

Using active choice and social norms to increase charitable giving in Scottsdale, AZ

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Overview

Scottsdale and the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) worked together to increase donations to the city's "Scottsdale Cares" program through an email fundraising campaign. The emails encouraged recipients to donate through their utility bill. We tested whether an email that prompts customers to make an active choice is effective in terms of increasing the likelihood of donating and recurring donation sign-ups.

Scottsdale residents were randomized to receive either no email, an email with a button saying 'Yes' that was hyperlinked through to the signup form, or an email with a 'Yes' and a 'No' button where the former was hyperlinked through to the signup form. Where the salience of donating is increased by any email versus no email, recent studies have also shown that presenting an active choice can lead to engagement with a service.¹ Even though residents are not compelled to make any choice at all, by presenting a salient 'No' button in addition to the 'Yes' button in the email aimed to induce more active consideration of a pro-social activity, and in turn generate more donations.

In this trial, 25,093 email addresses were randomized to one of the three trial arms. Our primary outcome measure was whether donation was made within 30 days of the email being sent out.²

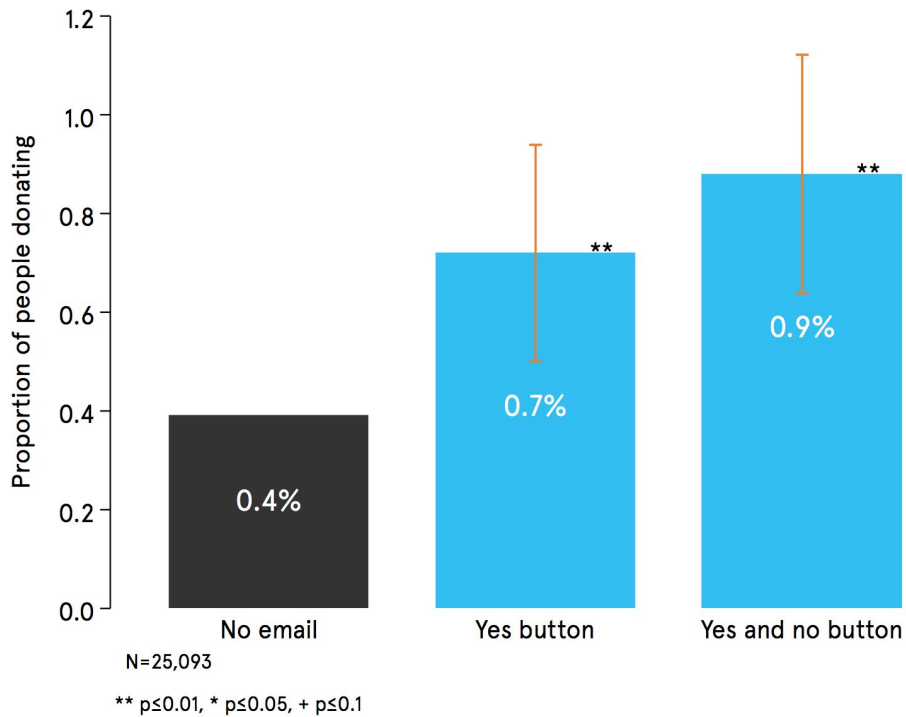
Results

Both of the emails had a statistically robust effect on increasing the donation rate compared to the control. We see an increase of approximately 75% for the Yes button email, and an increase of 125% for the Yes and No buttons email. However, the base rate in the group that received no emails was very small, at just 0.4%. This suggests that there may be other pain points in the process that can be addressed. For example, the process of signing up could be simplified, or alternative modes of donation could be created, to ensure that more people who are interested in donating can easily and quickly do so.

¹ Keller, P. A., Harlam, B., Loewenstein, G., & Volpp, K. G. (2011). Enhanced active choice: A new method to motivate behavior change. *Journal of Consumer psychology*, 21(4), 376-383.

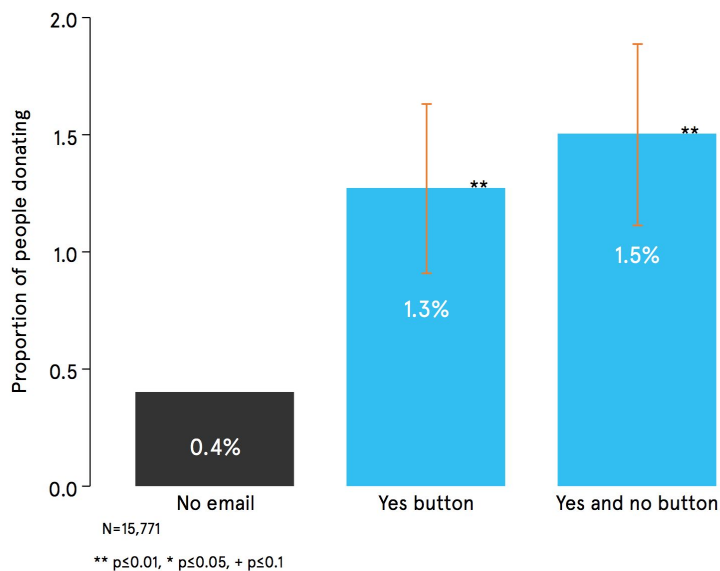
² As the maximum suggested donation is \$1 we do not look at donation amounts because over 80% of those who donate donate exactly \$1.

Figure 1: Effect of receiving different emails on donation rates (amongst all trial participants)



Using data on email opening rates, we were able to estimate the effect of the email among those who actually read it. The donation rate for this cohort more than doubled for customers that received the Yes button email, and more than tripled for customers that received the the Yes and No button email.

Figure 2: Effect of receiving different emails on donation rates (amongst those who opened the email)



Annex 1: Yes and No buttons email

From: Greg Bestgen, City of Scottsdale

Subject: Scottsdale Cares!

Dear neighbor,

[Scottsdale Cares](#) is an easy way for you to give back to your community. 100% of donations go to local non-profits that help Scottsdale residents in need.

Local charities needed more than \$400,000 in funding to support Scottsdale residents, but Scottsdale Cares was only able to fund one-fourth of the need. This year, thousands of your neighbors have stepped up. **But there's more work to be done.**



Would you like to join your neighbors and donate to Scottsdale Cares?



Here's how to donate.

- [Log in to your e-billing account](#)
- Click on "My Payments" in the left-hand side navigation menu
- Click on the "Auto Payments" tab
- Click the "Edit" link next to your monthly utility bill payment
- Select "Yes, include my Scottsdale Cares amount" to donate \$1 automatically each month

Would you like to pay your Scottsdale Cares amount with your auto payment? Yes, include my Scottsdale Cares amount. [What is Scottsdale Cares & Who Benefits?](#) No, do not include my Scottsdale Cares amount.

- Click "Save"

Sincerely,

Greg Bestgen
Human Services Director
City of Scottsdale

Annex 2: Just yes button email

From: Greg Bestgen, City of Scottsdale
Subject: Scottsdale Cares!

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