

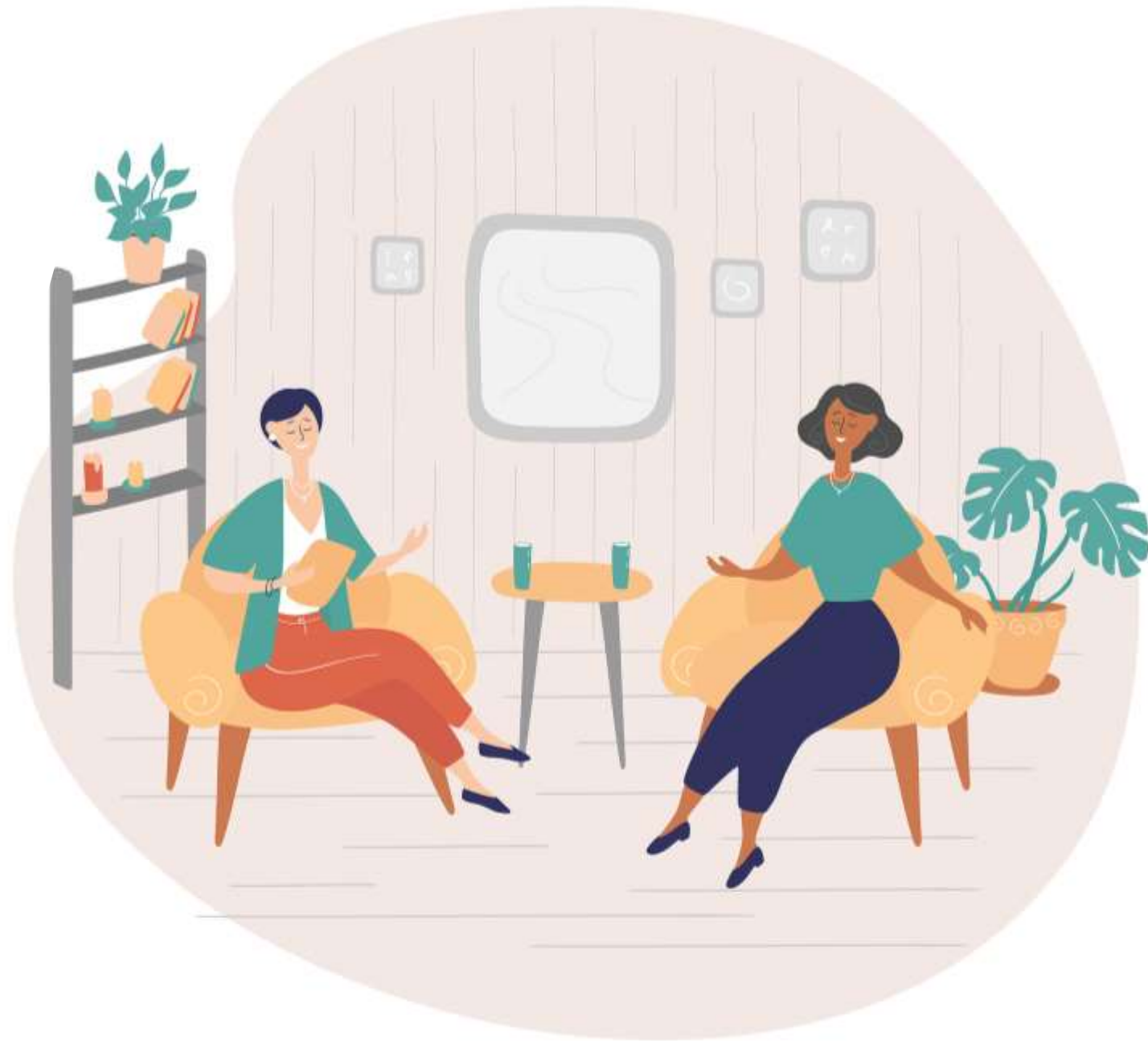
Socratic Fundraising in Bulk

Donor surveys that work

Professor Russell James
Texas Tech University

Asking questions

Sometimes face-to-face, one-on-one conversations aren't feasible because of personnel, cost, time, volume, distance, etc.





Asking
questions still

- Donor telephone conversations (one-on-one but not face-to-face)
- Donor focus groups (face-to-face but not one-on-one)
- Donor surveys (neither one-on-one nor face-to-face)

Universal steps

- Connect the donor's identity (history, people, and values) with the cause, the charity, or the project [*Original Identity* → *Challenge*]
- Define a personally meaningful victory [*Victory* → *Enhanced Identity*]
- Make a challenge that promises the victory [*Challenge* → *Victory*]



Original Identity → **Challenge** → **Victory** → **Enhanced Identity**



Questions won't work if people won't answer

Justify asking questions:

- I need your help or advice because
 - I'm new here
 - We have a problem
 - We have an idea
 - You're in charge
 - You're important
- I can help or advise you
- I'm interested in your story

If you don't actually care, then don't ask

Reasons must also appear legitimate

- Don't add a donation request to a survey
- Don't ask a question with a forced answer

~~"Should we continue our award-winning work that is transforming the lives of so many in desperate need?"~~



Connect with original identity

- Questions can connect the donor's identity (values, people, or life story) with the cause, charity, or project
- The reason for asking can be because of the donor's identity:
“Your insight is especially important because we need input from ... [*women, Baby boomers, loyal donors, alumni from the 80s, people who care about X, etc.*]



Challenge
↙ ↘
Identity ← **Victory**

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

Please rate the importance to you of the following

Being a good example for the next generation.

Making a lasting impact in the world.

Ensuring that your values will be remembered by future generations.

Highly Important
Somewhat Important
Slightly Important
Not Important

Values identity
questions
(Environmental
cause)

- Writing what they wanted to be remembered for by future generations increased donations to an environmental charity by 45%.¹
- Reminders of values such as love or religious beliefs increased donations for other causes.²

Learn something

Leaders at a charity focused on women's reproductive rights in the developing world assumed the key value was women's rights. Survey results revealed many donors cared only about population control.



Life story identity questions (environmental cause)

In one experiment, using the first two sets of questions increased donation likelihood for an environmental charity, especially for bequest gifts

At what age did you first begin to think about the importance of conserving the natural environment?

