

Door-to-door Fundraising Experiment Report



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Introduction

After running a door-to-door pilot with a sample size of 1,528 houses spanning roughly a month, the data supports the general consensus within Charity Science that door-to-door fundraising on behalf of direct-level charities is not viable for a charity in our particular financial and reputational position. Below is a report unpacking our methods and discussing the results that ultimately led us to declare door-to-door fundraising as a strategy not worth pursuing any further.

Shallow Conclusions Drawn From Pilot

Unlike several of the fundraising techniques previously explored by Charity Science, face-to-face fundraising, and door-to-door campaigns specifically, allow for a wide variety of metrics to be recorded and analyzed. In this particular pilot, the amount of data gathered was sufficient enough to make long-term projections on the viability of door-to-door as a method of fundraising for Charity Science, but not large enough to produce any conclusions of statistical significance. Despite the final outcome, Charity Science is nonetheless of the opinion that the aggregated data and analysis contains value for the effective altruism community and the nonprofit sector as a whole.

Beginning with a shallow overview of the data collected, the sum total of certain aggregated metrics offers a fairly compelling glimpse into the general direction of this report. Among the 1,528 houses approached, the one-time donation count totaled at \$262 CAD and the recurring monthly donation count, upon which sustainable door-to-door campaigns traditionally rest, totaled at a mere \$5 CAD. Our figures look much healthier when taking one-off donations into account, but without the acquisition of recurring donors, door-to-door canvassing costs are unsustainable. Assuming that the single recurring donor converted in our pilot does not fall victim to the [standard one-year industry](#) attrition rate of 43%, the total amount raised would be slightly higher. To put this in perspective further, total minutes spent running the pilot (not including substantial preparation time) totaled 47.57 hours. This brings the total amount raised to \$5.61 CAD per hour, and in this instance, the numbers can only be revised downward when considering our [preparation time](#) in launching the pilot. With the BC minimum wage currently resting at \$10.45, a shallow overview of the results suggests that a door-to-door program for a charitable organization of our size and stature is untenable.

Were the campaign to go beyond the pilot stage, calculations for ROI month-to-month (monthly ROI) and for the entire project (project ROI) could be revised upwards if an organization were able to constrain staffing costs, streamline administrative processes, refine geographical selections and campaign execution, conduct campaigns in favorable weather, and further experimentation generally.

With this in mind, we made projections regarding the long-term viability of a door-to-door campaign using data collected in the pilot. Our findings indicate that even the most optimistic assumptions yield a 5-year wait for breakeven returns on the campaign. These

results were significantly less encouraging than our preliminary research suggested, and ultimately reinforce our conclusions regarding the infeasibility of door-to-door fundraising for Charity Science and similar organizations.

Below are four key findings that ultimately informed our conclusions on the door-to-door fundraising pilot:

- An insufficient number of conversions (defined as new recurring donors), likely due in no small part to a lack of brand recognition
- Substantial time and monetary costs exacerbated by a lack of manpower needed to generate donations offsetting initial sunk costs
- Perceived donor apathy and saturation of particular door-to-door territory
- Other potential confounding factors drawn from qualitative evidence

The section following the preliminary research and experimental design sections will expound on these findings.

Preliminary Research

Preliminary [research](#) indicated a generally grim outlook on the viability of conducting a successful door-to-door fundraising campaign. A number of authoritative sources provided the foundation upon which [informed calculations](#) for the pilot project were made, including academic articles published in major journals, industry blog posts and statistics quoted by third-party fundraising experts currently running door-to-door campaigns on behalf of some of the largest charities in the world. In order to achieve an acceptable return on investment for the entire project (project ROI), according to the earliest calculations for both the pilot project and a theoretical multi-year campaign, a door-to-door campaign was projected to require significant upfront investment, nontrivial costs associated with sustaining the program, significant manpower, and a dedication to maintaining the campaign for years on end if only to recoup initial program costs. Below is an overview of the principal findings uncovered in the preliminary research, which may be found in its entirety in [this document](#).

