,
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

The stronger preference for religious causes is perhaps understandable given Northern Ireland’s relatively higher church attendance than other jurisdictions but does this make securing funding for other causes more difficult?

The key finding for motivation was that two factors were most apparent locally – the value or strength of the cause or project and the proximity of the donor to the cause, either for family reasons or because of the experience of friends or colleagues.

The view from this project is that support for religious causes did not necessarily make it more difficult to raise money for other causes because there was plenty of evidence that most donors supported a range of charities and the ‘habit’ of giving was an important factor in philanthropy.

Encouraging and supporting
those who want to give
and **empowering** the local community
to **effect change.**



2 Developing the Campaign Case and Goal Setting



Why the campaign case is important:

- Describes your cause
- Says why your organisation is right to advance that cause
- It is a key internal document
- It is the basis for a variety of case statements such as brochures, applications, grant proposals etc.

What a campaign case achieves:

- It presents a need or problem
- Offers a solution
- Describes the difference that will be made
- Says how your organisation fits in
- It can allow buy in from the organisation
- It can allow buy in from supporters

An important component of the case is describing the financial need and should address the following basic questions and answers:

- What is the financial need?
- Will it all be met from major donors?
- Does a mix of funders strengthen your case?
- Is your goal realistic?
- Unrealistic goals mean only one thing!
- Realistic goals give confidence

In summary the case for support presents a problem or need and says how, with the right financial support, that need can be met. As well as its use for major donor fundraising, the case for support is the basis for all applications to charitable trusts and grants sources and is the starting point when you produce brochures etc. Given that it is the essence of the project, advice and input is often sought from a wide circle of people to get their buy in. While not specifically addressed in this project the experience elsewhere for major donor projects is that a feasibility study is carried out in advance of embarking on a campaign. The feasibility study assesses the readiness of the organisation to undertake a major donor campaign and often examines many of the questions which form the basis of the case for support.

It is no accident that major donor fundraising work is called a 'campaign,' which is generally associated with the military or political world. Major donor fundraising takes time and planning and the commitment of resources to be successful.



Most organisations in this project viewed the case for support or rationale for the project as straightforward. The experience from this project is that the process and development of the case for support can be anything but straightforward.

CASE STUDY - NORTHERN IRELAND

Knowing the need in detail and having a unity of purpose within the organisation did at times in this project prove difficult for some organisations. Perhaps because some other aspects of fundraising do not require the full explanation which is required for major donor campaigns, organisations sometimes found it difficult to ‘nail down’ the essence of the project and present it in an accessible way for potential donors. It was not just the detail but also the process – who did they need to consult to get agreement, where did it fit in with other fundraising initiatives, who should lead on it, what would happen if the circumstances or need for the project changed during the campaign – were some of the most common issues. Some of this could be put down to the fact that major donor campaigns are seen as more personal and thus required a higher level of explanation than other fundraising initiatives which were often more directed at a general audience.

In setting the target for the campaign a number of factors came into play for the organisations in this project. The American experience is often that the campaign is funded entirely from personal donations but in Northern Ireland many fundraising campaigns have a portion of the target provided by government. This partnership funding is generally regarded positively locally and perhaps is an acceptance that a project that receives some government support has already gone through some sort of due

diligence. Some charities also committed some of their own money to the project which in general is positive when seeking external support. The most common reason campaigns fail or struggle is that from the outset the target is unrealistic, so making an assessment of what was possible formed an important part of the initial work in this project.

Another issue in relation to the case for support was making sure that the project had the support of the wider organisation and board and was not just invested in one or two individuals.

Some organisations in this project kept the proposed campaign too narrowly focused to a few individuals and this produced problems when people left the organisation.

As we shall see when we consider the actual ask for participants in this project, the strength of the case is still a vital part of success. A strong, coherent rationale for the project has a lot of currency in Northern Ireland.

3 Researching and Assessing Potential Major Gifts



Knowing who to ask for support is, at risk of stating the obvious, a very important part of major donor fundraising.

Percentages are sometimes put on the value of research as a factor in the success of the campaign but in reality they don't mean much. There is no question, however, that it is a vital part of the work in raising money. The dictum that money does not come in and has to be gone after, is not offered and has to be asked for, is why the process of research is so important.

