Actionology™

FUNDRAISING ACTION PACK

Behavioral Science Principles
to Improve Your Fundraising

A Handy Guide to Help You Achieve Better Results

You're about to wake up your fundraising by learning how little things affect the decisions your donors make. By using the principles of behavioral science, you can unlock a new level of engagment.

These cards are an easy way to learn concepts in psychology and neuroscience that can affect how much your donors give. These principles have emerged from academia and have been tested and used by nonprofits. Since every organization is different, you should test each principle to see what works for your donors.

This deck was designed as a handy tool that you can put into practice right away — so leave it on your desk where you will see it and refer to it when crafting your fundraising communications.

Learn more at **ActionologyImpact.com**

An Introduction to the Cards

The Fundraising Action Pack

There are 16 behavioral science principles in this deck. Each principle has three cards:

- Description of the principle.
- Examples of how it has been used.
- Questions and tips to implement the principle

Various Ways to Use the Cards

- Read the cards to get familiar with the principles.
- Start with a random principle.
- Craft an appeal by following this sequence, applying what you have learned in each stage for the next set of principles.

 **1. Understanding Your Audience:**	Self-Connection, Social Norms, Labeling, Priming
 **2. Telling Your Story:**	Framing, Loss Aversion, Identifiable Victim, Metaphor, Rhyming
 **3. Crafting Your Offer:**	Scarcity, Choice, Set Completion, Anchoring, Decoy Effect
 **4. Determining Your Delivery:**	Credible Messenger, Time Pressure

Using the Cards with Your Team

Quick Session: Pick one principle and have your group read about the principle and the examples. Then have each person on your team answer the Reflect questions on the green Action cards. What insights emerged? Then review the tips in the Apply section. How would each person in your team implement those?

Full Workshop: Use the deck to gain deeper insights and improvements by using them in a sequential way. Structure a day for your team to go through all the cards and questions in the order on the reverse of this card. Start with **Understanding Your Audience**. Review the principles and answer the questions for those principles. What did you learn about your donors? Next, move onto **Telling Your Story** and apply those insights to develop your message. Finally, move onto **Crafting Your Offer** and **Determining Your Delivery**.

However you use this deck, we're sure you'll gain some fresh insights to renew your thinking and boost your results.

The footnotes refer to sources located at **ActionologyImpact.com/fundraising**

STAGE 1

Understanding Your Audience

Self-Connection

We relate to others who share the same name, values, beliefs, age, and other characteristics.

Connection to others who share similar attributes is a powerful psychological principle.

Anything that is self-connected (or can be made to seem so) can serve as a springboard to persuasion. People who have a birthday, birthplace, or first name in common come to like each other more, which leads to heightened cooperation. This is why the residents of Quincy, Massachusets, helped out the town of Quincy, Illinois, when it was in trouble, why people tend to marry people with the same last name, why there are more dentists name Dennis than Jerry or Walter,[1] and why Coca-Cola put 150 of the most common first names on 100 million cans of Coke (resulting in the first increase in sales of Coke in a decade).[2]

Self-Connection **Examples**

EXAMPLE

In one study, a survey was sent to people with a letter from a person with a similar name to the recipient (such as Robert Greer and Bob Gregar). Other people received the surveys with letters from people with dissimilar names. Those who received the survey from the person with a similar name were twice as likely to complete the survey and return the packet as those who got the survey from the name unlike theirs (**56% vs 30%**). None realized the name had affected them.[3]

EXAMPLE

In order to attract donors to its message, Macmillan Cancer Support in the U.K. used billboards with facial recognition to change messages. When more males were detected in the crowd, the billboard message read, "No dad should face cancer alone." Female and neutral messages were used based on traffic flow.[4]

EXAMPLE

An experiment involving Utrecht University graduates found that people were more likely to make donations when asked by someone with a similar name or when their first names resembled the name of the university. This lead the author of the study to suggest that the name-letter effect be embraced by telemarketing charities in an effort to increase donations.[5]

EXAMPLE

Donors are more likely to make small business microloans online to people who share their initials.[6] Another study finds that donors appeared to strongly favor recipients who were more attractive, less overweight, and lighter in skin color.[7]

Self-Connection **in Action**

To increase your fundraising appeal, find a connection between your donors and your cause

REFLECT

- When designing a program or initiative for a specific client, how can you remind them of themselves by the name, title or label you give it?
- In your donor appeal letter, try to connect with your donors by using stories of people your organization has helped who are similar to donors in some way — from the same town, county, similar circumstances, values, world perspective, etc.

Self-Connection

APPLY

- Find out all you can about your donor prospects so you can find similarities that you can use to establish rapport and prime for agreement. These can include gender, family role (mother, father, etc.), career, political orientation, geography (birth, raised, work, live, etc.). For example, identifying your donors as parents, you might use: "Tonight in Ethiopia, a family like yours will sit down to eat a very different meal."

- Use success stories that relate to your donors. For example, send female stories to female donors, and male stories to male donors. Point out similarities in your story to your donors (they are from the same area or share similar values).

- Identify self-connections in donor testimonials.

Social Norms

People's behavior tends to follow that of the crowd or what others around them are doing.

You can influence people's actions by letting them know that others are taking those same actions.

Social norms are all around us and have been used to guide many types of behaviors. From saving energy to reducing risky behavior, people adjust their actions to stay in line with their peers.

Nonprofits should be aware of how social dynamics influence their donors' behavior. From online features that allow donors to showcase their support for your organization on their social media channels, to recognition of high-end donors during live auctions at galas, there are many ways that charities can build support for their cause using social norms.

Social Norms **Examples**

EXAMPLE

In the U.K., 35% of people say they want to leave a legacy to charity, yet only 7% of wills contain one. In a test, three different groups of subjects were offered free assistance in drafting a will. The social norms test group made the most gifts, double the average gift amount compared with the group that had no mention of charitable giving.[1]

	GIFTS	AVG AMT.
GROUP 1: No mention of charitable giving	4.9%	$3,300
GROUP 2: "Would you like to leave money to charity in your will?"	10.8%	$3,100
GROUP 3: "Many of our customers like to leave money to charity in their will. Are there any causes you are passionate about?"	**15.4%**	**$6,661**

EXAMPLE

If people believe that most of their peers are drinking beer daily, they are more likely to do the same. But if those beliefs are based on inaccurate information, you can change behavior by emphasizing the accurate information — telling what most people are actually doing.

Ads that read, "Most (81%) of Montana college students have four or fewer alcoholic drinks each week," and "Most (70%) of Montana teens are tobacco-free" have helped decrease smoking and college drinking.[2]

EXAMPLE

To create an expectation that many people were donating to its organization, a nonprofit changed the call to action in its TV ad from "Operators are waiting, please call now" to "If operators are busy, please call again."

Social Norms **in Action**

Build interest in your organization by showing that it is being supported by many people.

REFLECT

- What are the norms for giving among your donors?
- Can you segment your database to show that a majority of your donors in a certain town, county or other geographic area have supported your organization?
- Can you segment your database by factors such as age, gender, or other demographics?