Principal Findings of Preliminary Research

Based upon academic articles published in major journals, industry blog posts, and statistics quoted by third-party fundraising experts currently running door-to-door campaigns on behalf of some of the largest charities in the world, all indications pointed to a particularly high barrier of entry to door-to-door fundraising for a charity with such low brand recognition and constrained financial resources. Below are several highlights from the report that informed this outlook:

- Inputting figures furnished by extant research into our [calculations](#) (expressed in GBP because UK studies generated the bulk of this resource), using a value of £63.67 (~\$120 CAD) as the cost per donor acquisition, at 100 donors, a monthly ask of £5 (~\$10 CAD), attrition rates (43% for 1st year, 16% for second year and 7.5% for consecutive years) and a model time of 20 years, the expected total cost would be

£6,367 (~ \$12,000 CAD) with a return of £31,306 (~ \$59,000 CAD) giving a total profit of £24,938 (~\$47,000 CAD) pounds, or £14,701 (~ \$28,000 CAD) after inflation. Using a model time of 8 years, which is more realistic due to the concept of creeping donor apathy, gives an income of £11,453 (~ \$21,500 CAD), or £8,842 (~ \$17,000 CAD) after inflation. This is an **expected project ROI of 2.39**. A face-to-face campaign in operation for 5 years can expect an **project ROI of 1.6**, according to these figures.

- Regarding third-party agencies, the literature suggests that at an average of £10 (~\$20 CAD) per donation, fees paid to external agencies will be recovered in 8-16 months of continuous operation and the expected break-even point would be 26-28 months after starting the campaign. This constitutes slightly better potential for breaking even than in-house campaigns.
- Using the 8 year model and a first year attrition rate of 60% and plugging in additional figures provided by Donorworx (a for-profit firm specializing in door-to-door fundraising), a cost of \$150,000 (CAD) will result in ~300 donors that average about \$30 in donations per month and a profit of \$42,116 (£20,358), resulting in a **project ROI of 1.28**, which is slightly lower than our projected estimates.
- Public Outreach, another for-profit firm specializing in door-to-door fundraising, suggest that a small, relatively unknown non-profit like Charity Science could expect to spend \$17-18 to make \$1 in recurring monthly donations, compared to larger charities like Red Cross and MSF that would need only to spend \$11-12 per recurring donor dollar. Assuming the monthly donations remain the same over a 12 month period, the **project ROI** after 1 year for Charity Science with these numbers might be expected to be **0.69:1**.
- Overseas development charities appear to have the highest attrition rates, followed by social welfare and disability, followed by health, followed by environmental. If we increase the first year attrition rate to 60% for overseas development charities, the income in the 8-year model reduces to £4,306 (~ \$8,000 CAD) after inflation. This is a **project ROI of 1.68**.
- These calculations do not take into account the time value of money, which is beyond the scope of this study but is expected to make the income less attractive.
- According to a couple of industry experts, there is a chance that raising money as a non-profit fundraising on behalf of other charities would be less effective than expected, as it has the potential to result in less of an emotional impact for the potential donor. Thus our preliminary analysis of ROI might be an overestimate.
- Despite media claims, potential harm to a charity's reputation as the result of door-to-door fundraising is not a significant concern.
- Assuming costs and returns both increase linearly with increasing staff size (an assumption we tested in the pilot), we predict we'll run at a loss with 1 staff member, we'd predict we'd run at a loss at 50 staff members, and vice versa.