The theory says that you should start on the inside or current donorbase of the charity. The organisations in this project had donorbases of varying sizes and value. Some had a long track record of doing regular mailings while others had lists of people who had supported the charity in an ad hoc basis or were members of the organisation.

Trying to assess the likelihood of people giving to the cause is a key part of the research and this can be done through a formal rating process called LAI –linkage, ability, interest. A key task is trying to have a rationale than turns suspects (wealthy people with no discernible link to the cause) into prospects (wealthy people with some reason to think they will support the cause).

Compiling your research is often described as a business of lists – individual lists, business lists, lists of people in Northern Ireland, lists of people from Northern Ireland living in England, the USA etc). This can take some time and in some jurisdictions research companies are recruited for the task.

A productive source of information in compiling lists are newspapers and of course the internet which can lead to more detailed information such as company accounts,

directorships, business networks etc. The most often referenced publications in this respect are the 'rich lists' published by various newspapers on an annual basis.

Wealthy doesn't necessarily mean charitable. Some research conducted in Britain helps to guide us in general terms to where there may be a confluence of wealth and philanthropy. This indicates that people who are self made entrepreneurs are more generous, similarly, top salaried people and maybe less surprising, lottery winners.

The list of potential donors or prospects should include as much information as possible, including business and personal information.

After compiling a list or lists, the next exercise in the research process is often to produce a gift chart which estimates how many gifts or donations are required and at what level. For instance, the research should indicate that you need one gift of £100,000, three gifts of £50,000 etc. Again, the theory tells us that once you compile a list or lists you will have a success rate of one in seven i.e. you will have to ask seven people to get one gift.

CASE STUDY - NORTHERN IRELAND

It stands to reason that those who have supported the charity have already bought into the organisation's vision, or in some cases benefited from its services, but some charities in this project thought asking current supporters would displace existing income and they considered a major donor programme as a way of winning new supporters. In practice, there was little displacement and in most cases new donors were attracted to the charities. It was generally the case in this project that starting with people with existing links to the organisation or using these links to open other avenues of support was productive.

The problem in Northern Ireland is finding the wealthy people below the radar i.e. those who don't appear in the rich lists. Most charities had a copy of the annually published rich lists but most did not find them a good source of money or that they played a major part in the campaign. There was also some question as to their accuracy but they could indicate that what sectors of the economy were doing well.

According to recent research by Barclays, there are 14,000 millionaires in N Ireland and, remember, we have said that major donors can start at £5,000. If we ask people to pledge that support over three years that can equate to less than £1,200 a year over three years – that brings in a lot more people. But how do we find them?

Using research companies, usually based in England, does not appear to have been successful. The most common experience and most effective research method is starting on the 'inside' – the charity using its own network and building a list that way. This can be time consuming but appears to be the most effective method in researching potential donors. Once you manage to make contact with people to discuss major donors the last question should always be, 'who else do you know who might support the campaign?'

Rating and screening people can be a very scientific or formal process but for most of the participants in this project it was about two or three categories of people, starting with those most likely to be responsive to the campaign. When building a list of potential major donors there appears to be a strong 'Belfast centric' bias and little attention paid to individuals outside the city.

