

Summary of research



YouGov

“In January 2017, YouGov conducted two focus groups with charity donors amongst the general public for the Commission on the Donor Experience. The workshops were held in central London and in central Manchester. The groups gave feedback on specific recommendations arising from the Commission on the Donor Experience”

Summary of feedback on key aspects of the donor experience – findings from qualitative groups.

This document lists the questions that were asked in the discussion guide that relate specifically to individual projects identified by the Commission on the Donor Experience, and participant views in these specific areas. They are presented in the order in which they were asked.

Do you remember seeing or hearing anything about charities in the media recently? (P20)

Participants were quick to report stories about charities that they had heard in the media. Most of these stories painted the charities in a negative light, concentrating on bad practice that in some way related to spend (often around staff salaries) or an aggressive or inappropriate fundraising technique. There was strong opposition to “besieging” the most vulnerable with donation requests and a perception that this is widespread.

Do you tell positive stories about this charity to other people? (P18)

There was no strong indication from participants that they act as advocates for their chosen charities – more that giving to charity and the relationship that they have with specific charities are more of a personal issue, and not one that they discuss with other people. This remains the case even when the relationship is a good one. Much is learned from sponsorship requests, which provide the means through which participants find out which charities their friends are aligned to.

In what way do you receive most communications from the charities you support? PROBE telephone, face to face, email. (P11)

Participants tended to receive communications in ‘traditional’ ways – through letters or newsletters primarily, though a minority reported receiving emails. There was broad agreement that emails were the preferred form of communication, though a minority still expressed a preference for written communication.

Have you ever spoken to any of their fundraisers? What was your experience of them? (P14)

Across the board, fundraisers were painted in a negative light. On street and doorstep fundraisers were felt to be too aggressive in their techniques whilst not being knowledgeable enough about the cause for which they were working. Telephone fundraisers approaching existing donors were felt to be equally tenacious, “constantly” trying to persuade them to increase the size of their donations.

What are your views on the language (words and phrases) that charities use to communicate with donors? (P01) Do they use *emotional* language in their communications? Is this a good thing? (P06)

In both groups, participants felt that there was an over reliance on emotional language and appeals that are perceived to manipulate potential donors into giving. That said, participants did understand why charities behave this way, but it often left them powerless, upset or frustrated when they were unable to donate. The focus on such messages should become the beneficial power of the charity, rather than the gravity of the problem.

Do you feel that you have enough choice in terms of the relationship and interaction that you have with your charities? (P13)

The ability to tailor communications to their choice seemed to be missing, and also seemed to be an unmet need – though, for many it provided the opportunity to ‘opt-out’ of receiving communications, there was a wider benefit – namely, providing an opportunity for the charity to demonstrate that it is listening to its donors and wants them to have a say in the relationship it has with them.

What about your sense of satisfaction as a donor? Do the charities that you donate to ever ask if you are satisfied? (P03)

Only one participant in each group was broadly satisfied with the relationship they had with their chosen charities and felt that there was little that they would change. For others, there was a sense that the relationship they had with charities was one-way, with charities only getting in touch when they needed more money. Tellingly, those who had a positive relationship had been asked for feedback through survey mechanisms, which demonstrate both that the charity is listening and that it is striving for self-improvement.

Do they acknowledge/thank you for your donations? (P04)

Though few participants were able to recall a time when they had been asked for a donation specifically, there was also little appetite for donors to be thanked on an individual level as it may risk the perception that the charity is wasting money.

Do you feel that you go on a *journey* with them as a donor? (P05)

In truth, the use of language such as ‘journey’ and ‘relationship’ did not resonate with donors, who disliked such terms and did not feel that they actually enter into a commitment with the charities they support. This may have to do with their need to manage the terms of engagement and a concern that the terms of such a relationship are dictated by the charities themselves.

Do you feel that you understand the impact of your donations? (P19) Do you see them as a customer-focused organisation that treasures the needs of donors? (P16)

As discussed, participants felt that the tone of the communications they receive from charities tends towards the emotional and dramatic in order to entice potential donors. There was little sense that communications or propositions provided success stories showing the beneficial impact of donations received. The sense of sustainability – helping people to help themselves – was a very important theme to participants, and charities may look to acknowledge it in their communications.

Do they talk about their trustees or their senior board-level directors at all? (P15) What about their overall leader – their chief executive or CEO etc.? (P17) What about the partnerships with other organisations that some organisations have? (P07)

No appetite existed at all for charities to be writing to donors about their internal workings or about how they are managed and run. Participants had no interest in this, it was felt to be a waste of money, and furthermore it makes them feel their charity is more like an organisation (with overheads and expenses) rather than a charity. This information should be available on the website, however. Nor was there any interest in hearing about the partnerships that a charity has, for similar reasons.

