**HOW TO GET DONORS TO GIVE**

While Give A Billion is NOT a grant-awarding charity, one of the things we are currently asked about frequently, is how individuals and people can get hold of **money** towards their specific need, group, project or programme. In our FAQ section, we suggest they use the power of the internet and appropriate search terms, to RESEARCH suitable potential donor organisations. However, even if you FIND such an organisation, they will almost certainly have some kind of Application Process you will need to follow, before they part with any funds. Money can be hard to come by, wherever you live – and getting donors to part with it can sometimes seem harder still. So we have suggested a list of STEPS you might wish to take, which may help INCREASE your chances of success in applying for donor funds. They are NOT A SUBSTITUTE for following the relevant organisation’s formal Application Process, but they may help you THINK ABOUT how to approach YOUR Application.

1. Before asking others for money, or other forms of assistance, there are some basic things to do first, long before the financial request. So don’t let your request for money become your FIRST request. The first thing you want is INFORMATION. You want to discover as much as you can about the organisation, WHAT it aims to do and HOW it aims to do it. The most important kind of information relates to a MATCHING of goals, objectives, values and beliefs. It also really helps if you can match LANGUAGE. Communication will always be required throughout any Application Process and it helps if you can understand what each other is saying, without having to use Google Translate for every email.
2. CREDIBILITY: The internet is a wonderful thing, but it has unearthed a mass of scammers and con-artists. You may NOT be one of them, but donors don’t know that – yet. Convincing any money-giving organisation that you are GENUINE, takes time. Trust is a journey and it is usually undertaken in SMALLER steps to begin with. We believe you will build credibility by NOT asking for money initially, but wanting to UNDERSTAND the donor organisation. That will often include going far BEYOND the web site itself. The web site is what EVERYONE can see. You are after the sort of privileged information only a few ever get to see – because they just don’t ask, or they ask the wrong way. If you were hunting a particular wild animal, you would take time to learn its habits and behaviours, right? Give at least as MUCH thought to how you would capture a large grant as you would to capturing a tiger with your bare hands. If that seems too much like hard work for you, then by all means try a better way that you can think of.
3. PEOPLE BUY FROM PEOPLE: Think of your hope for a donation like a **planned** sales campaign – or a form of **romancing**, if that metaphor works better for you. Multiple steps need to be taken to increase your chances of success at each STAGE of the developing relationship. Sales people think of it as **de-risking** the final outcome. The final outcome should not be a surprise, if you have done your preparation work well. You don’t just throw yourself at the object of your affections and expect them to say “yes” to marriage the first time you ask - do you? If so, perhaps romantic customs are a little different in your country!
4. You should be seeking outcomes where BOTH parties complete the transaction, happy to engage in other similar transactions in future. If you want money, what is it they want in return? They should not have to beg you – you should VOLUNTEER it. Think of all the things YOU might want from someone you were giving your OWN money to. Some donor organisations have strict governance controls which mean they HAVE to show what money is being spent on, down to the last penny. So, you should be ready to produce accounts, legal documentation, research material, letters from relevant Government officials, bank account statements, reports, invoices, spreadsheets and so on. These are the things that donor organisations run on. If you cannot produce them, you cannot expect to get funding. Relationship is NOT enough on its own. Relationship is just the BRIDGE. All the necessary supporting paperwork is the TRAFFIC across the bridge. The bridge exists to support the traffic. If there was no bridge, there would be no point in sending traffic across. But relationship is NOT a substitute for “transparency” and paperwork – it is the BASIS for it.
5. Consider first, if YOU had the kind of money you are asking for sitting in your OWN hands (and I mean the exact amount you are asking for), is this how YOU would spend it? If not, what makes you think that the DONOR will want to spend it YOUR way, rather than any OTHER way. Those with money have PLENTY of choices about HOW to spend it. What makes your cause SO special? If you can’t yet answer that question, you are still at the “information-gathering” stage.
6. WHY NOW? Consider that there will always be many other options for the donor, including the “do-nothing” and “do later” options.
7. BEST-FIT: Does your specific request fit into what you KNOW that donor, individual or organisation has made their TOP priority? If not, your own requests may be beaten to the money by a better-fit alternative. Think about what you can do to ADAPT your requests to best fit their donor’s stated priorities.