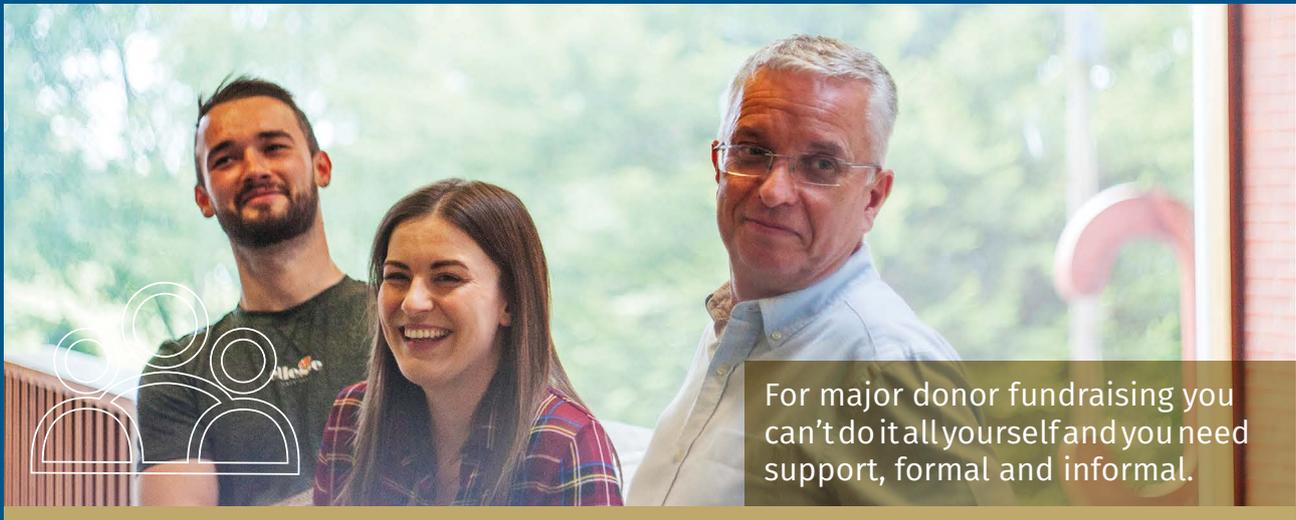
Participants in this project lamented the value of their boards in helping find and solicit donations. This may be down to how charity boards are recruited where the focus is on advising on the running of the organisation, strategy etc, not fundraising. Management boards are not development (fundraising) boards but can play a part in sharing their knowledge and contacts. Perhaps board members should be asked to consider how they can help the fundraising function as well as the other duties they perform.

The gift chart referred to above was not particularly productive for participants in this project but was used on occasion as a prompt for some donors. Also, the 'one in seven rule,' which says that you need to have seven prospects to get one gift, was not accurate as most participants tended to form a view on the likelihood of a potential donation before they considered making an ask. Reluctance to meet, not answering calls or correspondence were pretty strong signals that the prospect was not interested.

There is evidence from this project that donors like to be part of a group of big givers who have common interests or professional links, either because they like to be associated with a select group or to be seen by them as successful.

A word about sources outside Northern Ireland: in a lot of the early discussions with participants in this project, organisations asked about the potential of people from Northern Ireland living outside the region. America, England and the Republic of Ireland, in that order, was discussed most commonly. Looking outside Northern Ireland for support should be in addition to local efforts, not instead of, as, not surprisingly, people like to see that there is local buy in for the project. What is clear from this project is that it is almost impossible to make any progress outside Northern Ireland unless you have someone in those places working (volunteering) for you. Even if you visit these places to meet people you can't maintain interest and participation without someone helping at their end. The other lesson is that the engagement should be sustained and a one off visit will not lead to support.

4 Recruiting Volunteers and Cultivation Process



Volunteers in the campaign should have the connections to help build relationships and advocate for the cause. The classic model of major donor fundraising is to form a development board or committee of people who will assist in the task of raising the money. The type of people who should be on the board is summarised in the American dictum 'Give, get or get off.' The most important person on the board is the chair who should be well connected, committed, respected and be prepared to devote time and energy. If he or she is wealthy, which is preferably and usually vital for most development boards, then they will have to contribute themselves to the campaign to have any credibility.

All volunteers in the major donor campaign have to be prepared to learn. They may be successful in their own field but they are not fundraisers. They need support to learn about the project and also the 'black art' of raising money.

Donor cultivation is any activity that deepens an individual's understanding of your project. It precedes solicitation which is the business of asking for money. It is not an unnecessary extra. Sometimes it is difficult to assess if you are making progress in cultivation but the easiest way to address this is to ask if the prospect knows more about the project, financial need etc than before the cultivation. Finding out that someone is not going to support the campaign is also progress and saves you wasting your time.

Cultivation is a process and comes in many shapes and sizes. Typical examples are functions such as dinners, presentations and visits to the location of the project if it's for capital.

Meeting someone prominent who is involved in the campaign or a key person involved in the delivery of the project is also popular. Sometimes it's just one to one meetings but it should have a goal, such as explaining more about some aspect of the project, more about the financial need etc.

Cultivation opportunities often also lead to a request for 'advice and guidance.' Many people are flattered to be asked for their views. A common 'involvement device' is to show the prospect a list of names seeking their views. Sometimes you know that they know some of the people on the list and the cultivation is an attempt to find out if they will help you make a link.