☐ In childhood ☐ In high school ☐ In my 20s ☐ In my 30s or later

Comments:

Which of the following have been important in your life?

<input type="checkbox"/> Time I have spent outdoors	<input type="checkbox"/> Time I have spent on a river
<input type="checkbox"/> Time I have spent in a forest	<input type="checkbox"/> Time I have spent on a lake
<input type="checkbox"/> My life experiences with wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/> My life experiences with wild birds
<input type="checkbox"/> My life experiences with trees and plants	

Comments:

When did you first learn about [org]? ☐ Within the last year ☐ Within the last five years ☐ Within the last ten years ☐ More than ten years ago

Last Will and Testament



Life story connections
are key for charitable
bequests

- A key result from interviews, neuroimaging, and phrasing experiments
- Ex: The phrase “to support causes that have been important in your life” maximized interest in a bequest gift

Learn something

- Answers are a great starting point for follow up questions (“Tell me more ...”)
- Messaging might be informed by knowing that donations were most likely for those noting “life experiences with wild birds,” and least likely for those referencing time “spent on a lake.”



People identity questions (environmental cause)

- First two questions also link to later question about honoring a family member with a gift in a will
- Answers are great starting point for follow up questions (“Tell me more ...”)

Do you have more or less than two family members who consider conserving the natural environment to be important?

☐ About 2 ☐ More than 2 ☐ Less than 2

Were there any family members in your life who were particularly influential in shaping your views on the importance of nature conservation?

☐ Grandmother ☐ Grandfather ☐ Aunt ☐ Uncle ☐ Mother ☐ Father
☐ Sibling ☐ Other family member

Comments:

We love to recognize our outstanding team members at [org]! Please share any memorable experiences you’ve had with anyone you’ve met at [org].

Comments:

Identity questions: Nudge towards more positive answers

- The most negative answer might be “probably not” or “unlikely,” but omit “definitely not” or “never”
- The lowest group is “less than 2,” omitting the “none” response
- Relationship started within the last year, five years, or ten years are not exclusive categories:
Uncertainty nudges towards
“safer” answer of longer category





Victory questions (environmental cause)

Help the donor define a personally meaningful victory with a “victory menu”

On a scale from 0 = Absolutely no importance to 100 = Absolutely the greatest importance, please rate the importance of the work of [org] in the following areas

- ☐ Environmental conservation
- ☐ Preserve wetlands for wild ducks and other migrating birds
- ☐ Protect and restore ancient sequoia and redwood forests in the U.S.
- ☐ Protect sensitive coral reefs around the globe

Victory questions (all causes research)

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

One experiment tested ten charities from five causes with three projects per cause. Average giving likelihood was:

- 14% when reading about causes
- 15% when reading about causes and projects
- 19% when rating the importance of causes
- 21% when rating the importance of causes and projects



James, R. N., III. (2018). Increasing charitable donation intentions with preliminary importance ratings. *International Review of Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 15(3), 393-411.

Victory questions (environmental cause)

Challenge



Identity ← Victory

Using the cause and 3 projects below, donation likelihood to The Nature Conservancy *[or World Wildlife Fund]* was

- 11% *[or 13%]* when reading about causes
- 12% *[or 13%]* when reading about causes and projects
- 15% *[or 16%]* when rating causes
- 18% *[or 19%]* when rating causes and projects

On a scale from 0 = Absolutely no importance to 100 = Absolutely the greatest importance, please rate the importance of the work of [org] in the following areas

- ___ Environmental conservation
- ___ Preserve wetlands for wild ducks and other migrating birds
- ___ Protect and restore ancient sequoia and redwood forests in the U.S.
- ___ Protect sensitive coral reefs around the globe

Victory questions (university)

A) “Annual alumni giving through the Penn Fund directly supports these priorities of undergraduate education.

- ☒ Student financial aid
- ☒ Student and academic life
- ☒ Residential life
- ☒ Special campus initiatives”

“Rich”: \$192 avg; “Powerful”: \$158 avg

B) Remove the checks from the boxes and add, “Tell us which is most important to you. (Please check one box)”

“Rich”: \$463 avg; “Powerful”: \$714 avg



Questions can turn a victory into the donor's victory

- First giving people the chance to vote on a project increases donations and volunteering
- Describing a potential victory as important can help but asking works better than telling

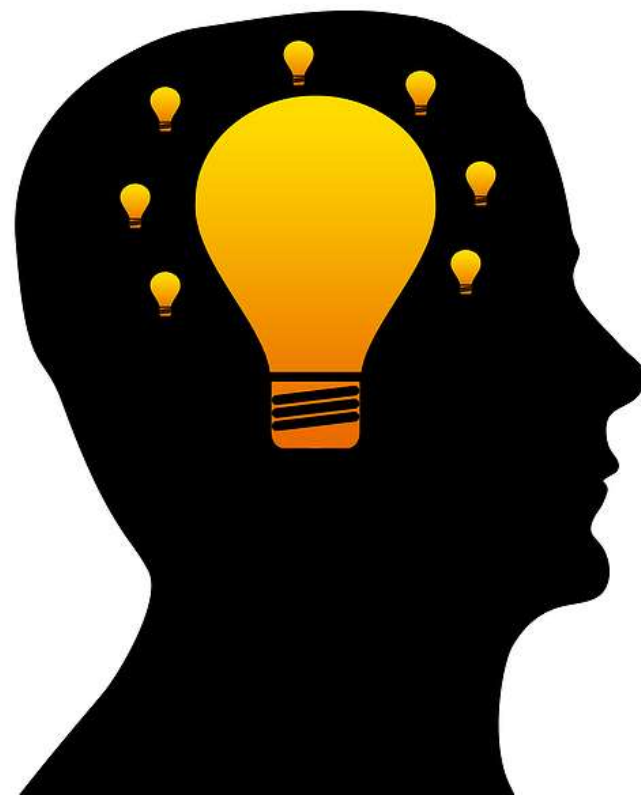
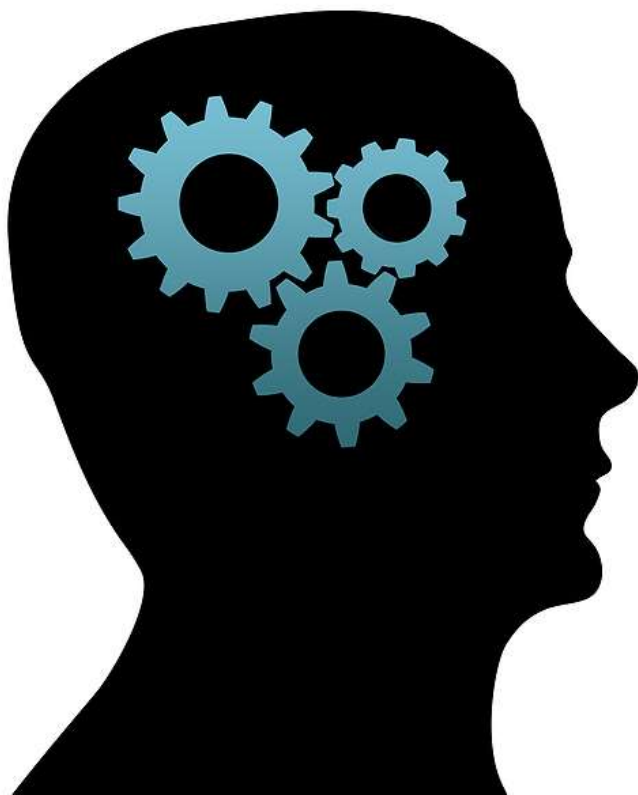


