DO I CARE IF YOU ARE PAID? A FIELD EXPERIMENT ON CHARITABLE DONATIONS

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A Field Experiment on Charitable Donations*

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Abstract

This study investigates how information on solicitors' compensation affects charitable giving in a door-to-door field experiment with more than 2,800 households. We vary whether solicitors are paid or not and the information about this compensation that potential donors receive. Relative to the treatment in which potential donors are not informed about the solicitor's compensation, donations increase by 16% when potential donors are informed that solicitors are paid, but are not effected when donors are informed that solicitors are unpaid. The effect is driven by female donors, who increase their donations by 88%. Our findings suggest that if charities pay their solicitors, it could be beneficial to communicate this information to donors.

Keywords: charitable giving, field experiment, information

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1. Introduction

Charitable giving is common and important. Private households in the US contribute nearly $375 billion dollars to charity annually (Giving USA, 2016). Hence, understanding what motivates people to give is important. In this paper we focus on one element of the decision process--how the information that solicitors provide regarding their compensation in fundraising campaigns affect charitable giving.

Compensation of the solicitors is a piece of information about a charity that falls into a larger set of considerations regarding how the donated money is used. An example are overhead costs. Bowman (2006) reports that changes in overhead ratios communicate useful information to donors. Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) identify overhead costs as important factor influencing charitable giving as fundraising costs impact on donors' confidence on the campaign (e.g., Sargeant, Ford, and West, 2006). Gneezy, Keenan, and Gneezy (2014) found that informing potential donors of low overhead costs increased donation rates. Would information regarding how solicitors are paid also affect behavior? Some charities pay solicitors for their work, whereas others do not. In some cases, solicitors wear nametags indicating that they are volunteers, while in other cases, the pay status of solicitors is not revealed at all. Consequently, potential donors must form own beliefs on the compensation of solicitors.

We hypothesize that the information on solicitors' compensation can have important signaling effects. First, when solicitors are not compensated it may signal that they are intrinsically motivated to work. Thus, households may feel empathic and indirectly reward them by donating more. However, information on volunteer work is noisy, as households may not believe that solicitors are telling the truth. If households mistrust this information, they may lower their donations. A solicitor who tells potential donors upfront that he/she is paid may be perceived as

more reliable and donors may be less likely to suspect him/her. Potential donors may reciprocate this transparency through increasing their donations.

To test these hypotheses, we conducted a door-to-door fundraising field experiment with more than 2,800 households. Many private donations are collected via door-to-door fundraising campaigns, and field experiments on door-to-door fundraising are a popular instrument to analyze donors' motivations to give (e.g., DellaVigna, List, and Malmendier, 2012; Edwards and List, 2014).[1] In different treatments, we varied whether solicitors revealed to potential donors whether they were *paid* or *unpaid.* In the control treatments, households received no information about the compensation of solicitors, but we also varied the payment status of solicitors to control for motivational crowding effects on the solicitor side.[2]

As predicted, our results show that informing donors that solicitors are paid increases donations by 16%. Interestingly (and surprisingly to us), we find that the increase is entirely driven by a substantial gender effect. When informed that solicitors are paid, female donors increase their donations by 88% relative to the no information treatments. This information has no significant effect on the behavior of male donors.

Our findings have implications for fundraising practices as they show how a simple piece of information can increase trust and donations. More generally, the results suggest that increasing transparency may increase the effectiveness of the donation pledge.

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[1] Other approaches testing the effectiveness of matching schemes commonly use mail solicitations (e.g., Adena and Huck, 2017; Huck and Rasul, 2011; Karlan and List, 2007; Karlan, List, and Shafir, 2011).
[2] These effects were emphasized by Gneezy and Rustichini (2000), i.e., paying (small) financial incentives to solicitors lowers their performance. See Barasch, Berman, and Small (2016) for an experimental demonstration in fundraising.

2. Experimental Environment

2.1 Experimental Design

To conduct our experiment, we partnered with a local non-profit organization: "Family Voices" of Wisconsin. With the help of students of the UW-Madison we carried out a door-to-door fundraising campaign. Family Voices offers a free tutoring program for low-income teens in the Madison Wisconsin area. The organization usually does not send out solicitors to collect money. Thus, there should be no bias in beliefs about whether our solicitors are paid or not. The organization is not political and has no record of any kind of scandals. Especially, there were never any scandals related to the spending of donations. We recruited 17 undergraduate students (53% female) who were trained to carry out the experiment by acting as door-to-door solicitors.