Social Norms

APPLY

- Use language that is as specific as possible for demonstrating a social norm, indicating commonality and level of support.
- Use past appeals to build support for a new campaign, such as "87% of our members donate to our Thanksgiving Meal campaign."
- Glean information from your website, social media, and email click-throughs to identify social norms.
- Combine with the Self-Connection Principle: "Many investment bankers like you support our organization at the $10,000 level."

Labeling

People generally behave in ways that reinforce their personal identities.

People are more likely to take a certain action if primed with a positive label describing how they see themselves.

A pro-social behavior, such as donating, can be activated by a label that a person believes reflects their identity — such as acknowledging someone as a philanthropist. Labels can be activated based on identities, such as nationality, religion, profession, race, political party, or other tribal associations, such as being a cancer survivor.

Labeling can be subtle. Airlines reinforce their passengers identities as savvy decision-makers by saying, "We know you have many airlines to choose from, thank you for choosing ours." Nonprofits can show appreciation of donors' trust in their organization.[1]

Labeling **Examples**

EXAMPLE

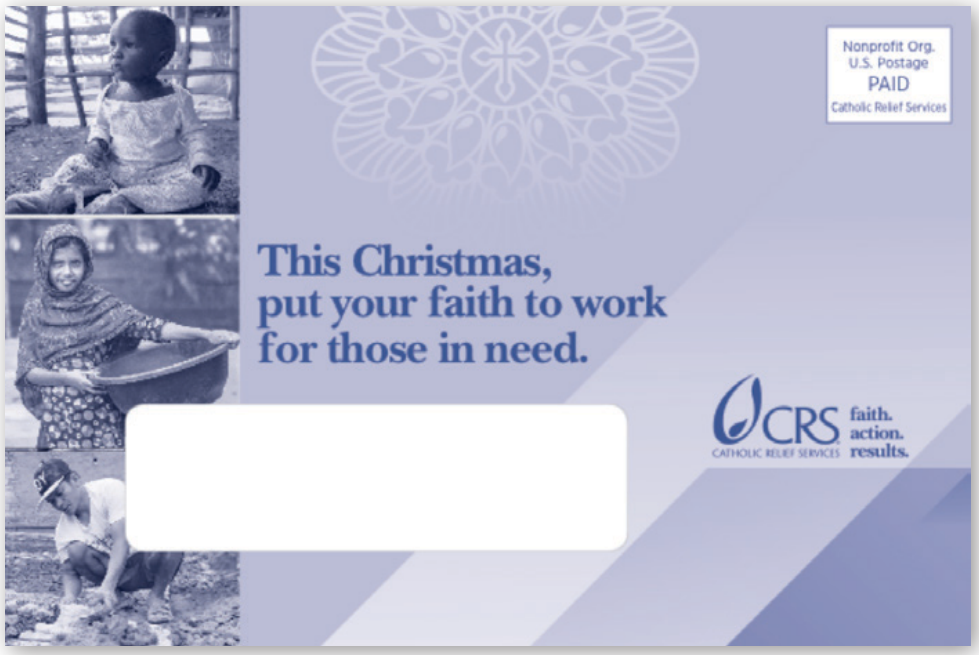
Half of potential voters for a local election in Chicago were told that they were "above-average citizens likely to vote and participate in political events." The other half were told they were average in terms of these interests, beliefs, and behaviors. One week later, the "above-average citizens" were 15% more likely to vote.[2]

EXAMPLE

Could children be motivated to help more if given a subtle cue that signals that helping would imply something positive about them? In a classroom experiment with 3- to 6-year-olds, the children were divided into two groups. Those who were described with a positive noun term ("Some children choose to be helpers") rather than a verb ("Some children choose to help") helped the experimenter 29% more often.[3]

EXAMPLE

Catholic Relief Charities was able to tap into their donors' religious identity as a way to motivate support for the organization. A mailing with the headline, "This Christmas, put your faith to work for those in need," as well as other language alluding to religious identity raised 18.5% more than the control package that did not specifically reference religion."[4]



Live out your faith and help those less fortunate.

Labeling **in Action**

Activate your donors' identities to bring out support for your cause.

REFLECT

- What language do your donors use about themselves? How do these words relate to your organization or cause?
- How can these be used as labels for your fundraising appeals?
- Study social media posts to determine how your supporters refer to themselves.
- What groups are they members of that imply status or personal qualities?

Labeling

APPLY

- Use labels that positively reflect how donors see themselves: charter member, pioneer for the cause, visionary, champion, friend, advocate, philanthropist, leader, long-time supporter, etc.

- If you are not merging recipient's first names into your emails, you can use a noun label, such as "Friend" to create a connection.

- At events, identify specific types of individuals present by appropriate nouns "Circle Club Founder," "Patrons," etc. Couple this with adjectives to imbue an additional sense of importance, such as "Longest serving board member" or "most active committee member."

STAGE 1

Understanding Your Audience

Priming

Influencing choices based on a response to a previous experience or stimulus.

Priming is a kind of "pre-suasion" that subtly influences a person's behavior.

Many kinds of priming influence how a donor perceives a solicitation or offer — words, pictures, and numbers can be primes that help shape how a message is received and acted upon.

For example, after reading a paragraph with words relating to the concept of old, people walked more slowly. Primed with words about cooperation, they were more likely to help someone.

Anchoring a donor around a certain number, such as a donation amount, is a form of priming (see the Anchoring cards).

Priming **Examples**

EXAMPLE

Potential voters who were asked to make a prediction about whether they would vote or not and give their reason, yielded a turnout rate that was 25% higher than those who weren't asked (**86.7%** vs. **61.5%**). People want to act in a way that is consistent with their public statements and beliefs about themselves.[1]

EXAMPLE

Many organizations use surveys or questionnaires to get donors thinking about certain issues. This gets donors in the frame of mind to support their cause. Whether one question or a more formal survey, priming an audience before an ask can help increase response rates.

EXAMPLE

One organization achieved an increase in donations by connecting with their donor's identity as a loving person. Before asking for the contribution, they asked donors to list three people they know (or are known by) or they love (or are loved by). The organization was receiving average donations of **$20**. After asking these questions, average donations increased to **$24**.[4]

EXAMPLE

Images can be a great way to prime your donors. One nonprofit places a subtle number in a photo (for example, on a blackboard in the background of a classroom scene) to prime their donors with a number above the average gift amount.[3]

Priming **in Action**

Asking the right priming question before making a request for a donation can lift response rates.