Challenge questions: Theory

Problem: A survey shouldn't ask for an immediate donation. (Doing this can delegitimize the questions.)

Solution: The goal is to get the donor to predict a gift. It's still in the realm of opinion gathering, but it's surprisingly powerful.





The “Question-
Behavior Effect”
(QBE)

People are less likely to do a pro-social act if asked than to predict they will do it, but once people predict they will act, they then change their future behavior to match their prediction

Asking for the prediction first increases pro-social behavior

In experiments, this works with:

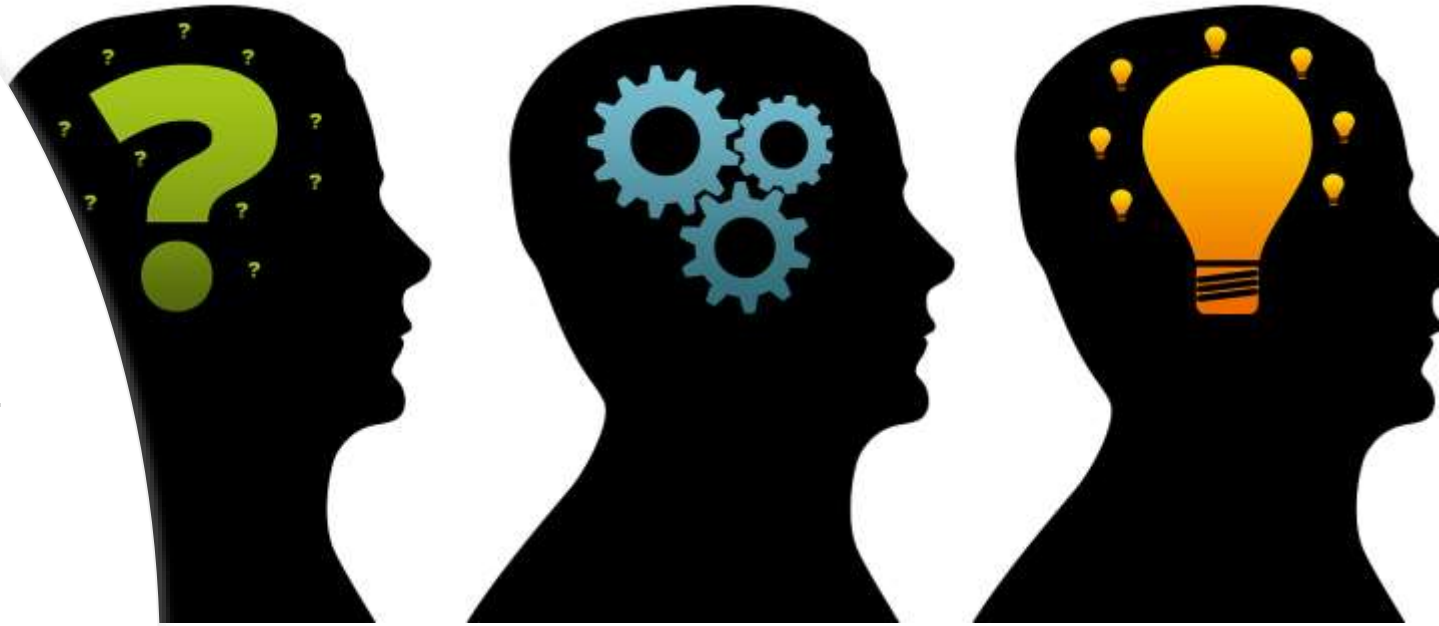
- Blood donations
- Volunteering
- Voting
- Recycling
- Buying environmentally friendly products
- Charitable donations



Godin, G., Germain, M., Conner, M., Delage, G., & Sheeran, P. (2014). Promoting the return of lapsed blood donors: A seven-arm randomized controlled trial of the question-behavior effect. *Health Psychology, 33*(7), 646-655; Godin, G., Sheeran, P., Conner, M., & Germain, M. (2008). Asking questions changes behavior: Mere measurement effects on frequency of blood donation. *Health Psychology, 27*(2), 179-184. Sherman, S. J. (1980). On the self-erasing nature of errors of prediction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*(2), 211-221; Spangenberg, E. R., Sprott, D. E., Grohmann, B., & Smith, R. J. (2003). Mass-communicated prediction requests: Practical application and a cognitive dissonance explanation for self-prophecy. *Journal of Marketing, 67*(3), 47-62. Greenwald, A. G., Carnot, C. G., Beach, R., & Young, B. (1987). Increasing voting behavior by asking people if they expect to vote. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 72*(2), 315-318. Sprott, D. E., Spangenberg, E. R., & Perkins, A. W. (1999). Two more self-prophecy experiments. In E. J. Arnould & L. M. Scott (Eds.), *NA - Advances in Consumer Research: Vol. 26* (pp. 621-626). Association for Consumer Research; Bodur, H. O., Duval, K. M., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Will you purchase environmentally friendly products? Using prediction requests to increase choice of sustainable products. *Journal of Business Ethics, 129*(1), 59-75; Obermiller, C., & Spangenberg, E. (2000). Improving telephone fundraising by use of self-prophecy. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 5*(4), 365-372.