Formulation of Success and Failure Criteria

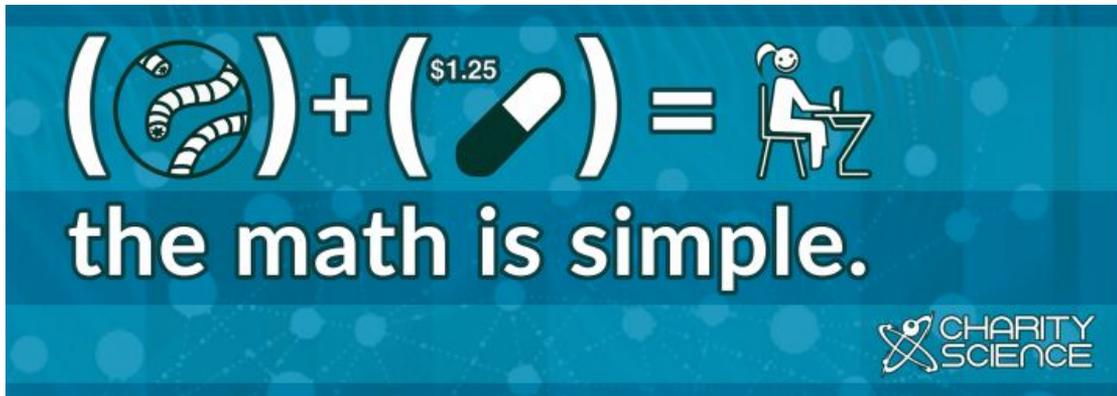
Our success and failure criteria were shaped by *a priori* calculations modeled after our informed calculations of the industry standard, and subjective considerations regarding the feasibility of the project once the data was gathered. In order for the pilot to outperform the industry standard according to our [initial projections](#), our street canvassers had to achieve a minimum of 2 recurring donations averaging \$20 CAD, while 1.65 recurring donations would have met expectations. Underperforming relative to the industry standard would likely result in zero recurring donations. Aside from major gifts, one-time donations were not thought to be enough to sustain a door-to-door fundraising program, and therefore any further considerations of implementing door-to-door would have to take into account that potential returns could only be realized if the project is consistently funded and operating for at least 4 to 5 years. Although many of the preliminary calculations were obfuscated by several unknowns, Charity Science nonetheless sees value in taking to the streets to gather data firsthand.

Using the data gathered over the course of the pilot, we were equipped to make long-term projections regarding the viability of the campaign. Given the financial and reputational position of our organization, we set a marker for success at a project ROI of 1:1 within the first two years of running the campaign. If projections suggested we would fail to achieve this marker within the first two years, this would provide additional support for door-to-door fundraising not being a viable campaign to run.

Experimental Design

Initial Planning

After receiving a [permit](#) to conduct door-to-door canvassing in the city of Vancouver, a plan of action was formulated, pitches were created (more on that below), [flyers](#) and [supplementary materials](#) were designed, and additional statistical [tracking](#) forms were put together in order to gather data as the pilot progressed. The pilot was slated to run between February 19th to the 21st and between the 25th to the 28th of the same month. The days of the week and times of day were chosen partially for experimental purposes and partially due to hunches about which times would yield the highest returns. For example, weekdays before 5 were avoided due to suspected low contact rates (interactions out of doors approached) and Saturday afternoons were targeted for the inverse reason. Canvassers were also deployed at times that were less likely to be successful in some instances for experimental purposes. In addition, further A/B testing between paired vs. individual canvassing was implemented.



Side A of the flyer given to interested potential donors



Side B of the flyer given to interested potential donors

Geography and Neighborhood

The [Kitsilano](#) neighborhood, located on the western edge of the city of Vancouver, was chosen due to its high residential density and relatively wealthy populace. Additionally, the neighborhood is largely situated in a grid-like formation, which allowed for easier planning, navigation and shorter walking time between houses. Despite the time of year in which the pilot was conducted, temperatures in Vancouver are generally milder than the rest of the country and even many parts of the U.S., although [qualitative information](#) garnered from the pilot indicated that temperature had no small part to play.