Just as there are good examples of cultivation there are also bad examples or cultivation that is less effective. Sending cold letters tends to be ineffective. Trying to talk to people at general events not related to the campaign can be difficult. Whatever the cultivation event you should go prepared with as much background on the individual as you can find. If there are a number of prospects at an event, for instance, volunteers or staff people involved should be given the responsibility of making contact with a specific person.



This project has found that volunteers are vital to success but do we always need a board for major donor fundraising? What are the alternatives? Boards may be in the classic model of major donor fundraising but they do not appear to be a prerequisite in Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY - NORTHERN IRELAND

Sometimes it's down to the type of campaign you are running. If you have a project that has a beginning, a middle and end, in other words, is time bound, forming a committee can be a time consuming and distracting task. If you get a good 'chair' or more accurately described as a key supporter you may not need to embark on forming a board. The 'chair' can use their contacts or network to open the doors because access is the key issue. It can also be difficult to get people to join formal boards or getting them to share information in that setting. Once you have people on a board and they are not contributing it is difficult in our culture to get them off the board. It is vitally important to have the help of wealthy individuals and/or connected people but this project has demonstrated that boards are not always necessary. Informal networks or people making connections on an individual basis also work.

One of the ways major donor fundraising differs from other fundraising activities is how it is approached. The temptation is to jump in and ask for money right from the start of a relationship, even from the first meeting. Some of the participants felt that you may only get one chance to meet people and you have to 'strike while the iron is hot.' Not doing this is not a sign of lack of confidence or indecision. Major donor fundraising needs a more subtle and patient approach. A common issue in this project, which often wasted time, was people's willingness to say they know people 'well' but were unable to deliver meetings, contact etc when it came to the crunch. Many people know such and such but can they/will they arrange a face to face?

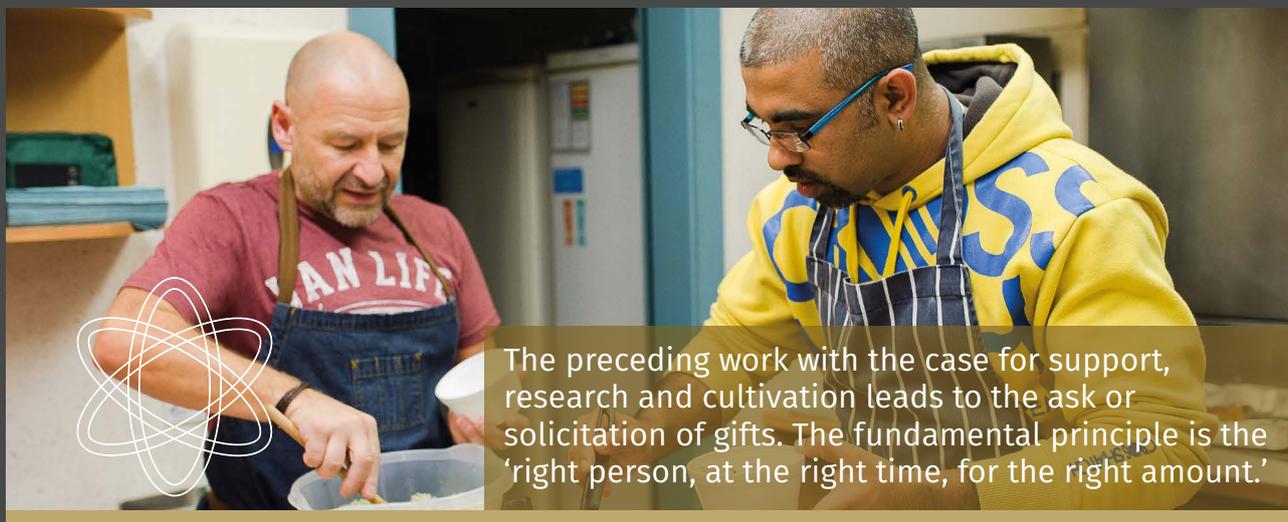
Many of the principles of cultivation above do apply and a lot of it is common sense. The theory of major donor fundraising indicates that you need to have a specified number of contacts with the potential donor before the ask – most commonly seven or nine depending on who you believe. This is not the experience in Northern Ireland. An initial cultivation event or meeting followed up by another meeting is usually sufficient to make the ask.