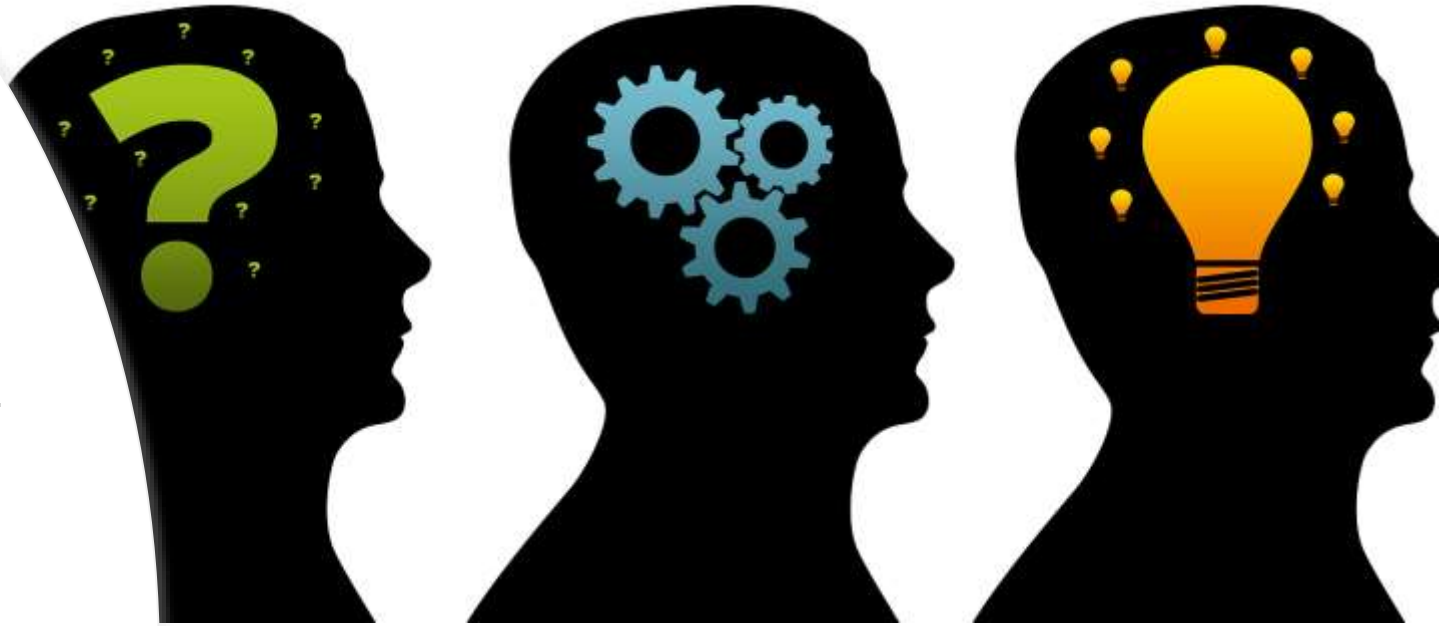
QBE Experiment

Asking “If you were contacted by your high school or college and asked to donate money, would you do so?” a few days before a fundraising request increased the share donating to their college by half



QBE Experiment

First asking how much people would “hypothetically” donate to a project increased actual donation 43% for a project helping turtles and 25% for one helping elephants.



Goal: Get a positive donation prediction

- QBE shows that people tend to change their behavior to match their predictions
- Lead-up questions showing identity connections and defining a meaningful victory can increase the giving prediction
- So, the gift prediction should come towards the end of the survey



Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways. How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?	<div> <div>Definitely</div> <div>Somewhat likely</div> <div>Unlikely</div> </div>			Have already done so	Would like more info
Gift by volunteering time					
Gift by check or credit card					
Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal					
Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)					
Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one					
Gift that pays you income for life					
Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes					
Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes					
Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes					

Challenge question examples

Challenge questions: Introduction

[Social norm statement] “Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways.”

“People like me do things like this” is a powerful message.

In experiments, adding that they “like to” do it is even more powerful. Adding that they “care about” the cause helps, too.



Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways. How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?

Gift by volunteering time

Gift by check or credit card

Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal

Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a

Challenge questions: Introduction

- [Prediction request] “How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?”
- In experiments, asking, “how likely is it that you will do X” influences behavior more than asking if a person “intends to” act
- It’s soft and easy. It’s an opinion, not a pledge (“might consider”). It’s about the future (“in the next six months”).



Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways. **How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?**

Gift by volunteering time
Gift by check or credit card
Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal
Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)
Gift in a will in honor or memory of a

Challenge questions: Volunteering

- In one experiment, first asking about volunteering led to a 50% increase in donation intentions
- Volunteering questions trigger a social-emotional mindset which then encourages donations



like to give in different ways.
is it that you would consider
following gifts in the next six

Gift by volunteering time

Gift by check or credit card

Gift as an automatic monthly

Gift in a will (if you happened

Challenge options: Check, credit card, automatic withdrawal

- Beginning with an easy answer creates inclusion in the group
 - The donor is the kind of person who makes gifts “like these.”
 - Next moves to the simplest upgrade – the automatic monthly donor
-



Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways. How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?

Gift by volunteering time

Gift by check or credit card

Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal

Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a

Challenge options: Bequest

Requests that “lead with death” have low response rates

- The survey “buries” the “death” question
- The list starts with the most familiar ways to give
- The estate gift is in the middle of the list, worded just the same as every other gift
- It’s just another way to give



Gift by volunteering time
Gift by check or credit card
Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal
Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)
Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one
Gift that pays you income for life
Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes



Estate-focused survey? Use permanence language!