REFLECT

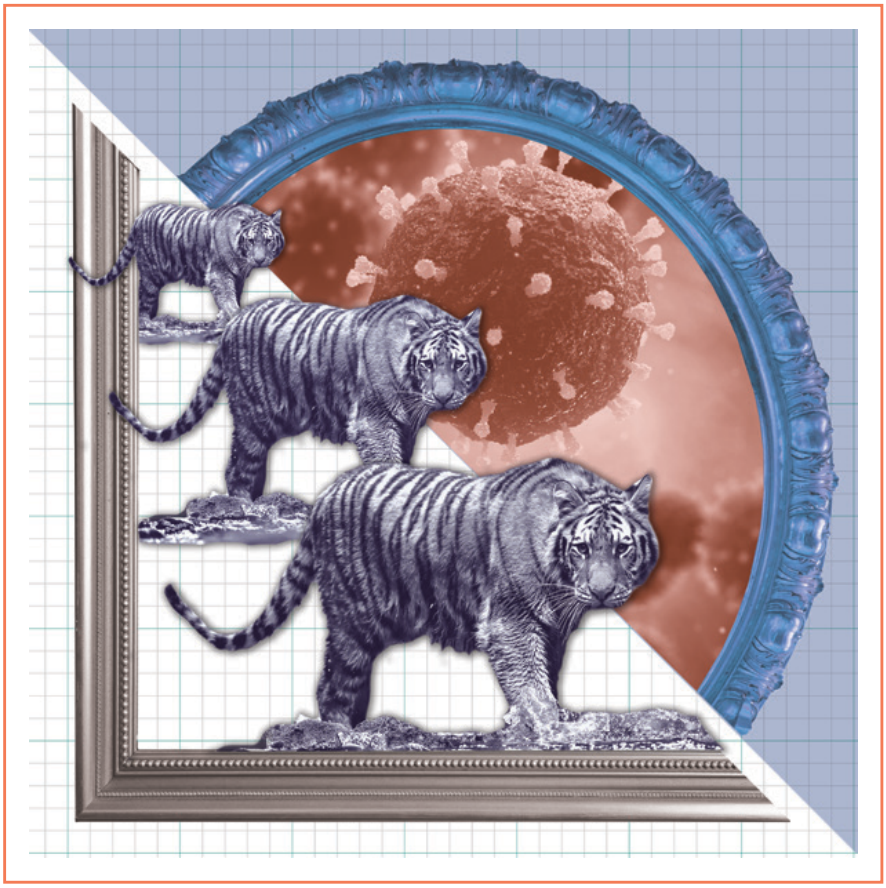
- In what ways are your brand, fundraising, and communications priming your audience to think about your organization in a certain way? How does this compare with other organizations in your sector?
- What are you doing to prime your donors in your fundraising, one-on-one meetings, and events?
- How can you use social media images and polling to prime your audience?

Priming

APPLY

- Prime your donors to be more open-minded and generous by using words related to those concepts.
- Prime your donors by asking questions. Follow a more demanding "ask" with a lower level one to make the lower level one seem more reasonable.
- Prime your audience by asking them to make public commitments to donating or volunteering.
- Prime your audience by asking them to do something. "No shows" at doctor appointments have been stemmed by asking patients to fill out appointment cards themselves rather than doing it for them. To improve attendance at events, ask people to submit questions they want answered at the event.
- Prime your audience through imagery, audio, aroma, temperature, and other senses.

Framing



Stating your message in a way that sets the context for understanding it.

You want to frame your message in a way that predisposes people to support it.

Different metaphors can frame how people think about crime. Characterizing crime as **a wild beast rampaging through the city that must be stopped** suggests that aggressive policing tactics are necessary to catch and cage it.

However, characterizing it as **a spreading virus infecting the city** implies that to bring the virus under control, it's necessary to remove the unhealthy conditions that allow it to breed and spread (such as joblessness, lack of education, and poverty).[1]

Framing **Examples**

EXAMPLE

Framing can shape how people perceive a topic. Framing the spread of false information online as **a drop in the bucket** minimizes its negative impact, versus framing it as **pollution,** which implies that a small amount can still do great harm.[2]

EXAMPLE

Reframing an issue can motivate people to act. After running a campaign called **Unite for Kids, Building Tomorrow Today School,** a school bond measure in Ohio failed three times. It was then reframed around loss aversion with the theme, **Our Kids Can't Wait**. This emphasized the limited time to do the right thing, and that kids will lose out if voters don't act now. Combined with other tactics, such as an intensive get out-the-vote strategy, the bond measure passed easily.[3]

EXAMPLE

Framing is about changing perceptions to make choices more appealing. In a school cafeteria, apples were displayed in unattractive steel bins in poorly lit areas of the lunch line. As a result, no one chose them. When they were displayed in a wire fruit rack and illuminated with a desk lamp, they appeared more attractive and sales of fruit in one school increased an astounding 54% in only two weeks. Consider whether your giving opportunities are presented in the best light.[4]

EXAMPLE

The term "sharing economy" frames services in a fair and positive way. In reality, these jobs are not full time, have no benefits or job security, and roll back workers' protections.[5]

Framing **in Action**

Framing that dovetails with people's values will be more successful.

REFLECT

- Examine the frames that already exist around your issue. Who created them? How long have they been used? What's the opposite frame?
- What frames or perspectives are your staff bringing that might color your organization's perspectives about its work?
- How can your organization shift its frames to understand and reflect the population it serves, find new approaches, or appeal to donors?

APPLY

- Frame your cause or story in a way that people can understand and relate to. For example, instead of just using amounts in isolation (such as the number of people affected by a disease), provide context, such as, "that is like everyone in New York, Chicago, and LA being infected."

- Reframing can involve inventing new words. For example, reframing "feedback" as "feedforward" shifts the emphasis from blame to a positive lesson for achieving success.

- It's often helpful to test different frames with your audience to assess perceptions and determine which resonates best before rolling them out in communications.

Loss Aversion

People tend to choose the option that will minimize loss, more than the one that maximizes gain.

Loss Aversion

Generally, losing something makes people twice as miserable as gaining the same thing makes them happy.

First identified in behavioral economics by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, loss aversion refers to people's tendency to prefer avoiding losses to acquiring equivalent gains: people prefer to not lose $5 than to find $5.

Whether a transaction is framed as a loss or as a gain is very important. Would you rather get a $5 discount or avoid a $5 surcharge? The same change in price framed differently has a significant effect on behavior.

Applied to fundraising, donors can be motivated to support a cause if offers are framed in terms of loss that they feel they can avoid.

Loss Aversion **Examples**

EXAMPLE

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund had more success with its fundraising by emphasizing threats to gorillas and their habitat rather than describing the real progress that has been made in saving gorillas.[1]

EXAMPLE

Greenpeace seeks support to save the Brazilian rainforest, which is disappearing at the rate of two football fields a minute.

EXAMPLE

The National Gallery in London seeks support to ensure a painting is not "lost" to a gallery in the U.S.[1]

EXAMPLE

The worst tax offenders are told that not paying tax means we all lose vital public services like roads.

Loss Aversion

EXAMPLE

Framing your offer around lives saved or lives lost can have a huge impact on the response. An international relief organization tested two campaigns — one using the Loss Aversion Principle. Donors were asked which program to support for a disease outbreak among 600 people.[2]

TEST 1	RESPONSE
"200 people will be saved"	67%
"1/3 probability that 600 people will be saved and 2/3 probability that 0 will be saved"	32%

TEST 2

But the same program, reframed yielded:

"400 people will die"	32%
"1/3 probability that 0 people will die" (Loss Aversion principle)	67%

Loss Aversion **in Action**

People need to know that something will be lost if they don't support you

REFLECT

- What problems is your organization addressing?
- How do you currently present what you do — in a positive or negative way?
- What would the world (or your area) look like without your organization?
- What opportunities for people would be lost without your program?
- How do you currently frame your message in your fundraising?

