

Time to Give: A Field Experiment on Intertemporal Charitable Giving

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Abstract: We conduct a natural field experiment to understand the importance of intertemporal substitution in charitable giving. Potential donors are offered a match on their donation if they give within the following few days of receiving the offer and are simultaneously informed that a similar match will be available to them in four weeks or two weeks time. The match offer is made to a donor via an email and is specific to the donor receiving the message. We contacted over 39,000 potential donors from email lists of supporters from nine nonprofit organizations. Emails were sent either two or four weeks prior to Giving Tuesday (last Tuesday in November), and match rates were either 80%, 100% or 120%. The match rate on Giving Tuesday was 100%. The number of donations and the total amount of money donated are larger from donors who received a 100% match offer earlier in the month compared to those in the control group. Offering matches earlier in the month does not crowd out the amount of money raised on Giving Tuesday. On average, total fundraising dollars from those contacted earlier than Giving Tuesday was 80% higher. Finally, we observe larger responsiveness to match rates than previously found, and the responsiveness is particularly pronounced when the donation ask is four weeks before Giving Tuesday.