- Describing a charity as “Creating lasting improvements that would benefit people in the future” rather than “Meeting the immediate needs of people” normally reduced donations, but it more than doubled gifts for those reminded of their mortality
- Use permanence language: “protect” becomes “Lasting protection,” “Permanently protect,” “Protect forever,” or “Protect for future generations”

Challenge options: Memorial bequest

In one experiment, mentioning this option increased interest in an estate gift for about one out of four people

In Memory

Gift by check or credit card

Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal

Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Challenge options: A survey can teach!

- It can ask about a “gift that pays you income for life,” a gift of inheritance rights (house or farmland) with an immediate income tax deduction, a named scholarship fund, a lectureship, an endowed professorship, a virtual endowment, etc.
- Curiosity leads to conversations



Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes

Challenge options: IRA Gifts

1. Heirs inheriting any amount of IRA money pay income taxes on it but leaving to charity avoids these taxes.

2. Donors over age 70½ can give directly from their IRA. (At 72+ this also offsets required distributions.)



Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes

Challenge options: Asset gifts & taxes

The final three questions lead with tax benefit. In one experiment, only 14% were “interested now” in pursuing a gift described as,

“Make a gift of stocks or bonds to charity.”

This increased to 20% when it was described as,

“Avoid capital gains tax by making a gift of stocks or bonds to charity”



Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes

Challenge options: Asset gifts & taxes

In one study of over 5,000 people, the share “definitely” or “might be” interested in reading more was:

- 16% for “Giving stocks”
- 16% for “Giving stocks, bonds, or real estate”
- 24% for “Avoiding capital gains taxes by giving stocks”
- 28% for “Avoiding taxes by giving stocks”



Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes

Challenge options: Gifts of assets

- Asset gift questions reveal capacity because a person wanting information about gifts of real estate, stocks, or bonds likely has these available to give
- Just reminding people of their wealth (assets) triggers a larger reference point and increases giving



Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes

Challenge answers: What's missing

- There isn't a hard "no" option, just "unlikely." Predictions are powerful. We don't want donors committing to a hard "no."
- There isn't a "don't know" option. Forcing a choice requires more thinking about gifts of assets.
- A "don't know" doesn't invite follow up, but a "somewhat likely" does



Challenge answers: “Have already done so”

- We want this information about the gift in a will. Including it for all gifts prevents the will question from standing out.
- Answering yes to initial questions (check, credit card) creates inclusion: “I am the type of person who makes gifts like these.”





Survey outcomes: Follow up

Definitely	Somewhat likely	Unlikely	Have already done so	Would like more info

- A donor might check, “Would like more information” or “Definitely” or “Somewhat likely” for an asset gift
- These give a reason for a follow-up contact
- This can lead to permission to present options (i.e., to make the ask)



Follow up phone call:

1. Thank you / reminder

“Hello Sara? Hi, this is [name] from [charity]. Don’t worry, I’m not calling to ask for a gift today. I wanted to thank you for your years of support of [cause]. Your gifts have really made a difference for [beneficiaries].”

“Also, I wanted to thank you for completing our survey a few days ago. This really helps our leadership. It’s important for them to know what matters to loyal donors like you. So, thanks for that!” ...



Follow up phone call: 2. Tell me more / I help donors

“I also wanted to follow up with you on one thing. You mentioned in the survey that you *[would like more information about / might be considering]* a gift *[of real estate / of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds / from an IRA]*. I work with many donors like you who’ve made these types of gifts. The extra tax benefits really make it a smarter way to give. Would you mind telling me if anything in particular prompted you to *[request that information / consider this type of a gift]*?” ...



Follow up phone call:
3. Can I show you some options?

“I’d love to share some examples of what others like you are doing. I think you’ll find some of the options interesting. This can also help with your giving to other causes, not just ours. I’ll be in your area next Tuesday. Would your calendar allow us to meet at 2pm?” ...



Follow up phone call: 4. Details?

“Great! I’ll put together some options for you. Before we meet, is there anything you want me to know about the *[real estate / investments / IRA]*? I know sometimes there are special issues with *[property / certain types of investments]*.”

Survey outcomes: Follow up conversations

- Follow up conversations can lead to permission to present options
- This soft proposal gives examples of smart gifts and shows their impact in the areas most important to the donor (shown in the survey)





Survey outcomes: Follow up calculations

- Good follow up can't work with big mailings
- How many follow up contacts can you make in a short time?
- Divide this by the expected response rate then divide by the expected share of surveys with positive answers to key questions
- Ex: $(50 \text{ follow-up calls} / .12 \text{ response rate}) / .20 \text{ positive answers} = 2,083 \text{ surveys MAX}$



Survey outcomes: Teach something about the donor

- Questions can help a donor learn something about herself
- They can help the donor to connect her values, people, and history with the charity and to define a personally meaningful victory
- This personal discover process can increase interest in giving

**Rating the importance
of a project requires
learning about it**



“I didn’t know they
protected coral reefs,
too.”

“I didn’t know they had
conservation centers.
Maybe I should visit?”

**Survey outcomes:
Teach something about the charity**

I didn't know that other people ...

Save taxes by
making gifts of
stocks or real
estate

Make gifts
that pay
them
income

Make estate
gifts in
memory of
a loved one

Avoid taxes
by making
gifts from an
IRA



Survey outcomes:
Teach something
about giving

Rating the likelihood of making a gift
requires thinking about it

Survey outcomes: Teach something by asking for guidance

“Please compare the two stories and select which of the two stories made you feel the following.

1. Made me value the work of [charity] even more.
2. Increased my connection to the cause.
3. Moved me emotionally.”



Survey outcomes: Teach something by asking for guidance

“It would be most helpful to me if when you read the booklet you note how it’s written. Do you like the style? Are the examples clear? Do you have any suggestions on how we might improve it?”

Which of these ads about giving stocks do you think others will find most compelling?



Survey outcomes: Teach something by asking for guidance

“We need your help! Estate gifts have always been critical for [this charity]. But this is a sensitive topic. So, we need your advice. We’re considering using one of these two brochures. Would you share your thoughts by answering a few questions about them?”



Survey outcomes: Timely reminders

- Being “top of the mind” is particularly important for rare event gifts such as before the sale of stocks or real estate or the drafting a new will
- A survey can remind donors of these gift ideas and sometimes the reminder will come at just the right time



Survey outcomes: Learn something

First, a warning: This isn't survey research, it's Socratic fundraising.