Loss Aversion

APPLY

- Use negative framing for your appeal — you can get a greater impact if you emphasize a potential loss.
- Describe what situations would be like without your organization's intervention, specifically, from the point of view of the people you help.
- Are your images happy or sad? Have you tested which actually get a higher response in your fundraising?
- How can you dramatize and help people visualize the loss, (such as a woman sitting in front of an empty plate, in a barren room, etc.)?
- Look for ways to reduce the perceived risk of supporting your organization, such as mentioning how long it has been around, its capable leadership, credentials, or awards.

STAGE 2
Telling Your Story

Identifiable Victim

The story of a single, identifiable victim can raise more money than statistics about multitudes in need.

People's emotions are activated when they can relate to a person.

Studies have shown that people can be moved to help a vivid and identifiable victim when they see a photograph that makes the victim "real," and feel that they can make a tangible difference in changing the victim's life.

"The death of a single Russian soldier is a tragedy. A million deaths is a statistic."
— JOSEPH STALIN

"If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will."
— MOTHER TERESA

Identifiable Victim **Examples**

EXAMPLE

A direct mail fundraising appeal tested different approaches, one using an identifiable victim.

STATISTICAL APPROACH (ABRIDGED VERSION)
Food shortages in Zambia are affecting more than 3 million children. Severe rainfall deficits have resulted in a 42% drop in maize production from 2000. As a result, an estimated 3 million Zambians face hunger.

SINGLE VICTIM APPROACH (ABRIDGED VERSION)
Any money that you donate will go to Rokia, a 7-year-old girl from Mali, Africa. Rokia is desperately poor, and faces a threat of severe hunger or even starvation. Her life will be changed for the better as a result of your financial gift.

The Single Victim approach received **$2.38**, the statistics approach received **$1.14**, while a combination approach yielded **$1.43**.[1]

Identifiable Victim

EXAMPLE

PHOTOGRAPHY: Nilüfer Demir

In spring 2011, the image of Aylan Kurdi, a 3-year-old boy who had washed up on the coast of Turkey, captivated the world and finally called attention to the staggering number of deaths in Syria that three years of news coverage couldn't do.[2]

EXAMPLE

Animals can also be identifiable victims. In 2002, donors contributed $50,000 to pay for a mid-Pacific rescue of Forgea, a dog that had been mistakenly abandoned on a tanker.[3]

Identifiable Victim **in Action**

Emphasize the most immediate need and impact, focusing on a single person rather than a mass of people.

REFLECT

- What aspects of your organization can you bring to life to help donors identify with your mission?
- What would life be like without your organization?
- Shift your perspective and see things through the lens of the people you serve. What else can speak for them (for example, what would their house say if it housed a happy family rather than one that argues all the time)?

Identifiable Victim

APPLY

- Consider the in-group vs. out-group dynamic. People are more likely to identify with people similar to them and will support causes that are closer to them (physically and psychically). Craft your message to bridge the mental distance between your organization and supporters.

- Find interesting ways to help your donors identify with the people you are trying to help:

The Asthma Society asked donors to breathe through a straw to demonstrate how hard it is to cope with asthma.

A museum sent prospects a nail with an appeal asking for help in securing artwork to hang on the walls.

A film institute gave supporters a piece of crumbling nitrate with a film clip to show the need for preservation.

Metaphor

Using the right metaphor has the power to transfer associations and positively influence behavior.

Metaphors are powerful tools for helping people understand complex concepts and motivate donors.

Metaphors work by comparing something difficult to understand with something that is already understood.

When computers first came out, it was difficult to understand how they functioned. Comparing them to a human brain provided the context to understand them. Language was used to compare computers to human brain functions — inputs (our senses), processing power (our executive functions), storage (our memory).

Nonprofits can use metaphors to convey the complex work that they do, describe their impact, and appeal to donors' emotions.

Metaphor **Examples**

EXAMPLE

Fulfilling interactions have been described as **filling your bucket.** Did someone "fill your bucket" of emotions by making you feel more positive? Or did that person "dip from your bucket," leaving you more negative than before? This metaphor has been used widely in many books and tools to foster greater self-awareness and more positive behavior and appreciation.

EXAMPLE

The metaphors of light and heat are used to describe different means of pursuing social change.

Light-based approaches emphasize educating and respecting the people you're trying to influence.

Heat-based approaches may use discomfort to force change through protest or civil disobedience.

EXAMPLE

The Civil Rights movement is guided by many metaphors. "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice," is a primary one.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was filled with metaphors beyond the main dream:

> "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred."

> "I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice."

> "With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

Metaphor **in Action**

What's the right metaphor for your organization or appeal?

REFLECT

- What metaphors are used by your organization and your sector? Are these useful?

In the human services field, the metaphor of a safety net is widely used. But that implies last-ditch efforts to help people when all else fails, and that's not what many organizations do. Metaphors that emphasize a message of empowerment and self-sufficiency might be more accurate and more compelling to donors.

APPLY

- Use metaphors that tap into your donors' values and perspective on the world so that they resonate on a deep level.
- Use metaphors to bring your appeals to life: "I'm drowning in a sea of grief." "His words cut deeper than a knife." "Hope is on the horizon."

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

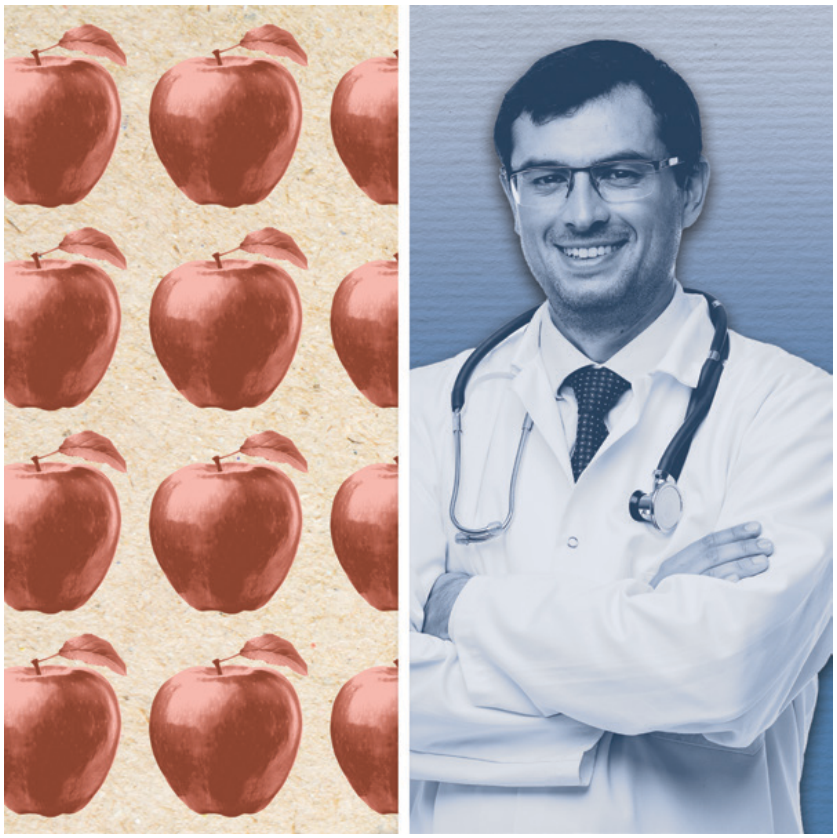
— LAO TZU

"You may get to the very top of the ladder, and then find it has not been leaning against the right wall."

