

THE ABCS OF PROSPECTING

You are looking for three things in each donor prospect:

- **Ability:** Evidence that a person has the ability to make the size of gift you want.
- **Belief:** Evidence that a person believes in your cause, or would if they knew about the cause.
- **Contact:** Evidence that a person knows someone in your organization, so you can establish contact with them.

When you have positive information about ability, belief and contact, then you have a “qualified prospect” – that is, someone who can be asked for a gift. For obvious reasons, we call these criteria ABC. But, in order of importance, they are CBA.

Contact: This is the most important factor. If you don’t know the person or don’t have access to them, then you have a stranger and not a prospect. That’s why you start with who you know.

You know three kinds of people:

- those you know personally,
- those who are known by people you know (you might gain access to a person in this category by using the name of someone you both know), and
- those who are currently donors. You may not personally know each current donor, but you can say, “We don’t know each other but we both support XXXX.” Many of your best contacts are going to come from people who give money already.

Belief: Ask yourself if there is any reason that the potential prospect would not believe in your cause. Groups working for social change often think that a person won’t believe in their cause when in fact the prospect has no opinion one way or the other. They may not have heard of the group, or possibly even the issue, or don’t see how the issue affects them. A great deal of money is lost through assuming a lack of belief on the part of a potential prospect. More often, belief can be uncovered by bringing the cause closer to the prospects’ personal experience.

Ability: The first question to ask about ability is *not* how much money the prospect has, but whether he or she gives away money at all. We know that about seven out of ten adults are donors. If your prospect is not one of those seven, she or he is not a prospect. Once you have determined whether the person is a giver, you now must decide how much to ask for. Don’t go by the most obvious signs, such as the type of car the prospect drives or the size of his or her house. These are as likely to be signs of debt as of wealth.

The most telling evidence is how much they give to other groups.

- Do they attend events that cost \$100? Do they have season tickets to the theatre?

You can look for evidence of what they would spend spontaneously.

- Would they spend \$200 on one item of clothing? Do they have expensive hobbies?

Finally, take into account what the prospect knows about your group.

- Suppose a prospect gives \$1,000 to her favorite group, which has similar values to yours. She has never given to your group, but a board member knows her and is willing to ask her for a gift. You have a qualified prospect, but don’t start by asking for \$1,000. That is what she gives to her favorite group. What will she give to a new group? You should start in the \$100 to \$250 range.

THE ABCS OF PROSPECTING

You are looking for three things in each prospective donor. You can ask people to give who don't meet every standard but your best prospects will have all three of the following:

- Ability:** Do they donate money to causes? Are they “givers”?
- Belief:** Do they care about your issue, your mission, your organization, etc.?
- Contact:** Do they have a relationship with you or any of your board members, volunteers, staff, or existing donors?

	Name & How to Reach	CONTACT How do you know this person? Do they know you?	BELIEF Does this person believe in your organization/mission?	ABILITY Have they given to anything before?	How much would you ask for?
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

SAMPLE PROSPECT FORM — CONFIDENTIAL

Date: _____ Compiled by: _____

Prospect name: _____

Address (Business & Home): _____

Phone (Home, Work, Cell, etc): _____

Email(s): _____

ABILITY:

- Evidence that this person is a donor (*Include names of groups and amounts given, if known*):
- Organizations this person is involved in (*Be as specific as possible about degree of involvement: “Active in Justice Now” is not as helpful as “Attends monthly meetings of Justice Now, serving as recording secretary. Also in charge of yearly auction for the last three years.”*):
- Giving History (*Both to your group, and to other groups.*):
- Occupation:
- Length of time in current occupation or with current employer:
- Income sources:

BELIEF:

- Note source of information about what this person believes (*For example, “Karen Smith heard this prospect speak at a school board meeting in favor of a pro-gay rights curricula” is more useful than “Pro-gay/lesbian rights.”*):
- In a committed relationship? If yes, partner’s name:
- Children: How many and what age:
- Personal history with our program or similar programs:
- Knowledge about our group (*What aspect of our work will be most appealing to this prospect?*):

CONTACT:

- Whose name shall we use in approaching this person?
- How will this prospect wish to be approached? (*For example, by two people, by board only, prefers to meet Executive Director, etc.*)

CULTIVATION & CONTACT RECORD (including solicitation efforts):

- Date:
- What happened:
- Who did it:
- What should happen next: