

# Economist finds formula for the 'perfect ask' in online fundraising

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Going it alone and setting targets are part of the 'perfect ask' fundraising formula to generate the most online donations for charity events, according to research.

Economist Professor Kimberley Scharf, from the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy (CAGE) at the University of Warwick, led a team who analysed data from the online fundraising site JustGiving to discover what determines fundraising success.

She found people fundraising on their own for individual events rather than mass charity-organised events attracted more donations and raised more money overall. She also found setting a fundraising target made a difference to the total raised.

In the working paper, 'Online Fundraising – the perfect ask?', the focus of the analysis was to see if there was a winning fundraising formula.

Professor Scharf said: "We found on average lone fundraisers receive 25 donations and raise £853. People taking part in a mass event receive 22 donations and raise £588. However, those who are taking part in mass charity-organised events fare the worst, on average they receive 16 donations and raise £439.

"One reason for this could be that people perceive a lone fundraiser as being more committed to the cause so are more likely to donate.

Interestingly, lone fundraisers are also the least likely to take part in further fundraising activity, which could reflect the amount of effort that goes into this kind of activity."

Professor Scharf also discovered that setting a fundraising target encouraged donors to give more.

She said: "Most fundraising pages have a target, around 80% and the typical target is around £350. The data shows that pages with a target raise significantly more than pages without, on average around £122 more. It is not clear whether this difference is because people who want to raise more money set targets, and devote more effort to fundraising, or because targets have a positive effect on how much people give."

However, Professor Scharf suggested that although donors will donate more to reach the target, they will also give an average of £5 less once the target has been reached.

She added: "This suggests one possible strategy is for donors to set, and raise, successive targets to maintain levels of [donations](#). We get bombarded by friends and work colleagues who have set up JustGiving pages for all kinds of fundraising activities. It is fascinating to look at the data behind these pages and get a clear idea of what motivates us to give to charity and how we choose to donate."

**More information:** The paper is available online:  
[www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/eco ... /194-2014\\_scharf.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/eco.../194-2014_scharf.pdf)

Provided by University of Warwick

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