Our interest was in exploring whether knowing that a solicitor is a paid worker or an unpaid volunteer affects the amount of a charitable donation and the likelihood of donors to make a donation. As such, in each soliciting session, we varied i) whether we paid our undergraduate students for that session and ii) whether our undergraduate students provided information about their payment status to the donor. Table 1 presents the experimental treatments and the number of observations in each condition. Comparisons of treatment cells A (*Paid-NoInfo*) and B (*Paid-Info*) allows us to investigate whether learning that a solicitor is paid influences donations. Comparing households' donation choices in cells C (*Unpaid-NoInfo*) and D (*Unpaid-Info*) enables us to study the information effect of an unpaid solicitor. In addition, we can control for the pure effect of financial incentives on solicitors' performance by comparing donations in the cells A (*Paid-NoInfo*) and C (*Unpaid-NoInfo*).

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Table 1: Experimental Treatments

	NoInfo	*Info*
Paid	(A) 233 households	(B) 266 households
Unpaid	(C) 254 households	(D) 284 households

2.2 Procedures

We first provided a training session on how to solicit. During this time solicitors learned detailed information about the charity and its goals and practiced reading the script to one another. At the beginning of the script, the solicitor introduced him/herself as either a paid worker, working for UW-Madison (*Paid-Info treatment*), an unpaid volunteer, volunteering for UW-Madison (*Unpaid-Info treatment*) or as being from UW-Madison (*Paid-NoInfo* and *Unpaid-NoInfo treatments*). The solicitor provided a few sentences describing the charity Family Voices. The solicitor noted that 100% of the donation would go towards covering the costs of educational materials for the program. Solicitors received a name badge with their name, the name of the charity. Depending on the treatment, the name badge either contained the words "paid worker", "unpaid volunteer" or no additional words. They wore the name badges while visiting households. As we study whether information about payment condition of solicitors affects donations, it is especially important to reach working people as well as homemakers. Thus, soliciting was conducted on Saturdays and Sundays.

Since we wanted all of our solicitors to work in each treatment cell, we agreed on the following compensation scheme with our research assistants. We created routes with 25 houses each and then randomly assigned them to solicitors.[3] A day of work was broken into four routes,

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[3] The only criterion that was applied in the selection of a neighborhood was that it was a safe area.

whereby two routes were completed in the morning and two were completed in the afternoon. Solicitors were always provided with two routes of paid work and two routes where they received no compensation. The paid work was compensated at $25 per route and volunteering time was uncompensated. Upon arriving to the site, each solicitor flipped a coin to determine whether the morning would consist of a paid route followed by an unpaid route, or vice versa. Solicitors then flipped another coin to determine whether the afternoon would consist of a paid route followed by an unpaid route or vice versa. We also randomly assigned whether we ran the information treatments either in the afternoon or the morning (the remaining part of the day was assigned to no information). The solicitors' treatment assignment therefore determined which treatment each household was assigned to. No solicitors declined to participate in the unpaid sessions, generating a balanced dataset of paid/unpaid conditions.

Upon visiting each household, solicitors were required to record key information about each visit. This also included details on whether or not they approached the house (houses with a 'no soliciting' sign were not approached), whether the door was opened, whether the individual donated, the amount of the donation. Solicitors also recorded the gender and race of the person opening the door. They were instructed not to indicate or create the impression that this was an experiment.

3. Results

3.1 Data

Solicitors approached 2,608 households, of which 1,037 opened the door.[4] The neighborhood was relatively wealthy: the mean annual income of the approached households was US$102,977 (sd= 14,387).[5] Of those households who opened the door 92% were white and 49% were female. Table 2 presents summary statistics on the approached households in the treatments. It demonstrates that we have a balanced treatment assignment. That is, in all treatments the solicitors approached more than 90% of the households which were assigned. Of the approached households, roughly 40% opened the door in each treatment. Moreover, we had a similar number of males/females and white persons in each treatment.