A common form of cultivation in Northern Ireland tends to be the 'big dinner' where people are invited to hear the pitch. This does not appear to be a very successful type of cultivation. Often the event falls between two stools, between a private dinner for a small select group and a bigger event. Unless it is very carefully managed it is very difficult to make a dinner work for major donor fundraising.

Some participants in this project used groups of people in the same area of business as a way of recruiting donors.

Initially, an individual gave a gift to the campaign and committed to try to get his colleagues to pledge support also. This is a variant of the US practice of donor 'clubs' but is more informal in Northern Ireland.

5 Making the Ask/Solicitation



The usual format is to ask for the biggest gifts first which makes sense in terms of managing your time. This is where the gift chart can be helpful as it describes, even in theory, what size of gifts are needed.

Typically, the right person to make the ask is someone who is known and respected by the prospect. Often there is a personal or business link. If he or she is wealthy they need to have supported the campaign and have given at the same level asked of the prospect (or relatively the same) if they are of comparable wealth. This is usually described as the 'first division' solicitor of gifts. Second division solicitors are the campaign board, the chair or perhaps the CEO of the organisation. If we extend the sporting metaphor staff members or fundraisers could be listed as third division solicitors. Combinations of the above are usually involved in the ask.

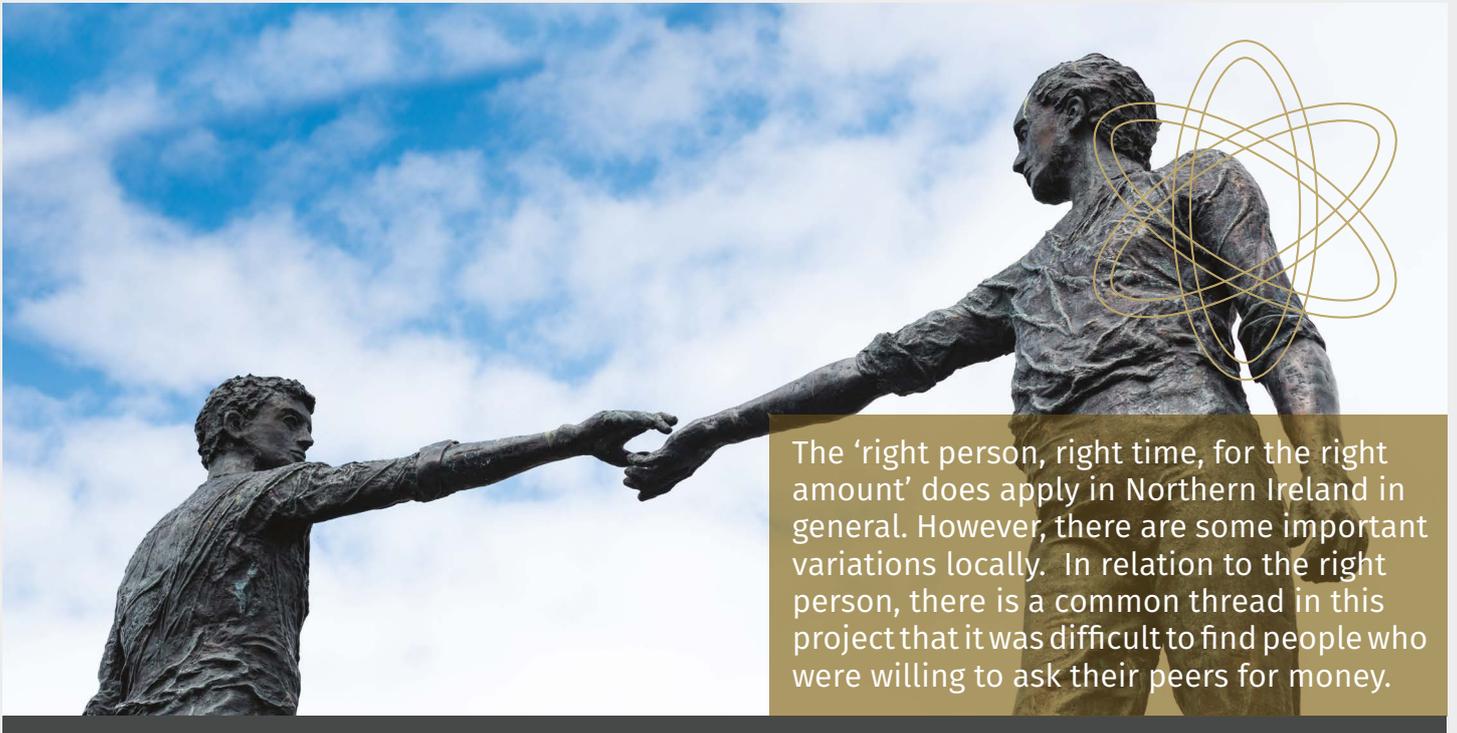
The right time is with all things related to major donor fundraising a matter of judgement but generally speaking it's when you assess they know enough about your organisation, the need and the project you are fundraising for. It's less about the number of contacts with the person than the quality of those contacts. Usually it means they have visited the location of the project and/or met some of the key people involved in the project. Sometimes at this point the potential donor will have shown interest in some specific aspect of the project. In general the more questions they ask about the project the better the chance of they will support it – no questions can suggest lack of interest and engagement.