What if they asked you to leave money in your will to them? (P10)

There was support for legacy donations, though none had them in place. However, participants were reticent around discussing their own wills and unsure if they would respond to a prompt to do so. Where charities are able to help them with their will this was viewed positively, as long as this was not accompanied by a strong sales push.

“In July 2016, Qualtrics conducted a survey of current donors for the Commission on the Donor Experience. The survey was carried out online with a representative sample.”

Findings from quantitative research

1a. Overall experiences of charities that respondents already support:

- 20% rate their overall experience as 7* (as good as it can be)
- 3% rate their overall experience as 1* (as bad as it can be)
- Almost two-thirds (63%) rate it good (5*/6*/7*)
- 15% rate their overall experiences as bad (1*/2*/3*)
- A quarter (23%) rate it 4* (neither bad nor good)

1b. Overall experiences of charities that respondents do not already support:

- 12% rate their overall experience as 7* (as good as it can be)
- 9% rate their overall experience as 1* (as bad as it can be)
- 4 in 10 (40%) rate it good (5*/6*/7*)
- Over a third (35%) rate their overall experiences as bad (1*/2*/3*)
- A quarter (25%) rate it 4* (neither bad nor good)

2. Worst experiences:

- 13% have no ‘worst experiences’ to report
- most common refer to street and door-to-door fundraising, notably feelings of harassment, being pestered, asked to give more than they can afford etc, but also feelings of guilt at not being able to give more.
- some report on their feelings about how the sector is run (e.g. paying salaries) instead of their personal experiences of being asked.

3. Best experiences:

- 10% have no ‘best experiences’ to report
- Most common reasons: being thanked sincerely; understanding what difference their donation makes; the politeness/good humour of the asker; being respected when they say no; the transaction being quick
- Some named best charities & causes: Parkinsons, Marie Curie, Macmillan, Child Sponsorship (esp. World Vision), Air ambulances, St Teresa’s hospice in Darlington

4a. Thinking about the last charity supported, did you feel emotionally blackmailed?

- Agree – 23% (men 20%, women 25)
- Neither – 18%
- Disagree – 56% (men 62%, women 56%)

4b. Thinking about the last charity supported, were you sincerely thanked?

- Agree – 57%
- Neither – 25%
- Disagree – 18%

4c. Thinking about the last charity supported, do you know how the donation was spent?

- Agree – 56%
- Neither – 25%
- Disagree – 20%

4d. Thinking about the last charity supported, do you enjoy supporting this charity?

- 4e.** Thinking about the last charity supported, do you wish you were not on their database/files?
- Agree – 23%. no/basic tax 8%, higher rate 16%
 - Neither – 26%
 - Disagree – 51% None of the 80+
- 5a.** Thinking about your overall experiences, do you think that supporting charities is a burden?
- Agree – 18%
 - Neither – 28%
 - Disagree – 52% None of the 80+
- 5b.** Thinking about your overall experiences, does supporting charities bring you joy?
- Agree – 66%
 - Neither – 28%
 - Disagree – 8%
- 5c.** Thinking about your overall experiences, is supporting charities an important part of your life?
- Agree – 49%
 - Neither – 36%
 - Disagree – 15%
- 5d.** Thinking about your overall experiences, is supporting charities a duty?
- Agree – 41%. No/basic = 8/9%, higher rate 19%
 - Neither – 34%
 - Disagree – 25%
- 5e.** Thinking about your overall experiences, do charities let you choose how or when you hear from them?
- Agree – 54%
 - Neither – 30%
 - Disagree – 16%

Methodology and survey details

- The survey was conducted online from 7th July to 14th July 2016.
- Respondents were screened to ensure that they have given money to at least one charity in the past four weeks. This established a binary variable (donor/non-donor) and no further data was collected on frequency, size, method or destination of gift.
- The sample size was 1,040.
- Partial responses were not recorded.

The survey sourced respondents to meet the following quota, to ensure a representative sample:

Gender

Male: 493
Female: 507

Age

16 – 19: 59
20 – 24: 83
25 – 29: 84
30 – 34: 83
35 – 39: 76
40 – 44: 83
45 – 49: 89
50 – 54: 85
55 – 59: 74
60 – 64: 66
65 – 69: 68
70 – 74: 50
75 – 79: 41
80+: 59

Region

North East - 41
North West - 111
Yorkshire and the Humber - 84
East Midlands - 72
West Midlands - 88
East England - 92
London - 129
South East - 136
South West - 84
Wales - 49
Scotland - 85
Northern Ireland - 29

Tax

I do not pay income tax - 26%
I pay basic rate (20%) - 62%
I pay higher rate (40%) - 11%
I pay additional rate (45%) - 1%