Table 2: Summary Statistics on Approached Households

	N assigned	% approached (of assigned)	% opened door (of approached)	N males (if door opened)	N females (if door opened)	N white (if door opened)	N (if door opened)
Paid-NoInfo	644	94.41	38.45	118	111	217	233
Paid-Info	755	93.11	37.84	132	128	244	266
Unpaid-NoInfo	677	91.29	41.10	126	119	235	254
Unpaid-Info	732	92.62	41.95	138	144	257	284
All	2,808	92.84	39.78	514	502	953	1,037

Notes*: The table gives an overview on the number of assigned and the percentage of approached households and on the percentage of households that opened the door by treatment. The number of males, females, and whites among those who opened the door is presented in columns 5-8. The sum of males and females is smaller than the total number, as for 21 households the gender of the subject was either not recorded, or a couple (a male and a female) opened the door together.

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[4] We have data on demographics (e.g., skin color, gender) only for 1,013 subjects.
[5] 62.18% have a high, 37.78% have a middle, and only 0.04% have a moderate income.

3.2 Main Results

In this section we start by reporting our main results on the average donation levels (in \$) in our different treatments. Figure 1 overviews the average donation levels (in \$) of households who opened the door. The data is unconditional on the decision to donate.[6]
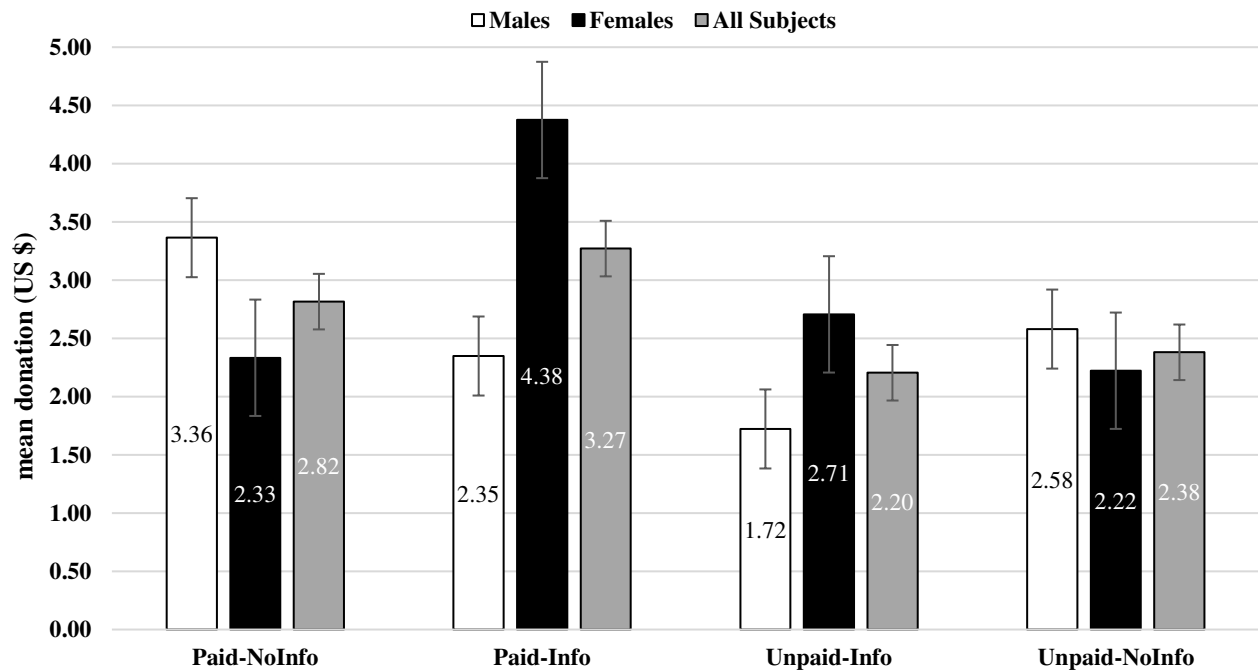

Figure 1: Overview Donations Levels

Notes*: Donors can decide to donate any possible amount. The bar graph depicts the average donation amounts (in US\$) in the treatments. Data of all 1,037 households that opened the door are included (unconditional on whether subjects donated). The bars for "All Subjects" contain observations of male and female donors as well as a small number of observations without a record of donors' gender.