How much to ask for? Apart from an outright 'no' the next worst feeling is when a figure is suggested and the person says yes immediately.

Right away you are thinking, should I have asked for more. That said, you should always suggest a figure because you cannot assume the potential donor knows what is expected from them. You may have used the gift chart as a prompt but you still need to ask at a level that may challenge the donor.

The biggest challenge at this stage can be finding someone in your 'team' who will make the ask. Even successful businessmen can balk at asking for money face to face. Typical objections to asking are 'I'm not good at asking for money,' (who is, and you are not asking for yourself) 'They might ask me something about the project or organisation I don't know,' (someone from the organisation can be there with you or you can come back with an answer) 'I might fail and let you down' (yes, that's possible but over the campaign we will be successful).

If askers have objections, prospects also have 'typical' responses. They may have some problem with some aspect of the project (you try to address that) or they say their financial situation is not great 'at the minute' (you acknowledge that but stress importance of project and willingness to spread gift over a number of years). Quite commonly they will give a token gift (usually small) to end their involvement.



The 'right person, right time, for the right amount' does apply in Northern Ireland in general. However, there are some important variations locally. In relation to the right person, there is a common thread in this project that it was difficult to find people who were willing to ask their peers for money.

CASE STUDY - NORTHERN IRELAND

It's probably part of the wider philanthropy culture – if we had more people used to giving it would be easier to find more askers. In this project most of the 'askers' were staff members, including senior staff and fundraisers, sometimes accompanied by volunteers who had prepared the way and/or gained access.

Chief executives need to be engaged also and in this project were key participants in the major donor process.

The right time as referenced above does not conform to the longer lead time or number of prior contacts in the theory of major donor fundraising. A second or third contact, if properly handled, sufficed to make the ask. On some occasions, due mostly likely to the strength of the case, a first meeting secured a major gift. The right time should still conform to a planned process but it seems people are prepared to consider a gift with less advance work.

The right amount is one of the hardest assessments to make. Participants in this project tried to find out what prospects had given the past as starting point, although most depended on their own prompt to suggest a giving level. This was most often framed on the basis of saying 'we are seeking gifts in the £x category'. Or including hoped for gift levels within the paperwork on the project.

Despite this, some major gifts levels appear to have been selected by the donor. Presenting the gift as over three years and with the possible tax advantages was also popular, although some people did not take up phased payment. In some cases the gift, while offered by an individual, came from the company either owned or led by the individual. When it comes down to getting the money it doesn't really matter where it comes from but from the outset you should indicate that the approach is to the individual rather than the company so that you don't get distracted with offers of involving employees etc (although you will take this as well as a personal donation).

6 Recognition and Stewardship



As well as being part of the sales pitch for gifts, subtly put, recognition can be an investment for future gifts. While not a prime motivator for giving, it is a motivator. People who say they don't want recognition don't always mean it.

