

# The Sweet Spot for Asking for Donations

3 MIN READ



When the athletics box office and Performing Arts Center box office at Cal Poly consolidated into a single location, Ryan Gruss was faced with an interesting opportunity.

His work on the performing arts side saw Ryan bring in donations at an average of \$50, thanks mostly to a pop-up that asked buyers if they wanted to support the youth arts program. As a result of people knowing where their donations were going, Ryan was able to secure roughly \$10,000 in fundraising that year. But when he looked at the way the Athletics donations were set up at Cal Poly, Ryan noticed that this department didn't have the same sort of success.

“When we took over athletics they had the recommended donation set at \$50,” says Ryan, “which I felt was a little high for a regular ticket buyer that didn't have a personal history with the Athletics program.” Ryan changed set the donation pop-up ask at \$10, which he learned people were much more receptive to. But by looking at the data the Athletics department had been collecting, Ryan noticed that there was some potential extra revenue to be earned.

“I thought that the soccer program we were running could ask for a slightly higher rate since it's targeting alumni. We changed the recommended donation to \$50 since those participants are not only alumni, but they're more likely to donate because they've gone through the soccer program. They're part of it, and they feel ownership of it in some way.”

Ryan figured out how to ask for donations in a way that appeals to people's interests instead of applying a blanket technique. By adjusting your fundraising pop-up messages to reflect your audience, you're better equipped to catch them in stride at the right time of their life stage. Students may not be flush enough with cash to relinquish \$50, but they might be if they know that the money is going to a youth arts program. Similarly, alumni who feel a sense of ownership towards a program might feel an obligation to give back.

## Things To Consider When Setting Donations

- With multiple personas there's no such thing as a singular solution
- Cater to specific audiences by appealing to their values
- Recognize when something isn't working and pivot
- Look within and across industries to see what works

Ryan's experience in the performing arts box office allowed him to get a wider perspective on donations, but the ways you can use the data you get along with the donation can be just as useful as the money. Scot Allan at Gateway Playhouse noted that his performing arts center didn't have much success when asking buyers for a \$25 donation, but things changed instantly when he started a campaign with a \$1 pop up.

That campaign saw hundreds of donors making small offerings, which identified them for follow-ups from Scot. “That flags them as people who will take a second to contribute, and when we hit them up later they make a larger donation,” explained Scot. “We’re able to recognize them as being slightly more bleeding heart.”