Figure 1 shows that if paid solicitors inform donors about their compensation, this increases the average donation levels from US\$2.82 (sd=9.28) to US\$3.27 (sd=8.60) by 16% (see gray bars in the first and second panels). Female donors increase their contributions by 88% from US\$2.33

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[6] Summary statistics on donations rates and donations levels by treatment and by gender are provided in Table A1 in Appendix A. Figure B1 in Appendix B presents the distribution of donation rates by treatment.

(sd=6.16) to US$4.38 (sd=9.26) (see black bars in the first and second panels). Interestingly, the

information that a solicitor is unpaid has no effect on donations. In this case, we only find a

moderate effect on the donation level, which slightly increases from US$2.20 (sd=6.74) to US$2.38

(sd=7.05) (see grey bars in the third and fourth panels).

Table 3: Parametric Statistics of Donation Levels

	(OLS), Dependent Variable = Dollars Donated			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	(Unpaid only)	(Paid only)	(All)	(All)
Paid			1.542	2.013*
			(1.031)	(1.049)
Information	.792	-.625	.817	.847
	(.869)	(1.182)	(.995)	(1.000)
Paid X Information			-1.617	-1.627
			(1.421)	(1.426)
Female Donor	.912	-1.287	.885	1.038
	(.899)	(1.236)	(1.031)	(1.035)
Paid X Female Donor			-1.935	-2.254
			(1.487)	(1.490)
Information X Female Donor	-1.073	3.103*	-1.080	-1.096
	(1.229)	(1.662)	(1.410)	(1.413)
Paid X Information X Female Donor			4.088**	4.164**
			(2.025)	(2.025)
Constant	-6.275*	3.883	.960	-3.187
	(3.488)	(5.135)	(1.121)	(2.882)
Controls	YES	YES	NO	YES
Solicitor Fixed Effect	YES	YES	YES	YES
Obs.	524	487	1,016	1,011
P model	.3437	.5624	.4126	.2140
Adj. R-squared	.0042	-.0035	.0009	.0055

Notes: Estimates for an ordinary least squares model, with standard errors in parenthesis. All data conditional on the door being opened are included. Significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% level is denoted by *, **, and ***, respectively. The regressions include fixed effects for the solicitor. *Controls* include for household income, household ownership of the house/apartment, donor being white, and for the hour of day.

Table 3 reports parametric regression analyses incorporating randomization fixed effects of solicitors, time of day and other controls. The dependent variable is the dollars donated. It is zero if households did not donate.

Model 1 focuses on the data of the unpaid solicitors, whereas Model 2 concentrates on the data of paid solicitors. We apply these sub-sample regressions to better interpret the potential interaction effects of solicitors' payment status and the role of providing households with this information. In these models we incorporate the following regressors: *information* is a dummy which is positive when the solicitor informs the households of her compensation. *Female donor* is a dummy which controls for the gender of the donor. Moreover, *information x female donor* controls for the interaction effects of information on female donors. Models 3 and 4 analyze the data of all treatments. Here, we also include a dummy variable which controls for the impact of paid solicitors (*paid*). To explore how the effects of paid solicitors differ by the gender of the potential donor, we include the interaction of *paid x female donor.* Finally, we include *paid x information x female donor* which controls for the effects of informing female donors that solicitors are paid.

The regressions support the pattern observed in Figure 1. Model 1 demonstrates that the information about workers being volunteers does not increase donations. In Model 2 we find that the information that workers are paid moderately increases donations by female donors. Importantly, Models 3-4 indicate that the information of a paid solicitor significantly increases donations, but only if the donor is female. This is supported by the interaction term *paid x information x female donor* which is significant and positive. Our insights hold irrespective of whether we analyze the data conditioned on a certain payment (Models 1-2) or jointly (Models 3-

4) and irrespective of whether we include control variables (Model 3 vs. 4).[7] Summing up, we can state:

Result 1: The information that a solicitor is paid yields significantly higher donations, but only for female donors.

and

Result 2: The information that a solicitor is unpaid does not influence donations, for either male or female donors.