Once a gift has been secured you of course thank people but the 'thank you' is not a one off event. It should be a process of ongoing engagement. This doesn't mean that when you communicate with the donor you are always looking for money. Tell people how the project is going, what's been accomplished and even share some problems you may be having.

The class types of recognition are most obvious for capital projects – named area or name on a plaque. If you are going down the route of naming areas you need to think it out early on so you have some consistency of offer. Other types of recognition include awards, honours, special access and membership of an exclusive group. Whatever you offer you need to make sure you can deliver.

Related to recognition is stewardship which is about how you treat people who have supported you. Apart from being good manners, stewardship is also an investment in the future. Good stewardship is an appropriate expression of continuing appreciation and recognition and demonstrates that you are open about what you do with the donor's money. Good stewardship treats donors as not just cheque books and very often it ensures that they become ambassadors for the charity. How often have you heard someone say, 'such and such a charity does

great work.' This comment will have come from a positive experience with the charity. Major donors are no better than people who have given small donations but they are special because they have been given significant support to your cause and should be treated in a special way.

Turning the commitment of a gift or pledge into money requires a letter which thanks the donor, restates what the commitment is, what specifically it is to be used for (where appropriate), the schedule of payments (the amount over three years, for instance) and how it will be recognised. This sometimes referred to as the gift contract.

Ongoing stewardship comes in many shapes and sizes. One of the most obvious is using the telephone to talk to a major donor. The call can be about progress with the project or some other issue related to the gift. Phone calls are often a nice surprise for the donor. Personalised correspondence with the annual report, invitations to tours or events and opportunities to meet VIPs or experts associated with the charity are also popular. Stewardship should not be a one-off but a planned and sustained record to engagement.

Some organisations give great thought to who should sign the 'thank you' or maintain subsequent contact with the donor. In the first instance, the contact should be from the person who made the ask but where the charity has some big names on board they also should be brought into the frame if it considered the donor will be impressed by the association. On occasion, a service user or beneficiary of the charity's services can also be involved.



Stewardship in Northern Ireland major donor fundraising sometimes is left to the end of the project or as an afterthought. Not having a clear view or at least done some initial planning around stewardship can lead to it being a haphazard endeavour.

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This is never a good idea and the relative smallness of the market means you have to work harder to hold onto the people who support you. Some organisations considered sending a copy of the annual report along with a pro forma letter of thanks was adequate for major donors. Besides the fact that few people read annual reports, adding someone onto the list that includes all kinds of people is a minimalist approach to stewardship. In addition, major donors may be exclusively or primarily interested in a particular aspect of your work which is what motivated them to give in the first place so focussing on that when contacting them is probably best.

People locally tend to be personable and want to maximise the opportunity for face to face meetings with donors at openings, launch of new services etc. This sometimes leads to major donors being invited to every event a charity runs, to the proverbial 'opening of an envelope.'

While there is no specific recommendation on the number of invitations to attend events, one or two attendances at appropriate events is better than inclusion on a general invitation list. A popular and effective form of stewardship used by organisations is an invitation to an event where an important/high profile person will be in attendance. Even if the major donor does not attend, and they often do, it helps the charity's image to be associated with a VIP.

For participants in this project some people were impressed if they were thanked by a high profile person associated with the charity – such as an honorary president, chairman or high profile person associated with the charity.

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This is sometimes done instead of the thank you coming from the person who made the ask or was the original contact but it would be better to do this as well as the normal 'thank you.' Earlier we talked about motivation for major donors and often it was found that they wanted more involvement than just giving money and this should be kept in mind during the stewardship process.

connecting people who care with causes that matter

This project was originally funded by Giving Northern Ireland (GNI) a registered charity co- founded by the Boards of The Atlantic Philanthropies and The Lloyds TSB Foundation to encourage a more resilient and sustainable voluntary sector in NI and which existed between 2013 and 2018.

In September 2018, The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland who GNI had always worked closely with, took ownership of their work and mission of championing philanthropy in Northern Ireland, focusing particularly on High Net Worth Individuals and Corporates and building a strong and independent voice for giving.

“ The Community Foundation has a long track record of supporting major donors and encouraging generosity in NI and the Board of GNI are pleased that under the umbrella of the Community Foundation this research and toolkit will support and encourage more and better major giving in NI. ”

Gary Mills, *Previous Chair, Giving NI*

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