

Gain More Gifts with a Matching-Funds Offer

A match offer can create an almost magical boost in funding.

By Jeff Brooks



don't throw around terms like "magic" lightly, because there's no such thing.

But matching funds come close to magic.

A match offer can cut through the clutter and encourage more donors to give. In fact, in my experience, a well-built match offer can bring in 10% to 50% more revenue than a similar message without a match.

And it does so without depressing average gifts. In fact, average gifts sometimes increase with match offers.

See why I'm almost willing to call it magic?

What Is a Match Offer?

A match offer is a simple promise to donors: Send us a donation, and we'll double it. (Or more than double it – a bit on that shortly.)

That doubling money can come from many sources:

- **your board** (it's a great way to get the board involved in fundraising)
- **a major donor** (or several major donors pooled into a single fund)
- **foundation**, corporate, or government sources.

All the matcher must do is agree to give a gift that will "match" the amount of money raised from other donors. Sometimes that depends on the amount raised ("Your gift will be matched if we raise a total of at least \$25,000.") More often there's no minimum but instead a maximum ("Your gift will be matched until we raise a total of \$25,000.")

Both ways add urgency to the message. The donor needs to act quickly to help raise enough or make sure their gift gets matched.

Matches often have a deadline ("Your gift will be matched if you give by December 31.")

The most important element of a match offer is the multiplier. That's the ratio that the donors' contributions

will be matched. Most often, it's 1:1, meaning the gift is doubled. But it can be more than that – the gift can be tripled, quadrupled, even multiplied by 10, 20, 50, or more. And here's the surprising thing: The greater the multiplier, the stronger the response. So if you can swing a 2:1 match ("Your gift will be tripled by matching funds!") do so!

If you can't make that work, don't be discouraged. Do a match anyway.

How to Execute Your Match Fundraising

Here are ways to make the most of a match:

Trumpet the match offer on your outer envelope (or subject line if you're asking via e-mail).

Use language like this:

- Matching funds will double your donation
- Every \$1 will become \$2 (or, Every \$50 will become \$100)
- Your Gift DOUBLED by matching funds
- \$1 = \$2

"Giving away" your offer on the envelope or subject line is usually a bad tactic that suppresses response. Not in this case!

Include a reply device (or landing page).

Use your reply device to show the multiplying power of the match. Here's how a gift array on a match reply might look:

- [] \$25 to become \$50 with matching funds
- [] \$50 to become \$100 with matching funds
- [] \$75 to become \$150 with matching funds

Do the math for the donor. Even when it's super-easy math!

Watch your language.

Clarity, simplicity, repetition, and urgency are the keys, as they are in all fundraising. But with a match, your messaging should be almost entirely about the match.

Of course, you're still raising the money to do something specific. Your call to action should be something like this:

- Feed twice as many hungry children!
- Double my gift to feed the children!
- Match my hunger-fighting gift!

“Matching funds come close to magic.”



Here are some more phrases you can use in match fundraising:

- Every dollar you give – up to a total of \$100,000 – will be matched.
- Your gift will be doubled by matching funds until March 15!
- Your gift will help twice as many children!
- Every dollar you give will become \$2 worth of lifesaving help.

That obsessive focus on the match might strike you as simplistic and uninteresting. Let me assure you – it works.

An easy (and common) mistake is to say something like “Double your gift today.” That may sound to donors as if you’re asking *them* to give twice as much rather than making it clear that *others* will double their donations. Take care to check your language, and have someone else (who wasn’t involved in writing it) proof it too.

Here’s another thing about the wording you use: Make the match the story. Usually you tell a story about a problem you want donors to help solve or an opportunity you want to offer. But here you tell the exciting story of how the donor’s gift will make a bigger difference solving the problem or seizing the opportunity. It’s the story of a smart, compassionate donor who takes action at the right time and in the right way to have maximum impact.

Don’t Forget to Do These Two Vital Things

Make it 100% clear that the donor’s gift is multiplied. You might neglect to do this if you overthink the match. From your point of view, you aren’t getting twice the revenue, so you may feel there’s something bogus about the “doubling” language. But to the donor, the match means twice as much

good happens. Smart fundraisers always speak into their donors’ reality. Not their own.

Offer a multiplier of two or more. If you have a match ratio of less than one-to-one (doubling the donor’s gift) – such as 1:0.5 or “Every dollar you give will become \$1.50” – you won’t get the full power of a match. That doesn’t have the magic! Everyone loves a bargain. A match is a bargain for donors. That’s why it’s such a powerful tool in fundraising. 

Jeff Brooks (jeff.brooks@truesense.com) is creative director at TrueSense Marketing (truesense.com) and author of How to Turn Your Words into Money. He provides fundraising tips at Moceanic (hq@moceanic.com).

Fast-Track Fundraising Ideas

For more ways to boost revenues, see articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

Making Much of Little: Turning Untapped Assets into Gold (Vol. 36, No. 1)

The Five Most Dangerous Fundraising Fallacies (Vol. 32, No. 2)

Two Surprising Ways to Broaden Your Reach Online (Vol. 32, No. 4)

Improve Your Direct-Mail Outcomes With Advanced Analytics (Vol. 38, No. 2)

The Best Way to Tell Your Organization’s Story? Capture It on Video (Vol. 35, No. 4)

Top 10 Trends: How Major Donors Are Changing & What to Do about It (Vol. 31, No. 4)

Turning the Direct Ask into Gold (Vol. 30, No. 1)

E-Mail Mistakes that Could Be Damaging Your Fundraising (Vol. 36, No. 2)