“A good [donor] survey is not about information. It's about self-reflection. It's a conversation on paper.”

-Aimée Lindenberg



Survey outcomes: Learn something

These are persuasive surveys. The responses are intentionally biased. This means relative levels will be more meaningful.

- How does interest in project X compare with project Y or Z?
- Relative increases in estate gift interest reflect progress.



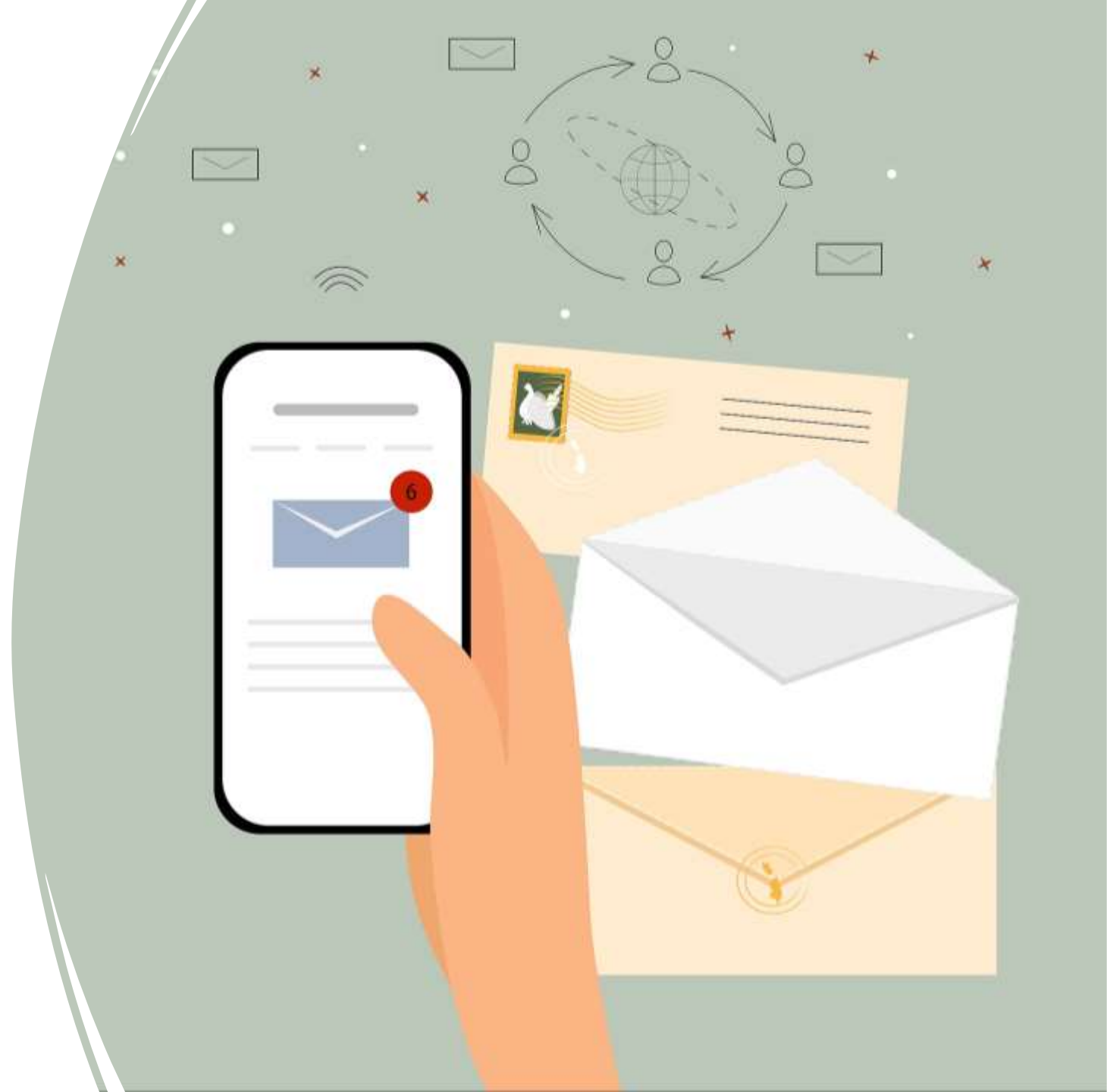
Survey outcomes: Learn something

- Appeal letters can test words and phrases for small gifts, but this is harder for major gifts of assets
- A survey can help because phrases or questions that increase predictions will also tend to increase donations



Other survey issues: Print or online?

- The online survey is the cheapest
- Reaching more people requires more channels
- Ex: Mailing to the online non-responders then calling the online and mail non-responders