In Model 4, once we include all data and controls, we find that paid solicitors collect moderately higher donations. This highlights the importance of our control treatments where households are faced with paid or unpaid solicitors, but receive no information on their compensation. This suggests that even though households have no information on solicitors' compensation, solicitors may signal their motivation with facial expressions and other cues (see Barasch, Berman, and Small, 2014, 2016).

3.3 Intensive and Extensive Margin

In the previous section, we analyzed the effect of treatments on donation levels. Our main result was that donations increase, if female donors learn that a solicitor is paid. In this section, we analyze the underlying drivers of these effects. More precisely, we study whether this effect is driven by a) increased donation levels conditional on giving (intensive margin), or b) an increased donation

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[7] In further analysis we could not find an interaction effect between the gender of the donors and of the solicitors.

probability (extensive margin), or c) a combination of both effects. Therefore, Figure 2 focuses on the probability that households donate in the treatments.
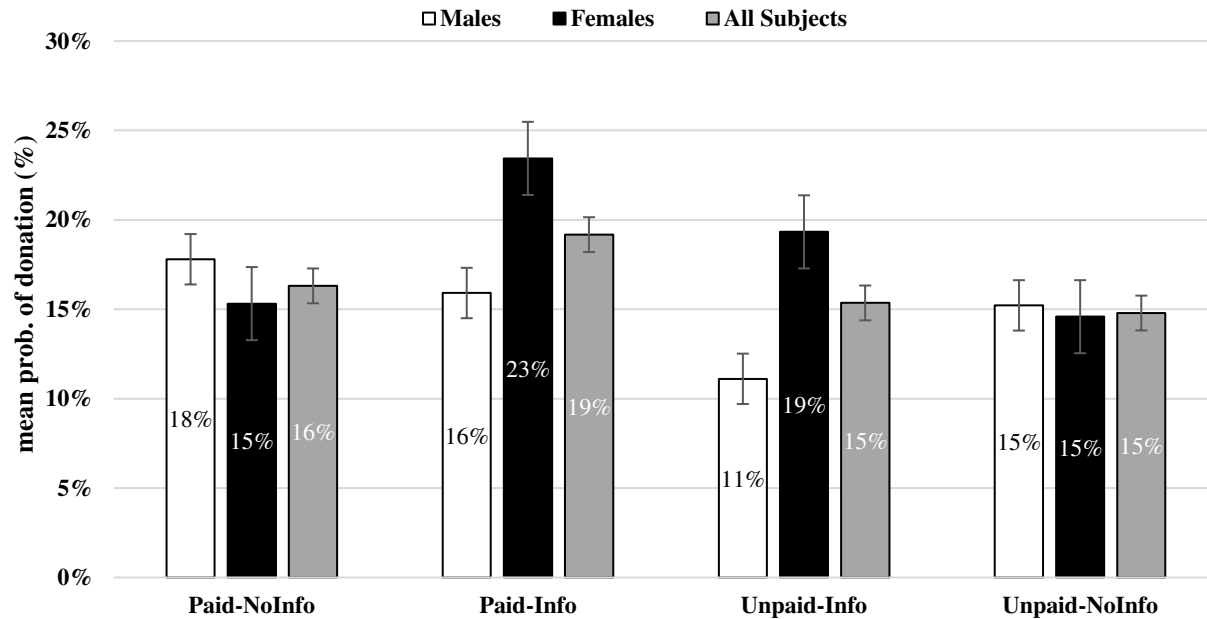

Figure 2: Overview Donation Rates

Notes*: Donors can decide to donate any possible amount. The bar graph depicts the donation rates (in %) in the treatments. Data for male, female, and all donors are reported. Only data of households that opened the door are included. The bars for "All Subjects" contain observations of male and female donors as well as a small number of observations without a record of donors' gender.*

It turns out that, when solicitors communicate that they are paid the likelihood to give increases from 16% to 19%. Figure 2 emphasizes that this is again driven by female households, who increase the likelihood to donate from 15% to 23% when knowing that the solicitor is compensated. Thus, there is a weak effect on the donation probability. By contrast, the donation likelihood of men even slightly decreases from 18% down to 16% when being informed that solicitors are compensated. Comparing Figures 1 and 2 it appears logical to expect that the combination of both, the intensive and the extensive margin, leads to the treatment effect. This impression is supported by additional regression analyzes presented in Table 4. The table provides

parametric statistics of donations conditional on giving (Models 1-4) and data on subjects' likelihood to give which is captured by donation rates (Models 5-8).