Pitches

Over the course of the pilot, four distinct pitches were tested for efficacy. Three pitches were designed for the pilot from the outset, and the fourth was formulated based on the experience of approaching a few hundred houses after the first leg. Each was assigned a certain alias based upon the technique that a particular pitch seemed to utilize. For example, [Pitch A](#) was known as the “direct” pitch because it resembled an appeal for charitable contributions in a more traditional sense with only one charity supported by Charity Science being presented (Schistosomiasis Control Initiative). Rather than approach potential donors with our unconventional organizational structure, our intuitive sense initially was that presenting only one of our recommended charities would more closely resemble more standard charities, theoretically resulting in a less complicated and more effective pitch.

[Pitch B](#) was understood as the “indirect” method of eliciting donations at the door because homeowners were asked to reveal their giving history for the prior year under the guise of an organizational survey, and then subsequently asked whether they had considered a particular charity recommended by Charity Science and GiveWell (Schistosomiasis Control Initiative). [Pitch C](#) was perhaps the most experimental and closely resembled a [Giving Game](#). Potential donors at the door were presented with a \$5 bill (later changed to a \$5 Charity Science [gift certificate](#)) and after being given a short introduction to each of the charities, asked where they would prefer to donate the \$5 among the three recommended charities supported by Charity Science. [Pitch D](#) resembled Pitch A as something of a traditional charitable appeal, with the primary difference being that all three of Charity Science’s top-recommended charities were presented initially.



Side B of Pitch C (Giving Game) flyer

Pilot Execution

Canvassing plans were largely followed according to the initial experimental design, with only slight variations in travel routes between canvassers due to a variety of unforeseen circumstances. These variations only differed from the initial plans to a minor degree and likely have very little impact on the results in practice. Efforts in the second week of the pilot were calibrated according to lessons learned in the previous week. For example, canvassers scaled back on hours deployed on the second Sunday afternoon, opting instead to approach potential donors on Thursday evening. Insufficient manpower and time constraints did not allow for certain days to be tested more than twice, and certain times of day were tested less than half a dozen times. These caveats should be taken into consideration when extrapolating any conclusions from this pilot project.

Relative Performance of Pitches

Once again, it should be noted that there was an insufficient amount of data to make statistically significant claims in the strictest sense. Pitch C performed the best according to several indicators presumably due to a novelty factor that was relatively successful in engaging and persuading potential donors. Aside from the unusually high success of Pitch B at generating dialogue from contact, Pitch C most proficient at getting a conversation started (37.1%). Pitch C received the most number of donations (10) totaling the highest amount raised (\$140 CAD) and also required the least time between donations (124 minutes). Furthermore, it was the only pitch that elicited a recurring donation (\$5 CAD). This method was tweaked before the start of the second leg to include a \$5 [gift certificate](#) (rather than

cash) that could be redeemed online, which may hold some significance considering the only recurring donation was achieved after the gift certificates were introduced. Potential donors that redeem a gift certificate are then presented with the option for a recurring donation. No recurring donations resulted from gift card redemptions, in fact, only two gift cards (out of 67 distributed) were actually redeemed. One of them was redeemed by the single recurring donor acquired, though it was after the donor had already agreed to a monthly recurring donation.

A closer look at the qualitative data reinforces the apparent success of Pitch C as a potentially more engaging way of approaching donors without appearing disingenuous. Qualitative responses from potential donors also confirmed that structuring the pitch as a game enticed them to hear more and think critically about each charity, as opposed to passively listening to a scripted pitch delivery.

After the first leg of the pilot, it quickly became clear from [quantitative](#) and anecdotal evidence that Pitch B (indirect) was performing the poorest by a rather large margin. To ensure that this dip did not simply come about by chance, Pitch B was still utilized but slowly phased out throughout the remainder of the pilot. Confirming our intuitions once the data was compiled, after 483 minutes of testing, Pitch B resulted in a donation in just 2.4% of dialogues totaling \$20 CAD. Only Pitch D performed worse, eliciting 0 donations in 355 minutes of testing. Interestingly, the indirect approach taken by Pitch B outperformed all others at initiating conversations from first contact (47.2%), but consistently failed to produce conversions. The take-away lesson here is likely that the complexity of a successful pitch includes far more than simply being able to start a conversation.