8. How does what you are requesting MATCH what their goals & objectives are, or how does it help them fulfil them at all? Next, consider how your project does it relatively BETTER than other alternatives. If you are to divert this chunk of funding from all the OTHER good causes and wonderful outcomes out there, it needs to be for better reasons than you, or those you care about, benefitting. In most cases, the Donors will not know you personally & will understandably not care about the exact same people you care about, to the DEGREE that you do. How could they? If you are ONLY seeking to do good for those who already do good to you, what reward do you expect?
9. Get yourself & the donor thinking primarily about the aiming points of OUTCOMES & IMPACTS, rather than actions & activities along the way. In selling, these are called “win results”. They are not ‘things’, they are future event results, with compelling emotional energy. What are you seeking to achieve at the END of it all & how will you measure that? For example, you do not wish to build a SCHOOL, but you wish to ensure that 10,000 children will have been educated to national standard levels, who otherwise would not be, over the next 25 years – perhaps the typical life expectancy of the school itself.
10. Demonstrate you are aware of comparable projects locally, or nationally, that you are measuring yourself against. How much did they cost? Why is there a specific need for YOU to spend money on a school, when the Government itself should normally make this its own priority? Will the Government match funding in any way?
11. How confident can any donor be that you have managed those kinds of projects & those sums of money before? What can you provide the potential donor with to increase their level of confidence and comfort that the money and the project is ‘in safe hands’?
12. Why spend US$250k (for example) on a school, or US$500k on a hospital, when many people in your area do not even have clean water, or sufficient food? It will usually be a more persuasive message to demonstrate how the proposed project can be adapted to address MULTIPLE aspects of the 7 dimensions of poverty (water, food, clothing, shelter etc).
13. How could costs and risks be mitigated? How could the entire vision for the project be broken down into lower-risk stages? This way, the donor can invest a little at a time & be confident in satisfactory progress at each stage, before progressing into the next stage. It may increase time & costs overall, but such an approach is potentially MORE likely to succeed in gaining donor support.
14. OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY – KEY CONSIDERATIONS & QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:
    1. Perhaps offer at least TWO alternative investment models, where you start with one room and build out, versus the ‘all-at-once’ alternative – and allow the donor to CHOOSE between them.
    2. Has the land (or other starting materials) been legally purchased?
    3. Who will maintain the [school] & where will THOSE ongoing funds come from?
    4. What have the community done BEFORE now, to demonstrate that they can be entrusted with this kind of asset, rather than letting it fall into disrepair?
    5. How safe will it be for all concerned?
    6. Is it vulnerable to attack/loss/damage?
    7. Why isn’t the Government building a [school] there, if there is such a clear need?
    8. Who will OWN the [school], once built?
    9. Does the community OWN any other communal property, or buildings & can it demonstrate a good track record of looking after them?
    10. Who will the contracts to build the school go to? How can you trust their prices?
    11. Who will pay if the project costs more than expected?
    12. Can you build and use one tenth of the [project] at a time. In Afghanistan & Pakistan for example, schools have been built by the local community at a cost of around US$25k each. How does your project compare?
    13. If the Government is not building the school, how can you be sure it will be built to adequate standards?
    14. How can you be sure that those doing the building work will actually complete it & what will you do if they don’t, having taken some or all of the money for the job?
    15. Will you buy the materials separate from the labour? Are there any suitable local labourers within the local community? Could their skills be provided for free, in return for the opportunity to send their own child to the school?
    16. Who will get the income from the [school] after it is built, from all the [school] fees?
    17. Who benefits if it makes a PROFIT & who bears the costs if it goes into a LOSS?
    18. Would the money not be better invested in a community project, which took US$25k and built up a business venture, to make a $250k return after 5 years? That way, you could demonstrate to any investor that the community knows how to successfully run a project together & handle money together. And if you want to demonstrate that you can achieve a tenfold return in 5 years, the best way to do that is to show where you have done it before.
    19. What sacrificial INVESTMENT will the community contribute to the project, to ensure they have ‘skin in the game’?
    20. Could there be a 3 way partnership between Government, the community contributions and an NGO, or MULTIPLE NGO’s? That way, the NGO risk is only around one third of the total funding, but they can reasonably claim (to their own supporters) 100% of the “impact”, as their funding was the seed funding, that was the difference that made the difference. Similarly, the Government can make its claims to be supporting the new project, while the Community will also recognise the difference its own contributions have made. The Community will always typically be the BIGGEST beneficiary among ALL the partners.
    21. Are there clear examples of where the Community have run building projects before, possibly through local faith groups, or a previous partnership with Government? The best way to demonstrate this is with open, transparent accounts for that project or group, or reference to an existing accountant within the community for this purpose.