— ALLEN RAINE

STAGE 2
Telling Your Story

Rhyming



Using rhymes enhances persuasion and recall, which can affect behavior.

Effective rhymes can make your fundraising campaign resonate.

Rhymes play upon two behavioral concepts — fluency and recall. Fluency means that messages are easier to understand and are more believable. Recall is the ability to remember messages. In an environment in which people are bombarded by messages, using rhymes that aid in fluency and recall can help organizations increase the likability and effectiveness of its messages.

"Rhyme is an attempt to reassemble and reaffirm the possibility of paradise. There is a wholeness, a serenity, in sounds coupling to form a memory."

— DEREK WALCOTT

Rhyming **Examples**

EXAMPLE

SOCIAL ISSUES

"Loose lips sink ships."
"Click it or ticket." (seat belt enforcement)
"An apple a day keeps the doctor away."
"Don't do the crime if you can't do the time."
"Bullies are thugs that need hugs."
"We need laps, more than apps."[1]
"If she can see it, she can be it."[2]

ADVERTISING

"Gillette. The Best A Man Can Get."
"The best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup!"

OTHER

"No pain, no gain."
"Birds of a feather flock together."
"A friend in need is a friend indeed."
"If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit."

EXAMPLE

“Fill up the truck, build up the town.”

In a small town in Eastern North Carolina with few stores, many residents drive 80-miles to the nearest mall located in another county to do their holiday shopping, causing the town to lose out on sales tax.

Aware they can’t compete with the larger market’s shopping mall, city council members embrace that fact, but start a campaign to get sales tax revenue by encouraging residents to fuel up their vehicles before they leave town. They call the campaign: “Fill up the truck, build up the town.”

During the first year of the campaign, the rural community experienced an average **8% increase** in gas tax revenue between the months of January and October, and a **14% increase** during November and December.[3]

Rhyming **in Action**

Use rhymes to create memorable messages for your donors.

REFLECT

- Are rhymes currently used by your organization or in your sector?
- Which rhyming phrases would encourage your audience to think about your organization's mission?
- How would you use a rhyming phrase for your campaign?

Rhyming

APPLY

- Create rhyming fundraising campaigns or taglines that can be understood by all audience members.
- Reduce time and find rhyming words with ease by using an online rhyming thesaurus.
- Use rhymes to create an emotional connection with your donors by appealing to their values.
- Avoid rhymes for the sake of rhyming — they need to make sense. A restaurant, Eat the Street, features street food from Thailand, but the message is not very appetizing.

Scarcity

Limiting availability can increase desirability.

We tend to want what we can't have.

Scarcity plays a major role in persuasion. Scarcity suggests that things are more valuable when they are less available. Scarcity can mean a limited set of choices or it can mean limited time. Nonprofits can use scarcity to increase the effectiveness of their fundraising appeals by highlighting either of those.

"Nothing creates cool like scarcity."

— NEIL BLUMENTHAL

Scarcity **Examples**

EXAMPLE

A domestic pet rescue organization in Texas hosted a small, intimate dinner each month with a limit of 15 participants. The invitations were printed on linen paper and personalized for each recipient. The invitation stated, "space is extremely limited, we have fewer than 10 seats remaining." The limited availability of seating made the event more desirable due to the fear of missing out.

Prior to using the Scarcity Principle, the charity sold an average of 80% of the seating capacity. Following the implementation of the Scarcity Principle, the charity sold 100% and had an average waitlist of six seats per dinner.[1]

EXAMPLE

A charity in Wyoming whose mission is to protect North American bison shows the dwindling number of wild bison remaining in order to increase awareness and gain support from their audience. Charts show the number of living bison by state, county, date, and gender. The visual representation creates a sense of urgency to act because of the small number of bison compared to the population in 1919.[2]

EXAMPLE

When a pet rescue advertises their animals for adoption, they include the average time an animal is housed at the shelter from first advertisement to adoption. This shows how quickly the animals are adopted and motivates people who want an animal to act fast.[3]

Scarcity **in Action**

Highlight limited availability or time to motivate donors.

REFLECT

- What is genuinely rare, unique, or limited about your mission or services?
- What are three items you could offer your donors that are limited, rare, and desired?
- How could you visually represent limited quantities or availability?
- How could you keep the amounts updated and accurate to enhance the donor experience?

APPLY

- The phrases "limited time" and "limited availability" are persuasive because people are motivated by a fear of loss or missing out.
- Donors are likely to contribute more time, money, and resources when there is a short amount of time available to make a decision.
- For one-on-one donor exchanges, emphasize the personal nature of the relationship, that you are reaching out to that person because you believe they can help in a specific, time-limited way, with an offer that is unique to them.
- Ethics matter. If you mention there are five of something remaining, be truthful about it.

Choice

People have a difficult time making a decision when faced with many options.

Limiting your giving options can help donors make a decision and subsequently increase donations.

The psychological effect of choice overload or decision fatigue is that people can only process a limited number of choices at a time. In this respect, three is a persuasive number.

If you are told two reasons why cake is delicious then, cognitively, you will be waiting for the third reason. If you are told four reasons why cake is delicious, you are likely to experience choice overload.

Nonprofits need to be aware of how the number of giving opportunities they offer can affect their donors' decision-making.

Choice **Examples**

EXAMPLE

The more choices offered, the less likely employees are to enroll in retirement programs. When **two** retirement fund options were offered, the fund participation was **75%.** When **59** funds were offered, participation dropped to **60%**.[1]

EXAMPLE

In a famous study of consumer choice, when people were presented with **24 flavors** of jams, **3%** made purchases. When the choice was reduced to only **six flavors**, the number of people making purchases increased to **30%**.[2]

EXAMPLE

When Head & Shoulders reduced the number of its products from **26** to **15**, simplifying consumer choice, sales increased **10%**.[3]

EXAMPLE

During an annual fundraising event, a nonprofit improved its fundraising results by reducing donation choices. One year, **six** donation options were offered and **15%** of the 114 attendees donated. The following year, **three** options were offered and **37%** of the 131 attendees donated.[4]

EXAMPLE

Some nonprofits have increased donations by offering only one gift amount on online donation forms, and limiting or eliminating other buttons that allow donors to click away from the donation form.