Pitch A appeared to have value as a straightforward and uncomplicated method of introducing Charity Science and a single organization that we support (SCI). In fact, Pitch A had a slightly better rate of conversion per dialogue (10.3%) and a higher mean donation (\$17.83) than Pitch C—the approach thought of as the highest performing pitch overall. Despite Pitch A being the least likely to generate a dialogue from first contact (34.1%), once a conversation was started, Pitch A had the highest likelihood of conversion. A few things might have contributed to this result: unwilling potential donors may have been screened more effectively by a straightforward approach at the door. Those expecting a pitch either politely declined immediately or were always going to be willing to listen. An uncomplicated pitch both in approach and content may have also been simply more effective at making the ask. It may have been that for the small number of people who were willing to listen were already in a giving frame of mind.

Pitch D was crafted in response to the relative successes of Pitches A and C in the first leg of the pilot, attempting to combine the simplicity of a straightforward approach (Pitch A) with some curiosity-inducing statements about Charity Science supporting multiple organizations at one time (Pitch C). Pitch D was tested in the second leg of the pilot, specifically between the dates of February 25th to the 28th. After 355 minutes of testing, the lowest amount of testing among the four pitches, Pitch D was the least successful in eliciting donations (\$0). Although Pitch D enjoying a relatively average contact to dialogue rate (36.8%), none of those dialogues resulted in a conversion.

Despite being unable to tease out the signal from the noise from a statistical standpoint, our tentative conclusions regarding the apparent successes and failures of certain pitches may hold some measure of practical value. With measured confidence, it would appear that potential donors at the door are more likely to enjoy a gamified pitch (Pitch C) that elicits critical thinking and facilitates a more intimate understanding with previously unknown charities. Canvassers also noticed a marked improvement in responses to pitches that were not overly scripted and allowed for organic conversation to flow from the initial contact. Hypothesizing the ideal conditions for optimum conversions, based on our extremely limited data, we would suggest a pitch similar to Pitch C (gamified) or Pitch A (direct) during sunny and warm weather on a Saturday or weekday after 4pm. Without the robustness to achieve statistical significance, however, these results are not necessarily generalizable.

Quantitative Analysis

Over the course of the pilot, Charity Science canvassers collected enough data to make more accurate projections regarding the long-term viability of door-to-door fundraising and helped solidify particular inputs that hadn't yet been confirmed firsthand. Metrics reported on the ground informed two crucial aspects in the final calculations—operating ROI from month-to-month (monthly ROI) and ROI for the entire campaign (project ROI). Both ratios weighed heavily in the final determinations.

Note: Any assumptions made in this section of the report are intentionally optimistic in order to encompass any potential for viability.

- **~90 seconds per door.** This number includes both travel time and about 30 seconds at each door. This also includes initial contacts, but does not include dialogues. Taking into account that our pilot was conducted in a fairly dense suburban area, this number could easily increase in sparser neighbourhoods or decrease if campaigns are conducted within apartment complexes, for example. We have estimated that 90 seconds is a reasonable average. At this rate (assuming no dialogues), a single canvasser (or team) would knock on ~40 doors per hour.
- **An average dialogue time of ~2.5 minutes.** For the purposes of this pilot, we define a dialogue as any conversation in which the potential donor actively engaged us in some way. Distinguishing a dialogue from a contact was relatively subjective, but generally speaking, if the conversation went beyond the potential donor being polite enough to listen to the initial pitch, the interaction would be considered a dialogue. Some dialogues lasted as long as 15-20 minutes, but most lasted only a few minutes.
- **A contact rate of ~40%.** We define a contact as any interaction at all with someone in the home. If nobody answers the door or nobody is home, it does not qualify as a contact.
- **A dialogue rate (dialogues/contacts) of ~38%.** Taking this figure and the contact rate into account, we found a **cumulative dialogue rate of ~15%**, meaning dialogues/doors.