Table 4: Parametric Statistics of Donation Levels conditional on Giving and Donation Rates

	(OLS), Dependent Variable = Dollars Donated *(Data conditional on Giving)*				(LPM), Dependent Variable = Donated (Binary) *(All data)*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	(Unpaid only)	(Paid only)	(All)	(All)	(Unpaid only)	(Paid only)	(All)	(All)
Paid			6.633	7.298			.060	.075*
			(5.061)	(5.294)			(.044)	(.045)
Information	2.213	-8.867	-.723	-.531	.040	.008	.044	.045
	(4.224)	(5.372)	(4.725)	(4.969)	(.041)	(.050)	(.042)	(.041)
Paid X Information			-5.726	-6.674			-.046	-.049
			(6.656)	(6.829)			(.063)	(.063)
Female Donor	.531	-8.566	-.1616	-.127	.074	.094	.082*	.086*
	(4.399)	(5.686)	(4.821)	(5.054)	(.046)	(.071)	(.046)	(.046)
Paid X Female Donor			-5.785	-7.393			-.101	-.109
			(6.884)	(7.138)			(.068)	(.068)
Information X Female Donor	-1.680	12.655*	.293	. 428	-.066	.094	-.078	-.078
	(5.663)	(7.494)	(6.303)	(6.580)	(.063)	(.071)	(.063)	(.063)
Paid X Information X Female Donor			9.26	11.794			.171*	.173*
			(8.87)	(9.192)			(.094)	(.094)
Constant	-17.455	44.218**	12.446	4.628	-.195	.196	.079*	.083
	(17.259)	(21.623)	(5.76)	(13.735)	(.167)	(.238)	(.044)	(.131)
Controls	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Solicitor Fixed Effect	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Obs.	77	87	165	164	524	487	1,016	1,016
P model	. 2849	. 5705	.9696	. 9168	<.000	<.000	.2681	.2681
Adj. R-squared / R-squared	. 0553	-.0205	-.074	-0.065	. 0463	.0576	.0291	.0291
Root MSE	-	-	-	-	. 3559	.38476	.37046	.37046

Notes: Models 1-4: estimates for an ordinary least squares model; Models 5-8: estimates for a linear probability model. Standard errors in parenthesis. Models 1-4: Only data from those donors, who make positive donations are included; Models 5-8: All data conditional on the door being opened are included. Significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% level is denoted by *, **, and ***, respectively. The regressions include fixed effects for the solicitor. For Models 1-4 Adj. R-squared, while for Models 5-8 R-squared is reported. *Controls* include for household income, household ownership of the house/apartment, donor being white, and for the hour of day.

The models in Table 4 illustrate that the treatment effects we observe are driven partly by effects on the intensive margin and partly by the effects on the intensive margin. For example, we see a weakly significant effect of *information x female donor* in Model 2, and a weekly significant effect of *paid x information x female donor* in Models 7-8. Neither the results on donation rates conditional on giving nor the results on dotation rates are robust. This indicates that the treatment effect is induced by both factors working together. Also, since both results are weaker than the overall result, and the sample size is lower in the "conditional on giving" Models 1-6, we may be low on power. We summarize our findings as follows:

Result 3: In *Paid-Info*, the donation amount of female donors is higher as a consequence of an increased likelihood to give and higher conditional donations.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In our field experiment, informing potential donors regarding solicitors' compensation significantly increased willingness to give. Interestingly, this only holds for female donors and only when being informed that solicitors are paid. Why do female donors positively react to the signal of a paid solicitor? A potential explanation is gender differences in trusting behavior. The literature on gender differences in preferences (Croson and Gneezy, 2009) reports that women are less trusting than men (e.g., Eckel and Wilson, 2004; Slonim and Guillen, 2010). As a result, women may trust the solicitor less when they have less information on the solicitor's motivation, or when solicitors claim they are volunteers.

Our result suggest that organizations could benefit from communicating the compensation scheme they provide to their solicitors. More generally, the results suggest that more transparency from the organization may increase trust and donations.