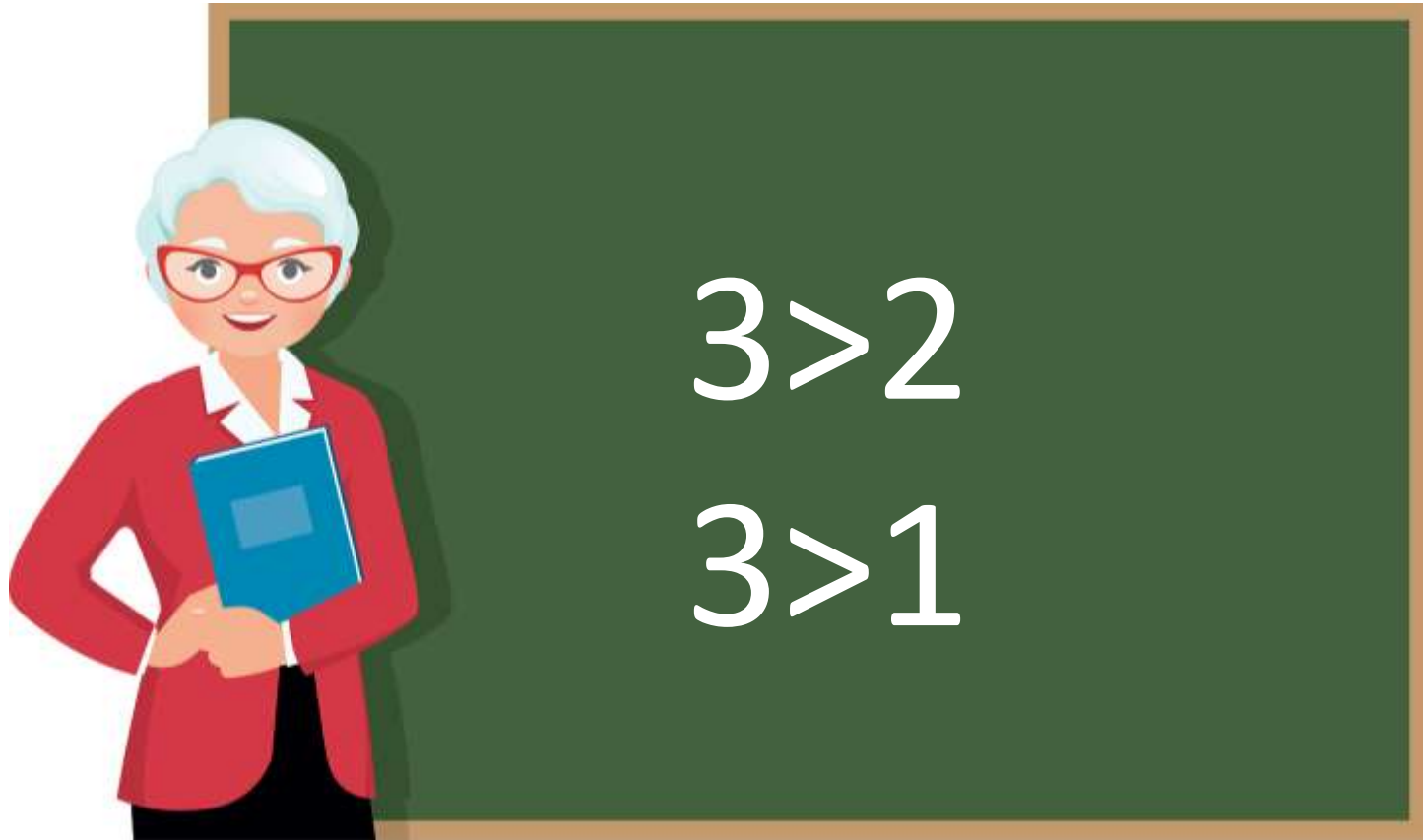


Other survey issues: How long should it be?

Some donor surveys use just a few questions. (An appeal reply card might add just one or two.) Others are several pages long.

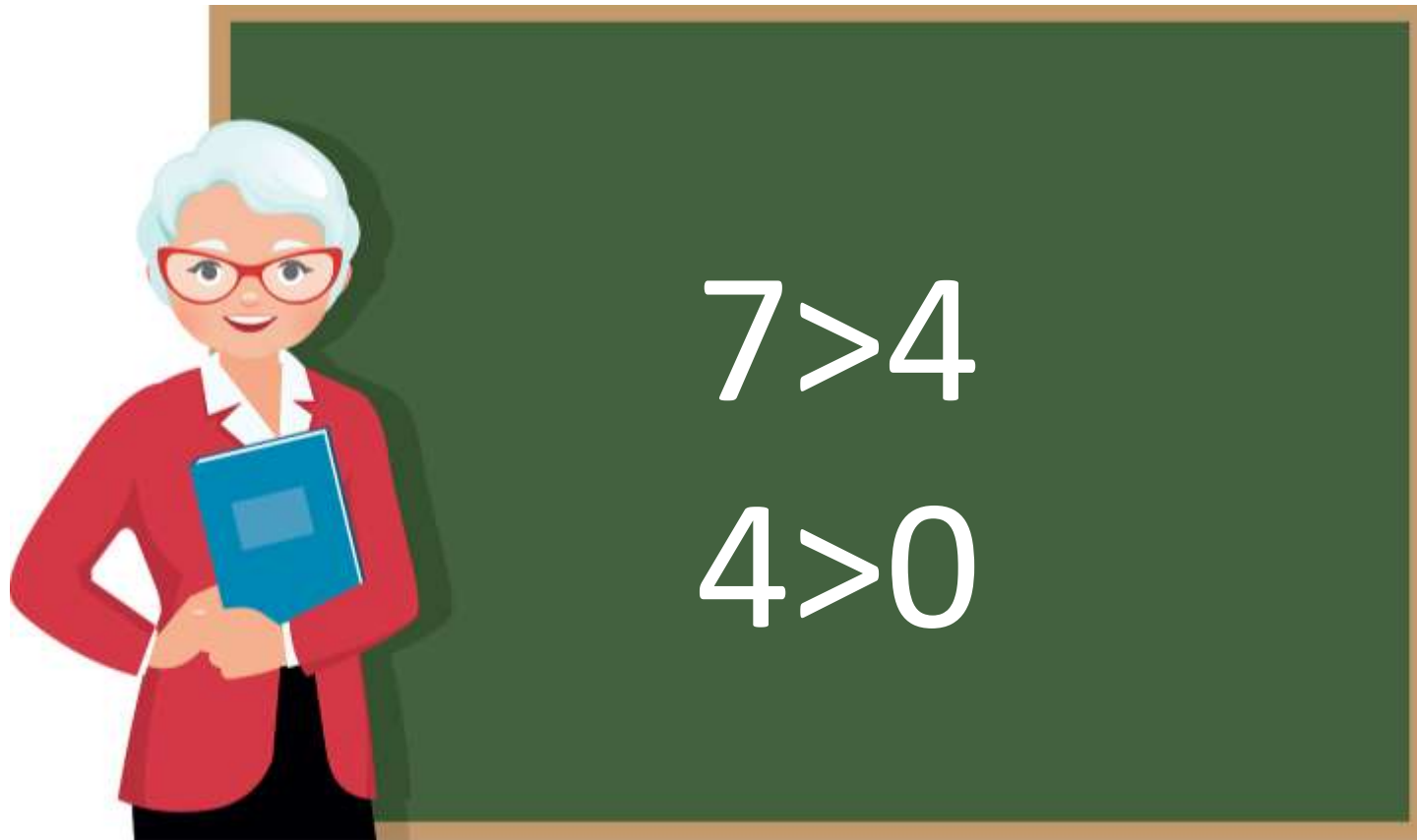
Which is better? It's a tradeoff.