"Paralysis is a consequence of having too many choices"

— BARRY SCHWARTZ

Choice **in Action**

Reduce options to facilitate your donors' decision-making.

REFLECT

- How many choices does your organization offer to its donors? How were these choices determined? Were they tested against fewer choices?
- How do the donation choices on your direct mail and email differ? What works best in each of these channels?
- How do you frame and present your giving options?

APPLY

- Behavioral science research suggests providing audiences with three options. The most desirable option should be presented as the middle option when written, and presented as the final option when spoken.
- In crafting the choice architecture for your donors, consider the starting amounts, and frame your gift array choices around anchors that lift their average donation amounts.
- Test a different number of gift options on donation pages and reply cards.
- Consider using the Set Completion Principle in crafting your choices.

Set Completion

People have a desire to complete a set.

Set Completion

People will opt for one “set” rather than individual items. You can create sets for your donation opportunities to take advantage of this principle.

Collecting things is a human behavior — whether acquiring stamps, coins, dolls, baseball cards, and other collectibles. But there’s an even stronger desire to get all the items in a category. This provides a sense of accomplishment that acquiring individual items does not.

Businesses frequently take advantage of this by bundling products together into sets at a slight price advantage over purchasing the same items separately. Nonprofits can do the same thing with their donation levels to increase their average gift size.

Set Completion **Examples**

EXAMPLE

In an experiment for a school fundraiser, offering donors the option to sponsor sets of textbooks raised more money than sponsoring individual books:[1]

Imagine that you've been asked to donate money to a local school's book fundraiser. The school is updating its existing textbook inventory for the entire fourth grade.

GROUP A

Each textbook costs $5 and you can donate up to 5 for a total of $25.

- ☐ 1 textbook ($5)
- ☐ 2 textbooks ($10)
- ☐ 3 textbooks ($15)
- ☐ 4 textbooks ($20)
- ☐ 5 textbooks ($25)
- ☐ I would not donate

22% increase

GROUP B

Each set of textbooks costs $25 and there are 5 textbooks in every set.

- ☐ 20% of one set ($5)
- ☐ 40% of one set ($10)
- ☐ 60% of one set ($15)
- ☐ 80% of one set ($20)
- ☐ One whole set ($25)
- ☐ I would not donate

38% increase

Set Completion

EXAMPLE

In this case, a nonprofit tested the Set Completion Principle by encouraging its supporters to write sets of four cards to seniors in a nursing home.[2]

We will send roughly 200 cards to each nursing home. Each senior will receive one card.

GROUP A

Thanks!
You have completed ONE card.

Would you like to write another?
☐ Yes ☐ No

GROUP B

Within each package, we are batching the cards in sets of 4.

Thanks!
You have completed 25% of one batch of cards. 

Would you like to write another?
☐ Yes ☐ No

% completing full set (4 cards):

GROUP A: 4.3%

GROUP B: 39.8%

Set Completion **in Action**

Motivate donors by encouraging them to support complete sets.

REFLECT

- What are the naturally occurring or possible sets in your work? For example:
  - helping a family (rather than individual)
  - delivering meals to all tenants in a building
  - providing all the benches for a park
  - purchasing all the books for a classroom

- How can you use these to create incentives for donors to support entire sets?

Set Completion

APPLY

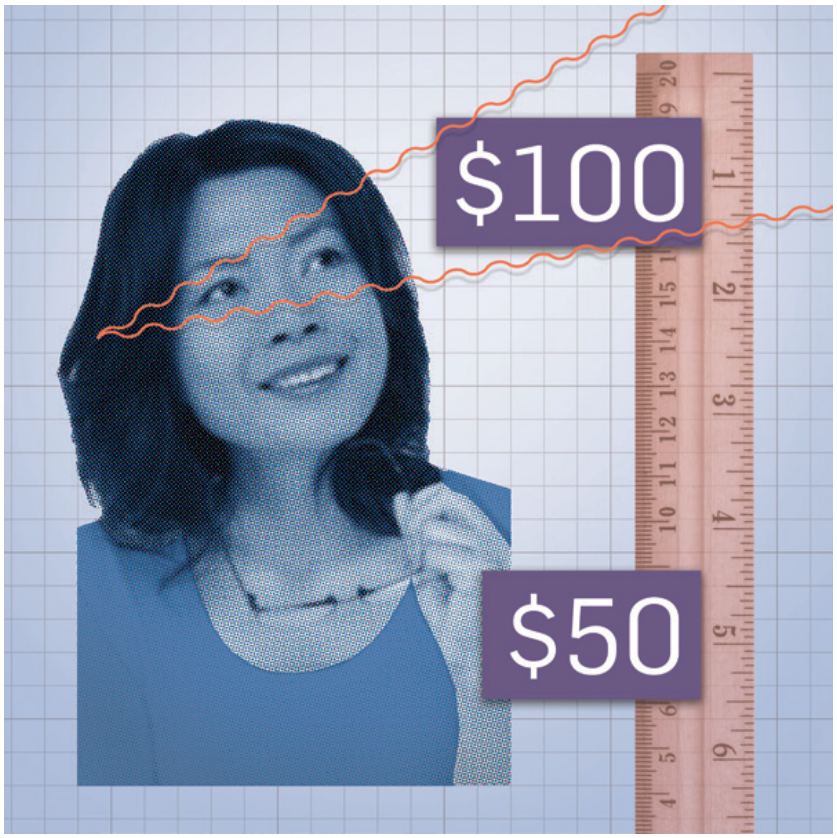
- How can you use time as a set? For example, by "rewarding" donors who make a donation in all 12 months in the year or those who "check in" on social media every Friday in the month of May.

- How can you use events as a set? For example, by incentivizing the purchase of tickets for all three events in a series or structuring live events to reward people who bid on at least one auction item on each of five tables.

- Motivate donors, volunteers, and others by pointing out the steps already taken and emphasizing how close they are to completion. This can be through tangible reminders, such as loyalty punch cards or through progress bars on online donation forms.

STAGE 3
Crafting Your Offer

Anchoring



Orienting someone around a high or low number can affect their perception of the price or value.

Anchoring

Anchoring ties someone to a piece of information — the anchor — that influences how they make a decision.

In decision-making (such as determining how much to donate), Anchoring occurs when people use an initial set of information (such as donation levels) to make subsequent judgments (how much to donate).

People make decisions based on the numbers in front of them, rather than starting from scratch, and so they become oriented around those anchors. Anchors are widely used in sales and marketing and can be employed by fundraisers to increase donation levels.

Anchoring **Examples**

EXAMPLE

Markita Andrews used anchoring very effectively to set records in selling Girl Scout cookies. She knocked on doors and asked for a donation of $30,000 (a very high anchor). Naturally, the homeowner said, "No," and then Markita said, "Then please buy a box of cookies and pay what you can."

