

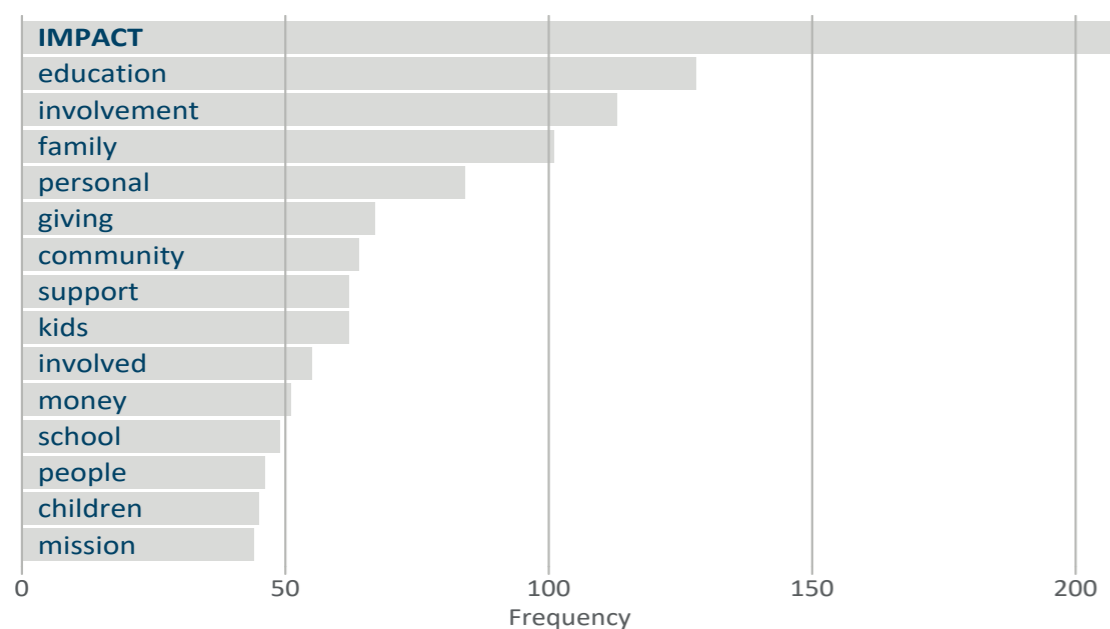
The Age-Old Question: What Factors Lead to Giving?

In the early 1900s, Andrew Carnegie famously said “It is more difficult to give money away intelligently than to earn it in the first place.” Fast forward 100 years, and fundraising professionals continue to study—with intensity—how to best cultivate and steward donors.

A personal interview with a key constituent (a.k.a. feasibility interview) is a high-value opportunity to inform our understanding of individual attitudes and inclinations. But what can thousands of these interviews tell us about why major donors choose to give?

We queried our database of more than 5,600 feasibility interviews to explore what factors are at play when the donor considers making a charitable gift.

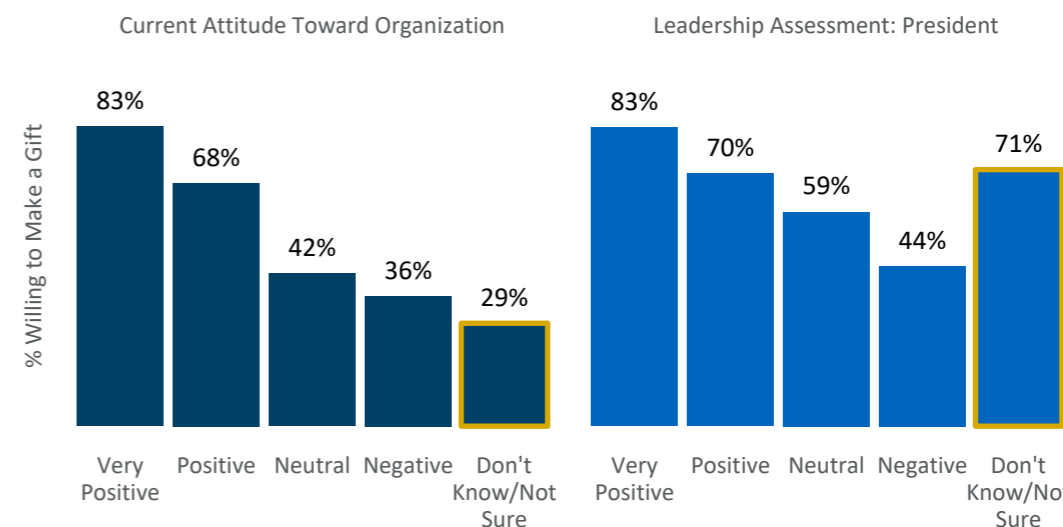
By far “impact” was the most frequent response to a direct question on what influences a donor to give. This reinforces the importance of investing in powerful narratives and unwavering donor stewardship.