When more is better



- One experiment used some of the previous questions about the donor's (1) people, (2) values, and (3) life story connections
- Using all three types worked better than using any one or two alone

When more is better



Another experiment found reading seven planned gift donor stories worked better than reading four, which worked better than reading none

When more is better

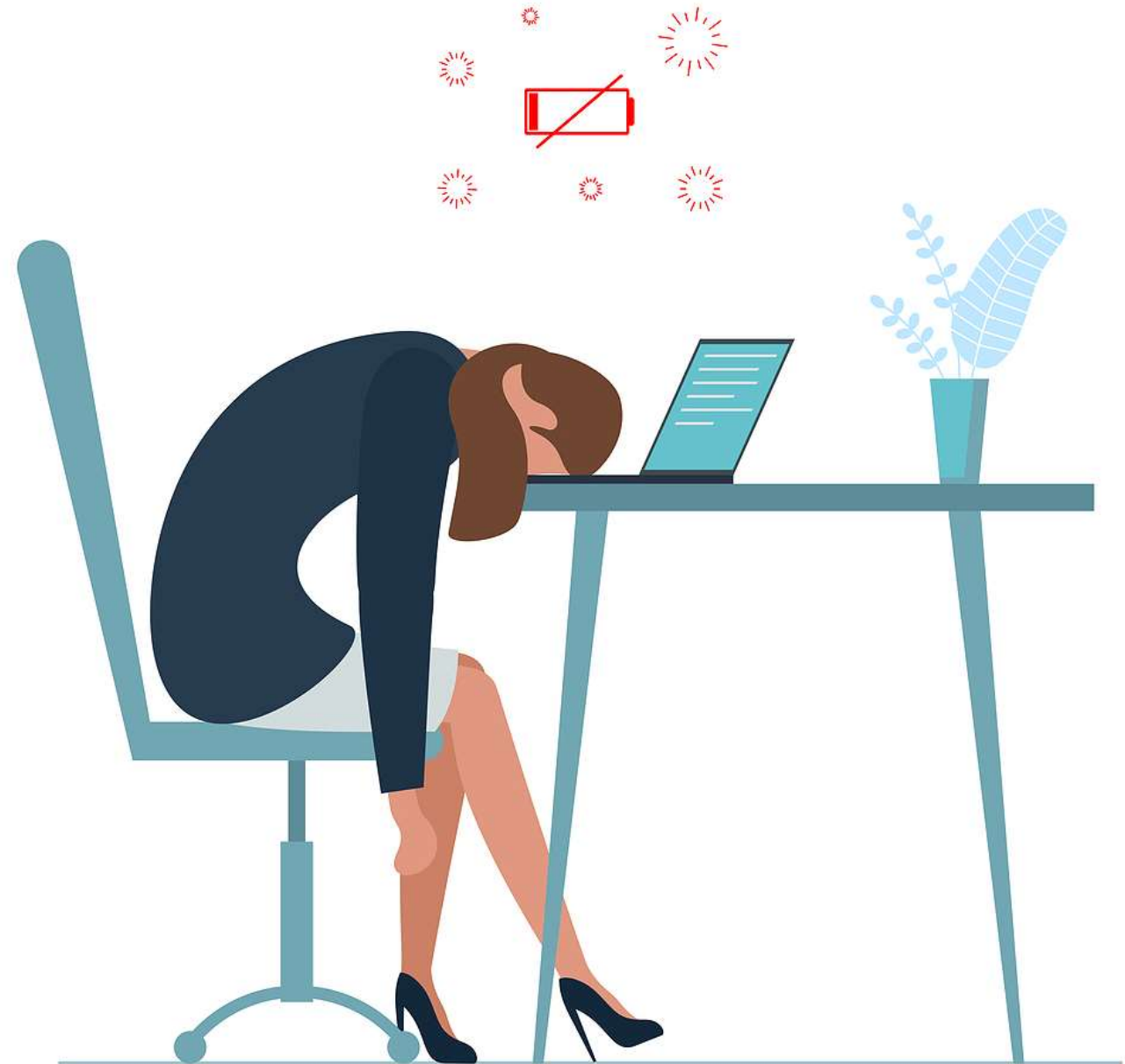
In experiments, triggering more expressions of an attitude increases commitment to the underlying belief and also actions that match those beliefs



Descheemaeker, M., Spruy, A., Faxio, R. H., & Hermans, D. (2017). On the generalization of attitude accessibility after repeated attitude expression. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 47, 97-104; Downing, J. W., Judd, C. M., & Brauer, M. (1992). Effects of repeated expressions on attitude extremity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(1), 17-29; Holland, R. W., Verplanken, B., & van Knippenberg, A. (2003). From repetition to conviction: Attitude accessibility as a determinant of attitude certainty. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 39(6), 594-601.

The tradeoff: The longer the survey, the less likely it is to be completed

- But “length” here isn’t just about page numbers or word count
- It’s about how easy it feels to take the survey
- Simple words, short sentences, and active verbs help
- So does attractive design



Rolstad, S., Adler, J., & Rydén, A. (2011). Response burden and questionnaire length: is shorter better? A review and meta-analysis. *Value in Health*, 14(8), 1101-1108.

Attractive design increases response rates



One study showed the positive effects of

- “Use of accent color.
- Additional navigation cues to call out section headings.
- More than one blank line between survey questions.
- White space between survey question-response option block is larger than white space between a survey question and response options associated with the question.
- One or more blank lines between end of survey question and start of response options.
- A line or other demarcation between columns of survey questions.
- Visible or extra white space on the survey page”

Attractive design increases response rates



- Most of these increase the physical length of the survey, but they make it feel easier and inviting
- These increased responses the most from the oldest respondents



Conclusion

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

Asking questions is powerful. It might start with a social conversation, a formal campaign feasibility study, a focus group, a phone survey, or a paper or electronic survey, but the steps are the same.

Appreciative inquiry is compelling.
Socratic fundraising works.



Socratic Fundraising in Bulk

Donor surveys that work

Professor Russell James
Texas Tech University