Fundraising Breakout Session One
The Highly Addictive Drug of Fundraising: Understanding Donor Motivations
Speaker: David Burgess, Director of Apollo Fundraising

David's talk looked at effective ways to trigger and reinforce donor behaviour. Considering the Pyramid of Giving model, David identified a couple of key stages at which fundraising often falls down when trying to move donors up the pyramid (from prospect to first gift, and from first gift to repeated gift), and looked at how it might be possible for fundraisers to shape donor behaviour.

Based on the Fogg Behaviour Model, David described how three things must coincide to make a donor move up the Pyramid of Giving: the donor's engagement with the cause (which provides their motivation to give); the donor's ability to give (which includes both their financial means, but also the time/effort they have to commit to making a donation); and a trigger or ask, provided by the fundraiser. A donor will not give unless their motivation and ability combine to take them into the top right section of the Fogg graph.

So which is easier to increase - the donor's motivation, or their ability to give? While you can't magic more funds into a donor's bank account, you can make sure that the giving process that donors go through on your website is as easy and streamlined as possible, increasing their practical ability to give. Try out the donor journey on your own website - how many obstacles do you put in front of prospective donors before they can finally hand their money over to you? Can you reduce these, or make the pathway clearer?

You can also lower the threshold that a donor's motivation needs to reach before they will donate, by making donating seem the social norm. People are hardwired to want to fit in socially, and will often behave as they think other people will behave. David gave the example of a behavioural study in the energy sector, in which households were told whether their energy consumption was higher or lower than an average household. Not only did high-consumers of energy reduce their consumption to be closer to the average, but low-consumers increased their consumption. How could you make giving appear to be the social norm for users on your website or visitors to your venue?

The more specific you can be about the group your donor wants to belong to, the more effective your results will be. This isn't necessarily aspirational. In another behavioural study based around encouraging hotel guests to reuse towels during their stay, guests responded more strongly when told that a high percentage of guests in their room reused their towels, than when they were told about the same percentage of guests in the hotel as a whole. How specific can you be in defining groups that your donors want to belong to? And how specifically can you define what that group's behaviour is - not just how many of them donate, but how much do they donate?

A couple of common social norming problems to be aware of: many charitable giving sites allow donors to see the size of other people's donations. This is great when you've just had a large donation, as it drags the average value of future donations up, but bad news if someone makes a smaller gift. It can be a good idea to have some reliable major donors on

hand to visibly top up a campaign if a flurry of smaller gifts start to come in. Similarly, if you have a see-through donation box at your venue, what message does it send to prospective donors if the box is almost empty, or only contains small change?

Can you fine tune the copy on your website to increase donor engagement? In a study of legacy giving, 5% of people who were drawing up their wills with a solicitor chose to make a bequest to a charitable cause if unprompted; that rose to 10.4% for people who were asked if they would like to leave a legacy; and rose again to 15.4% for people who were asked to think if there was a cause that they felt passionately about and would like to leave a legacy to. Not only that, but the donations from the "passionate" group were around £2K larger than the other groups. How could you evoke an emotional connection in your donors?

Audience example: social norming within corporate giving can lead not just to an increased number of corporate donors, but also can stimulate competition; if giving becomes a norm, then businesses may give more in order to stand out and impress customers/local authorities more.

Audience question: would an email about the impact of donations received so far be a stimulant to improved donor behaviour?
David suggested that messages around need rather than achievement are usually more powerful, but the two could be combined.

David then moved on to focus on the problems converting one time donors into repeat donors. The top three reasons given for why donors don't give a second time are: they felt they were not properly thanked; they had not seen the impact of their donation; and they were not asked to give again.

Thanking is probably something that happens with almost all donations, but it must be a thank that the donor feels engaged by, otherwise it will be forgotten. Thanking needs to make donors feel happy and reassured that making their donation was the right thing to do. Two chemicals released in the brain that create the sensation of happiness are serotonin which is linked to feelings of social acceptance and also social dominance or importance; and dopamine, which is linked to a sense or reward or achievement - so these are the feelings that fundraisers should try to provoke in donors. The more immediate that feedback can be, the stronger the positive reinforcement. The better a donor feels about their donation the more likely they are to seek a second "hit" with a repeat gift.

What happens at the moment your donors click on the button to make their donation? Can you make this feel more special? More personal (phone calls or handwritten cards)? More immediate? How can you reward a donor? Can you create surprise, for example with an unexpected reward like a video? Could the person who makes the thank you be someone the donor admires or identifies with? Small tweaks can make big differences - even something as simple as including a smile in the thank you can reinforce the right emotional response (in the study about household energy consumption, households with lower than average consumption did not increase their usage towards the average if the message that they were under-consumers was accompanied by a simple smiley face graphic).

How can you make your donors feel they and their gift are significant? Even small donations should show progress towards an end goal, but if this can be broken into manageable chunks it will be more effective. Donors are more likely to help an individual than a large group or a broad cause, because it feels like a manageable scale. A strong example of this is the Lyric Hammersmith's capital campaign, in which donations were assigned to a specific purpose at the point of donation - for example a low level donor could choose to donate towards buying mugs or gaffa tape. There is a need to balance this sort of tangibility with accountability; if you are not going to actually spend that money on a mug or gaffa tape, you must be open about this.

Audience question: should you segment your thanks, based on donor profiling?
David felt no - all donors should be thanked as much as possible, because you don't know who has the potential to give again, and to give much more in the future.

Audience question: is it possible to over-thank, for example by spending more on the thank you and follow-up than the value of the donation?
David agreed that this could be a problem - make sure that your follow-up contact with donors is actually what they want.

Audience question: how important is the language used in the thank you?
David said it is of great importance - small changes can have big impacts, and testing of different copy is essential.

Audience question: what are the factors that motivate donors to give to the arts?
David suggested that particularly with longer term or larger donors, it will usually be a combination of factors, but the real motivation is the outcome of their donation, the change it will make. Understand the change that the donor is seeking, and try to provide that to them.

Audience question: should donor lists be broken up into donor levels - some feedback has suggested that people would prefer to be all grouped together regardless of the value of their donation.
David's comments were that there is a balance to strike here between provoking aspirational behaviour (larger donations to move up the ladder) vs.a donor feeling like there are groups they can't be part of.

Audience question: what triggers in written copy can be used to shape behaviour?
David noted that there are many examples of "anchoring" where words or particularly numbers that appear in an environment can affect behaviour, even when not directly related (for example, in a study in which German judges were asked to roll a dice between hearing a case and sentencing it, the number rolled was shown to correlate to the sentence given, with lower numbers on the dice producing shorter jail terms).

Further reading suggestions:
Nudge by Cass R Sunstein and Richard H Thaler
Thinking Fast & Slow by Daniel Kahneman
www.bjfogg.com