- And finally, regarding the conversion rate (conversions/dialogues), we did not have a sufficient sample size to reach a satisfactory confidence level. We define a conversion as the acquisition of a recurring donor. Since we only acquired a single recurring donor throughout the pilot (1,528 doors and 221 dialogues), we can only speculate that **the conversion rate is somewhere between 1/75 (~1.3%) and 1/250 (0.4%)**. Preliminary research, as stated earlier, suggests the rate to be around 1/103 (~0.97%) for an organization whose name is immediately recognizable, and probably significantly lower for an organization not familiar to potential donors..

With these numbers taken into account, a single canvasser (or pair) would knock on an average of 24 doors, make 9.6 contacts, and have 3.6 dialogues per hour. If this canvasser worked for 6 hours/day (excluding travel time and breaks) for a standard number of working days per month, they could expect to achieve **between two and six conversions (new recurring donations) per month**.

These inputs were then used to assess the cost-effectiveness of running a door-to-door campaign long-term, taking into account conversions and attrition rates.* We did not include administrative costs, preparation costs, and one-off donations in these calculations, though we feel confident that these excluded costs would far exceed the gains of one-off donations. Thus, any estimates of cost-effectiveness are likely considerably more optimistic than what should be expected in actuality.

** Assessing attrition rates is beyond the scope of this study. We therefore used industry standards: 43% for the first year, 16% for the second, and 7.5% for each year beyond the second. Converting these into monthly attrition rates, the rate decreases from ~4.6% per month for the first year to ~1.5% for the second and levels off at 0.65% after two years.*

Assuming an 8-hour work day (6 hours of canvassing and 2 hours for travel, preparation, breaks, etc.) and minimum wage in British Columbia, Canada (\$10.45 CAD/hr), employing a canvasser would cost an organization ~\$1811 CAD per month (excluding reimbursements of travel, etc.).

It is worth noting that the number of canvassers does not affect the temporal point at which the campaign exceeds a 1:1 ratio. Increasing or decreasing the number of canvassers only scales the losses and returns linearly. Further, there are two critical points of interest in any given scenario: (i) the point at which the monthly ROI exceeds 1:1, and (ii) the point at which the project ROI exceeds 1:1. For the purposes of this experiment, the entire project ROI is more relevant. As noted before, point (ii) will likely occur later than projected in these calculations due to the necessary recovery of preparation costs.

The ROI for a given month can be determined by the monthly amount received through conversions, plus recurring donations from previous acquisitions (with relevant attrition rates applied respectively) divided by the salary of the canvassers. Assuming the amount obtained each month from new conversions is c . Then the amount gained on month m is

$$p_m = c + ca_1 + ca_1a_2 + \dots + ca_1a_2\dots a_{m-1} = c + \sum_{k=1}^{m-1} ca_1\dots a_k \quad (p_1 = c)$$

where a_m is the attrition rate after month m .

So the monthly ROI for month m could be given by p_m/s where s is the cost of employing all canvassers for a month.

Thus, the project ROI after month m can be given by $(p_1 + p_2 + \dots + p_m)/(m * s)$.

Considering all of the above, we calculated upper and lower bound projections with the most significant variables being the conversion rate (as mentioned earlier in this section) and the average monthly donation. In our pilot, we received only a single monthly donation of \$5 CAD, but this is likely lower than average, so we used the following:

- For a pessimistic projection, we assumed a 1/250 (0.4%) conversion rate and a \$10 CAD average monthly donation. At these rates, we expect the monthly ROI to hit a critical break-even point well after 20 years and the project ROI to follow after the campaign has been running for 50 years.
- For an optimistic projection, we assumed a 1/75 (~1.3%) conversion rate and a \$20 CAD average monthly donation. At these rates, we expect the monthly ROI to reach a critical point at month 22 of the campaign, and the project ROI to follow at month 44.

For a more detailed look at these and other projections, please see our long-term [projection calculator](#) can be found here.