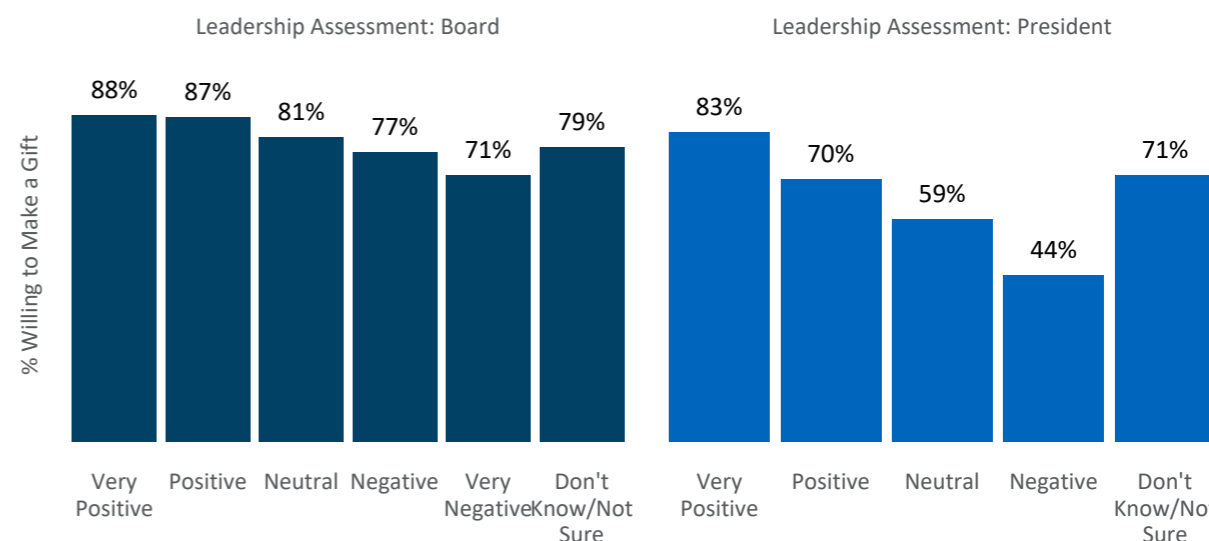
While we expected impact to be the headliner of influencers, our data tells us that the relationship between opinions of the institution and its leadership and the donor’s willingness to give are a bit less straightforward.

Feasibility study responses in our database show that interviewees with no opinion of the organization were less likely to be willing to make a gift than those with a negative opinion of the organization. This finding signals that a negative opinion indicates an interest in—or even attachment to—the organization. Though there is clearly a need to address their concerns, these interviewees perhaps possess a passion strong enough to support the organization even as their concerns remain.

Interestingly, people with no opinion about the organization’s president were just as likely to be willing to make a gift as those with a positive opinion of the president. It seems that not knowing the president is less important than not knowing about the organization’s overall impact.



However, having a negative view of the president cuts willingness to make a gift nearly in half, while a negative opinion of the board makes a gift only slightly less likely. So no opinion of, or not knowing, the president is very different than not liking the president. Perceptions of the board seem to have the least influence on willingness to give.



In the end, donors are seeking impact. Communications and donor stewardship remain key components to fundraising strategy. Organizational leadership, particularly at the presidential level, should also be a priority. Involving top executives who are well-trained in their role as leaders in the institution’s philanthropy, can mitigate the formation of negative opinions. In an increasingly complex and scrutinized fundraising environment, philanthropy requires both engaged leadership and engaged donors.