Over 12 years, she sold $80,000 worth of cookies. In 1985, she sold 11,000 boxes in one year. Anchoring someone around a high number (however unrealistic it may be) helps make another offer more palatable.[1]

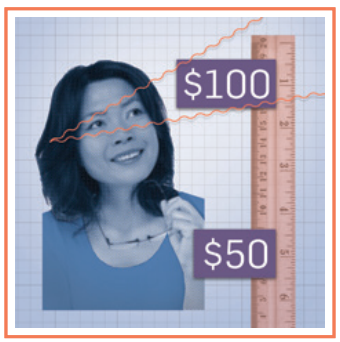
Anchoring

EXAMPLE

A museum tested the Anchoring Principle on three groups of visitors. As they entered the museum, each group was asked to make a donation in a different way. Those who were anchored with a low number (Group 2) gave less than those who had no anchor (Group 1). Those who were anchored to a high number (Group 3), gave more.[2]

	AVG AMT.
GROUP 1: "Would you be willing to donate to save 50,000 offshore Pacific Coast seabirds from small offshore oil spills?"	$64
GROUP 2: "Would you be willing to pay **$5** to save 50,000 offshore Pacific Coast seabirds from small offshore oil spills?"	$20
GROUP 3: "Would you be willing to pay **$400** to save 50,000 offshore Pacific Coast seabirds from small offshore oil spills?"	**$143**

Anchoring **in Action**



Anchors can be used in many ways, from donation levels to expectations about outcomes.

REFLECT

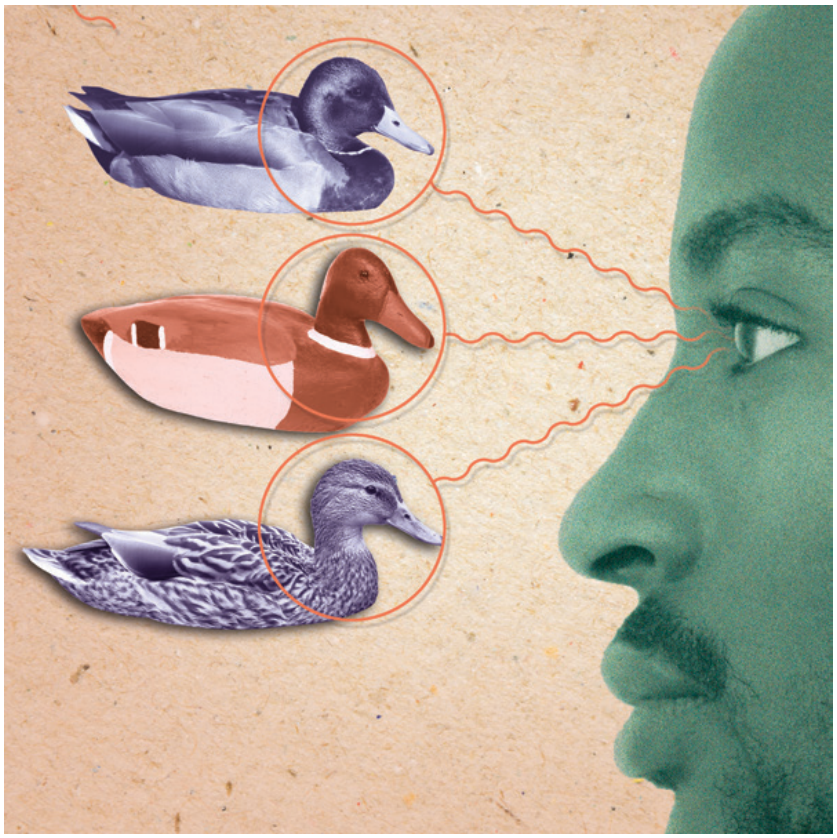
- What are the current anchors that you use for your donation levels?
- Which donor levels have pulled the largest amounts of donations?
- Which projects best convey your organization's overall impact and how do these reflect your average gift or higher gift levels?
- What are your prospect's current anchors based on their profession, income, lifestyle, etc.?

Anchoring

APPLY

- On your donation response card, start your giving options at an amount slightly higher than your average donors' gift.
- If you have a database of each donor's giving history, then edge them up, by asking $25 donors to support you at $50 level this year.
- Create giving levels that allow your donors to easily increase their gifts in a category, for example, feeding more people, rather than choosing between feeding people and education.
- Organize donor seating at events around their level of giving.
- Prime guests at your event by mentioning large giving opportunities and publicly recognizing large donations.

Decoy Effect



A third option can change the perceived value of two other options.

Decoy Effect

Because we make decisions by comparing choices that are in front of us, decoy options can influence our decisions.

Behavioral economic theory suggests we make decisions hastily based on emotion and by context, such as other available choices. The Decoy Effect describes what happens when choosing between two options, and a third choice is added.

Williams Sonoma had two breadmakers, but increased sales by adding a third, higher-priced option. People then bought the middle-priced option (which used to be the higher-priced and less purchased of the two).

When it comes to setting your gift levels, you can use the Decoy Effect to make your higher-level options look more desirable.

Decoy Effect **Examples**

EXAMPLE

In this classic example of the Decoy Effect, *The Economist* magazine ran a test of two offers in which the less expensive option was the most-selected option. They then offered a third subscription choice that helped increase total revenue by making the higher-priced option look like a better deal.[1]

TEST 1	**SELECTED**
Online subscription for $59	68%
Online and print subscription for $125	32%
Total revenue:	**$8,012**

TEST 2	
Online subscription for $59	16%
Print subscription for $125	0
Online and print subscription for $125	84%
Total revenue:	**$11,444**

Decoy Effect

EXAMPLE

An art museum with two membership levels found nearly five times as many people selecting the lower level. Then they introduced a third membership category as a decoy. In Test 2, offering the lower-priced Magritte Club helped people consider (and select) the other options and increased total revenue.[2]

TEST 1	SELECTED
Picasso Club: $2,500	8
Mondrian Club: $1,000	42
Total revenue:	**$62,000**

TEST 2	
Picasso Club: $2,500	17
Mondrian Club: $1,000	28
Magritte Club: $750	6
Total revenue:	**$74,250**

Decoy Effect **in Action**

Frame your gift options to make higher-level gifts more attractive.

REFLECT

- Consider how gift options are perceived by your donors. Which one seems like the best value to your donors?
- Are lower-level gift options inadvertently being used as Decoys and shifting people away from higher-level gifts?

Decoy Effect

APPLY

- Run a test with two offerings. It's likely the lower-priced one will prevail. Now introduce a third option to frame the other two as more worthwhile.
- The Decoy Effect can be used for events as well, for example, with high-priced decoys among your auction items, or offering tickets for meal only, drinks only, and meal and drinks.
- Think of new offerings beyond what you currently have in order to take advantage of the Decoy Effect.

STAGE 4

Determining Your Delivery

Credible Messenger

The best person to deliver your message is the one who is most believed by the recipient.

Deliver your message through someone your donors trust.

Typically, nonprofits appeal to donors with solicitation letters written by someone from the organization. But is that person the most credible and convincing one? Consider who else might be effective in motivating your donors to give.

People are more likely to believe their peers or others who have experienced a service, which is why social media, Yelp, and other ratings are so powerful.

Nonprofits use this concept in peer-to-peer fundraising, but neglect it when it comes to direct appeals. Fundraising letters from people donors can relate to in some way can be more effective in raising money.