Reasons for Declaring Door-to-door Nonviable

Expanding on the “Shallow Conclusions” section above, the following is a detailed summary of the suspected reasons that door-to-door fails to qualify as a potentially worthwhile method of fundraising for a charity in our particular financial and reputational position. Without a doubt, teasing out the signal from the noise was challenging with this particular data set, however, our data analysis techniques yielded a number of potential results that may be substantiated to some degree by qualitative evidence gathered during the course of the pilot. Although this analysis has a number of limitations that restrict the generalizability of results, fundraising professionals may be able to take away a number of practical implications.

Failure to meet success criteria

Based on the calculations detailed in this report’s [Quantitative Analysis](#) section, even with the most optimistic of assumptions, the project ROI fails to reach above 1:1 before the 2-year mark, which was our predetermined criteria for success. This critical point would not occur until 44 months into the door-to-door campaign (not taking into account recovery of initial preparation and administrative costs). Fully recovering from all costs of running this campaign would likely take four years as a best case scenario.

Insufficient number of conversions

The pilot suffered from an insufficient number of conversions (defined as new recurring donors), likely due in no small part to a lack of brand recognition. Among the 1,528 houses approached as mentioned above, the one-time donation count totaled at \$262 CAD and the recurring donation count, upon which successful door-to-door campaigns traditionally rest, totaled a mere \$5 CAD. Even after adjusting our project ROI calculations in retrospect, one recurring donor at \$5 CAD after 47 hours 34 minutes hours of door-to-door campaigning is clearly unsustainable.

On a qualitative note, despite not quantifying and categorizing excuses for rebuffing our canvassers as such, the prevailing sentiment among potential donors seemed to be that a lack of brand recognition was among the chief reasons why they would not make a donation at the door. Verbal responses were [written down](#) several times in which potential donors indicated an unwillingness to donate because they had never heard of either Charity Science, the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, the Against Malaria Foundation, and/or GiveDirectly. The tendency was for even genuinely interested parties was to engage canvassers, accept materials provided, and then politely decline to donate, preferring instead to research the previously unknown charities online. These particular anecdotal experiences align with figures quoted by industry experts during the preliminary phase, and similarly agree with academic literature finding that international development charities can expect a lower ROI than other types of charities engaging in door-to-door fundraising.

Substantial upfront time and monetary costs

Substantial upfront preparation time and monetary costs were exacerbated by a lack of manpower that would have been needed to generate donations offsetting initial sunk costs. The initial decision to conduct an in-house door-to-door pilot was in response to the upfront costs quoted by third-party fundraising companies, which were thought to be beyond our organizational means. The third-party companies justified these upfront costs, which typically started at \$150,000 CAD, by insisting that sufficient manpower was essential in order to tap into economies of scale. Recurring donors, they maintained, were few and far between. According to the data gathered in this pilot, we determined that hiring a sizeable team instead of a handful of individuals cuts down on the marginal cost per person, which means initial investment costs can be paid off quicker. In a scenario where a nonprofit hires a sizeable number of door-to-door canvassers, although there are substantial initial operating costs, revenue should also increase substantially in a linear fashion as well. Once a larger door-to-door program reaches the breakeven point for the entire program, compensating for the initial sunk costs becomes much less of a burden.

One industry veteran quoted 103 conversations on average per conversion, and another suggested that an organization of our type would likely have to pay \$17-18 CAD in operating costs per recurring donor dollar. These rather stark figures suggest that quite a few canvassers ought to be deployed at any given time in order to have a chance at picking up a recurring donor. And, in fact, the very same sentiment was expressed by industry veterans.

Rather large teams of canvassers are needed in order to “play the numbers game” of door-to-door fundraising.

