



What to Say in an In-Person “Ask”

The heart of fundraising is the “ask,” a direct solicitation for support. This can happen in many ways, by asking individually, in-person, in a letter, at an event, through a detailed written proposal, or by combining several of these methods. Use these tips to develop a plan for a personal ask to an individual or business owner.

Prepare what you are planning to say ahead of time. Even the most casual encounter should be thoughtfully carried out using the messages you developed in your [elevator speech](#).

For example, after a few polite preliminaries, your ask might go something like this:

“Hi, my name is Vera, and I’m a 4-H youth volunteer working to help our community become a cleaner, safer place. I understand you’ve been a long-time supporter of 4-H so I think you will find this project interesting. Do you have a minute to hear about what we are doing? 10 members of our club are conducting a GIS mapping project to discover the places in our community where litter accumulates. We will then create a map and recommend to our city council that dumpsters or trash bins be placed in those locations.

We are even planning to purchase and paint the trash bins. This project will cost us about \$6,000 for the GIS units to do the mapping and to purchase the trash bins. We’ve already raised \$1,000 toward this project and the city has committed to cover the costs of painting the bins if we can raise the balance from the community. I’ve already donated \$25 from my own allowance to the project, and I’m hoping you can pledge \$100 toward this goal. Can we count on your participation?”

After that, wait for an answer, offer to answer any questions, and thank the donor. If the person is willing to donate on the spot, take the check. If they are not ready to make a donation, you can give them a [pledge form](#) or explain that a pledge form will be in the mail shortly. Be sure to get their contact information (name, address, phone number, and email.) so you can send the pledge card to them.

Some Helpful Tips for In-person Asks

To get yourself into a frame of mind that will allow you to succeed — and even enjoy — the asking process, remember these simple rules:

- **Be yourself**
No canned script can give you the words to describe what excites you about your project. Remember your elevator speech but ultimately you'll want to put the script aside and speak from the heart.
- **Be direct**
There will come a time when you simply have to say, "A gift of \$XX would provide crucially important support for our efforts." Once the words are out, the air becomes clear, and the other person has the opportunity to respond with equal directness.
- **Focus on the cause**
You're not begging for money — you're asking the supporter to partner with your group to achieve a mutually desirable result. Show excitement, not desperation.
- **Remember "No" hardly ever means "No"**
It can mean not right now, not for this purpose, or not for this amount. Always ask if there is any way they might consider supporting this project. They may invite you to ask again at a later date, ask if they could make a pledge in installments so they wouldn't have to come up with all the money right now, or if they need some more information (or to talk to their spouse) in order to help them make a decision.
- **Don't take a "No" personally**
Some people are just not in a position to give, but appreciate being asked. Of course, there are certain people who just won't make charitable gifts, even if it's in their own, or their children's, or their community's interest. That's not a reflection on how you asked.