Credible Messenger **Examples**

EXAMPLE

Many organizations use celebrities to appeal to their donors. But these can be perceived as removed from the organization's mission. In contrast, for 35 years President Jimmy Carter and his wife have worked alongside volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, helping build, renovate, or repair homes, garnering respect from donors as celebrities who "walk the talk."[1]

EXAMPLE

To appeal to donors, an organization that runs a music program in inner-city schools included handwritten thank-you notes from students with each solicitation letter. While the list was very small, the appeal elicited a 100% response rate.[2]

EXAMPLE

How do you appeal to youth who are at-risk for involvement in the criminal justice system? It's not through probation officers. The Credible Messenger Justice Center in New York City trains ex-convicts who have transformed their lives to be mentors for these youth, sharing their experiences in a way that youth can relate to since they share a similar background, culture, and language.[3]

EXAMPLE

In a similar vein, the Commonwealth of Virginia wanted to prepare foster youth for the life they faced after they aged out of the foster care system. Instead of having the message come from authority figures in the foster system (who are not highly regarded by these youth), videos from youth who had aged out were used to deliver the message.[4]

Credible Messenger **in Action**

Consider who the best person is to deliver your message.

REFLECT

- Who typically signs your letters? Is this the best person to do so to engage your donors?
- Who are the key influencers for your donors? Who do they follow? Who do they respect? The more you know about your audience, their interests, and lifestyles, the more you can appeal to their interests.
- Conduct prospect research to uncover information about your donors that you can use to determine who their influencers might be.

Credible Messenger

APPLY

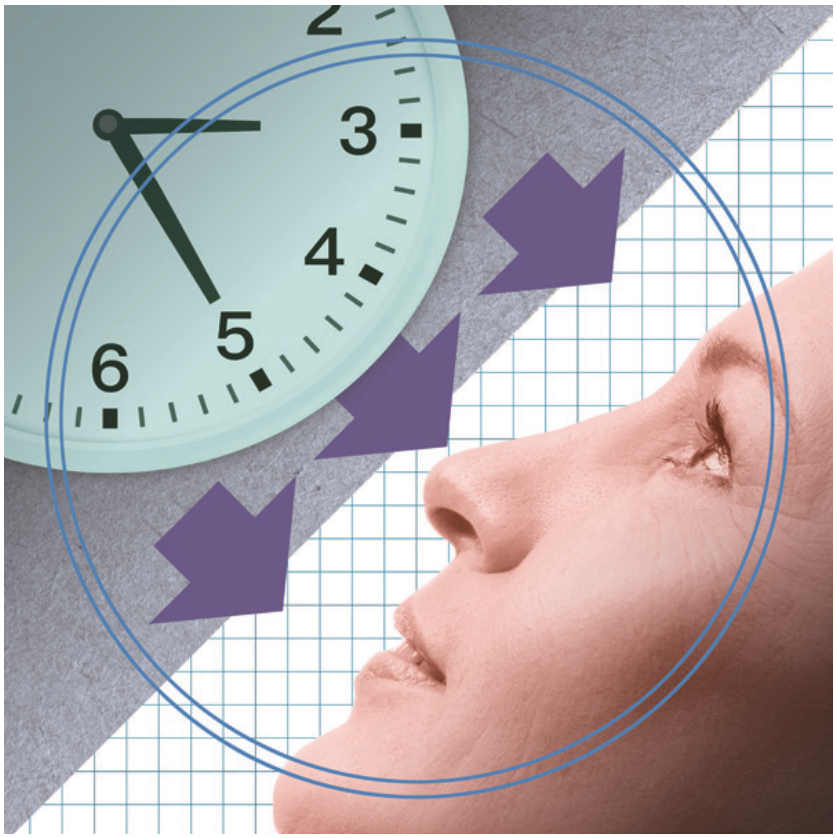
- Have someone who has influence with your donors write (or sign) the letter or email on behalf of your agency. Consider a local hero or celebrity, business, community, or civic leader.

- Use a letter written by people your organization has helped — they can vividly describe how their lives were transformed. Or have their parents, children, or siblings write it.

- For high-net worth individuals, business leaders (particularly in their sector), might have great influence. Financial advisors might also. Consider getting their endorsement or having a letter signed by them.

- Use a photo of your "credible messenger" including their work, home, or other environment, if that is something your donors will recognize, respect, or respond to.

Time Pressure



Deadlines and urgency are highly motivating.

Time Pressure can create a sense of urgency in fundraising.

Time Pressure is a type of psychological stress that occurs when a person has less time available (real or perceived) than is needed to complete a task or obtain a result. When donors feel Time Pressure, they narrow their focus, doing less research before contributing to an organization.

A popular and effective use of Time Pressure is in the checkout line. No clock or timer is counting down the time your transaction takes but you feel time pressure from all those people in line behind you. The employee asks, "Your total is $67.28. Do you want to round up to $68 to contribute to hurricane relief?" Knowing everyone wants the line to move, you say," yes," and donate 72 cents.

Time Pressure **Examples**

EXAMPLE

Low Time Pressure: You care about climate change and want to take action to save polar bears. While at home, you conduct research, carefully comparing organizations. You consider whether the charities are local, reputable, how they address the situation, and what their results have been. You read reviews. You spend as much time as you feel necessary, and then make a contribution that you feel is appropriate.

High Time Pressure: Now let's say you're at a charity dinner. The cause: saving the polar bears. During the auction, others are bidding on an item you and your spouse want so you can't take the time to calculate the actual value of the item. You have mere seconds to make a decision. In the thrill of the moment, you lift your paddle and make a bid, most likely paying more than you would have with more time to research it.

Time Pressure

EXAMPLE

Time Pressure can influence how donors respond to your offer. During a nonprofit's annual gala, potential donors were told they have **60 minutes** to complete their donations and **31%** of attendees made a donation. During the following year's annual gala, potential donors were told they have **10 minutes** to complete their donations and **67%** of attendees donated.[1]

"The ultimate inspiration is the deadline."
— NOLAN BUSHNELL

"The time is always right to do what is right."
— MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Time Pressure **in Action**

Explore the many ways you can create urgency for your donors.

REFLECT

- Does your organization have seasons, semesters, or other timing factors that can be used to create deadlines for giving opportunities?
- How accustomed are your donors to time pressure? Are they "goal oriented" people who might respond favorably, or "free spirits" who might respond negatively?
- How could you increase the perceived Time Pressure? What are three methods of applying Time Pressure to your next fundraising event?

Time Pressure

APPLY

- Create deadlines and urgency that map naturally with the timing of your progams.
- High Time Pressure should be taxing, yet, attainable. All calls-to-action with time pressure should give the donor sufficient time to complete the desired task.
- When using time pressure, reduce the number of choices a donor has to make.
- If applicable, share the reason for the deadline. People are more likely to act when they understand the purpose of an action.
- For online giving, experiment using a timer to urge donors to complete online donation forms. You can test whether urgency reduces the number of people leaving a donation form without completing it.