In a scenario where this pilot project serves as the precursor to a scaled up campaign, all indications point to the possibility that the potential upfront costs of a larger campaign would be substantial and likely unsustainable. Despite clamping down on upfront costs by running an in-house door-to-door pilot rather than contracting out the project, initial sunk costs were unavoidable. When viewed in relation to the resulting \$262 CAD raised in one-time donations and \$5 CAD raised in recurring donations, the need for a healthy base of recurring donors to stick over an extended period of time became even more clear. Short of a) recruiting a sufficient number of recurring donors, b) maintaining attrition levels at or below the industry standard, and c) running the door-to-door campaign for at least 4-5 years (at better conversion levels than the pilot produced), this particular method of fundraising is not a viable option.

Perceived donor apathy and territory saturation

Perceived donor apathy and saturation of this particular door-to-door territory may have also been costly. On numerous occasions, canvassers were asked if we were part of a larger “charity drive” taking place in the area. Residents complained that Charity Science canvassers numbered among the many soliciting them for donations at their door in recent memory. On the second day, canvassers visually confirmed a parallel (quite literally) door-to-door fundraising initiative taking place on exactly the same street at the same time. Repeated consternation and visible apathy regarding such frequent solicitation is not insignificant for the purposes of this report. The Kitsilano neighborhood was earmarked as ideal in a variety of ways, and several other nonprofits running door-to-door campaigns have similarly taken notice. We should not discount territory saturation as a possible reason for the pilot’s underwhelming conversion rate. In a similar vein, canvassers noticed a general aversion to door-to-door fundraising, which may or may not have been exacerbated by territory saturation.

Other potential confounding factors

Other potential confounding factors drawn from qualitative and quantitative evidence include temperature, weather, relatively less daylight (related to time of year), and upfront time identifying ideal times of day to operate. On [several occasions](#), potential donors indicated an unwillingness to engage canvassers partly due to the cold weather. Intuitively speaking, patience levels may very well drop when potential donors are inadequately prepared for winter weather while standing with the door open. Relatedly, the majority of the hours in which canvassers were deployed were also cloudy and rainy. That these factors impacted conversion levels is not beyond the realm of possibility, especially considering that the most successful fundraising day of the pilot by a large margin took place on a relatively warm and very sunny day. Additionally, targeting hours after the end of the work day appear to have paid slightly better dividends, although reduced daylight due to the time of year narrowed that window of opportunity to between the times of roughly 5pm to 6:45pm. And finally, the nature of running in-house pilots without expert consulting means that more time is spent on experimentation. Certain times of day were by far and above more

advantageous in terms of the contact rate. Our analysis indicates that the door to contact rate was roughly 5% better after 4pm when compared to before 12pm, which can have an impact on the conversion rate. These factors in this section combined with those formally laid out in previous sections may have contributed to the slight underperformance of this pilot relative to the calculated industry standard.

Pilot Conclusions Recap

After running a door-to-door pilot with a sample size of 1,528 houses spanning roughly a month, the general consensus within Charity Science as an organization is that door-to-door fundraising is not viable for a charity in our particular financial and reputational position.

Below are four key findings that ultimately informed our conclusions regarding the door-to-door fundraising pilot:

- An insufficient number of conversions (defined as new recurring donors), likely due in no small part to a lack of brand recognition
- Substantial time and monetary costs exacerbated by a lack of manpower needed to generate donations offsetting initial sunk costs
- Perceived donor apathy and saturation of particular door-to-door territory
- Other potential confounding factors drawn from qualitative evidence

We have concluded from our pilot study and review of the wider literature that door-to-door fundraising is not feasible for Charity Science to conduct in-house and at this scale. However, this does not entail that face-to-face fundraising is not a viable method were it outsourced and conducted at suitable scale for a sufficient length of time. Our review of existing academic and industry research suggests that door-to-door fundraising can quite reliably offer a significant return on investment over the course of a few years. Such a project would require substantial upfront investment of resources (more than \$100,000), but could plausibly exceed a project ROI of 1:1 after a two or three years. As such, this may be a more appealing prospect than direct donations to effective charities, depending on *inter alia* subjective judgements about time-discounting and risk aversion.

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