    22. Are there signs that the Community is growing in wealth & will be able to sustain such a project?
    23. How much money will be saved by the Community not having to pay [school or transport] fees? How will your project CHANGE commercial considerations for the local Community? What money will be saved – and so available to spend on the costs of the project itself?
    24. Are there organisations in your area that can demonstrate experience of running [schools] successfully?
    25. Can you produce a project document that assesses risks & mitigating strategies of your proposed project?
15. If you have gathered all the relevant information in response to the above questions into a single document, or document pack, the entire project idea can then be pitched to multiple NGO’s who might WANT to participate, fully or partially as one of a group. This approach requires some ‘pre-selling’ of the idea to BOTH the relevant Government department(s) & the Community. If you do not have those 2 key stakeholders backing the project, donors are likely to see far too much risk is ALL being carried just by them. They are then likely to invest their funds in far less risky alternatives, being proposed by OTHER applicants just like you, who have simply managed to gather MORE local support.
16. All these things can be done AHEAD of asking any NGO for money. You can ask Government representative “IF we can do this, WILL you do that”. You can also ask the community IF they would be willing to raise (for example) a third of the money. If the Community response is “NO”, then there is far less chance that any NGO or Government department will prioritise YOUR case, above many others that they may have to consider. LOTS of Communities around the world would be DELIGHTED to have someone build a [school] completely FREE in their Community – and some may be even more desperate than you. So consider carefully what YOU can do to make your proposal the most appealing & WORTHY of prioritising.
17. One example may be that a local faith group would agree to SELL its own premises and use the money to contribute towards the school, in exchange for being able to use the school premises on certain days & times for its own functions. There could be pledges from local successful business people, all keen to demonstrate their support. It could be commitments from contractors, or suppliers of raw materials. It could be letters of approval from Government officials. All these offers of potential support will help your case – but still not GUARANTEE it.
18. Be aware that some NGOs may not be able to build [schools], but will build a clinic, a well etc. The challenge is to build a ‘coalition of the willing’, rather than a lone ‘white night’ rescuer to do it all alone.
19. Remember to build up towards increased confidence in STAGES, so that it does not ALL depend on a single investment from a single donor bearing ALL the risk & VERY LITTLE reward. Start with small commitments and mini-projects now. Selling people on the idea: “If I…will you…?” costs very little. This approach gives you a good MEASURE of whether you are likely to have the SUPPORT you will need. If you cannot gather together the support you need from your OWN Community, then it is not so surprising if you don’t get the support you want from an NGO building a [school] for THAT kind of Community, versus OTHER Communities where the level of local support and commitment is DEMONSTRABLY greater. The Community ITSELF needs to earn the respect and trust of the donors and/or investors. Trust is built GRADUALLY, by delivering on one promise at a time.
20. Even in a 3-way agreement, ONE party needs to OWN the asset. So a local specialist lawyer’s guidance is required, unless the Government has a clear legal precedent, or is willing to step into this ownership and management role.
21. Build YOUR project with the hope of setting a PRECEDENT for thousands of other communities like yours all across your country – assuming your situation is not that unusual. This will increase the pressure on you to be open & accountable with the finances. It means it will be HARDER work, but a far GREATER work in the long run – as your entire region & possibly your entire country could benefit from your initial success. Think Big!
22. A key consideration will be: WHAT is being done differently? Otherwise, if you do what you have always done, you will only get what you’ve always had.
23. STARTING POINT: Will the Government, or any other suitable LOCAL organisation give ANY money towards the project, or are there ANY precedents like this in your region, or country, that you can find out about? If not, give VERY clear reasons as to why NOT. If local organisations will not fund ANY of the project, remote organisations in other countries and continents will be understandably suspicious & will want to know exactly WHY NOT.
24. Use the 7 Layer Poverty Model to demonstrate that you have ASSESSED the current situation in your community & have determined that this is the best investment of funds & most likely to attract suitable supporters, donors, and/or investors. This gives the NEEDS for the project greater credibility than just an opinion - that a few local people think it would be a “good idea” to get something for free from others who may be willing to pay for it entirely.
25. GET ORGANISED! Start your ‘coalition of the willing’. Ideally pick those who are best placed to do each important job within your Team , perform the role &/or have most to gain from the project’s success. This keeps the motivation levels high. You will need that to keep you going in the TOUGH TIMES. It could be a long and challenging – but ultimately worthwhile – journey. We wish you every success and trust that you will keep learning and sharing what you have learned along the way.

The Give A Billion Team