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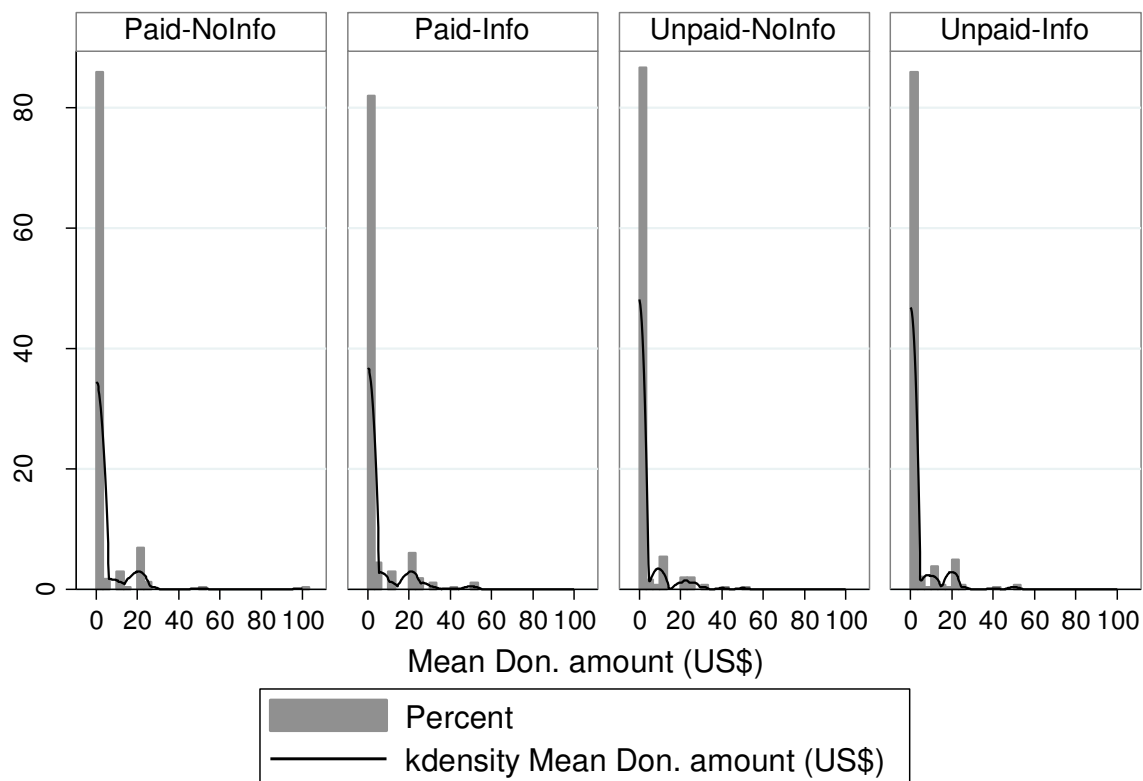
Appendix – For Online Distribution

Appendix A: Tables

Table A1: Summary Statistics Donations Levels and Donation Rates

		Mean Don. amount (US\$) (sd)	Mean Don. amount (US\$) if Don.>0 (sd)	Don. prob. (%)	N (N if Don.>0)
Paid-NoInfo	Males	3.36 (11.582)	20.89 (22.027)	17.80	118 (19)
	Females	2.33 (6.163)	15.23 (7.233)	15.32	111 (17)
	All	2.82 (9.277)	18.22 (16.782)	16.31	233 (36)
Paid-Info	Males	2.35 (7.985)	14.76 (15.006)	15.91	132 (21)
	Females	4.38 (9.264)	18.67 (9.994)	23.44	128 (30)
	All	3.27 (8.597)	17.06 (12.32)	19.17	266 (51)
Unpaid-NoInfo	Males	1.72 (5.759)	15.5 (9.428)	11.11	126 (14)
	Females	2.71 (7.665)	15.33 (11.972)	19.33	119 (21)
	All	2.20 (6.739)	15.14 (10.863)	15.35	254 (37)
Unpaid-Info	Males	2.58 (7.447)	16.18 (11.454)	15.22	138 (22)
	Females	2.22 (6.707)	15.24 (10.649)	14.58	144 (21)
	All	2.38 (7.046)	15.72 (10.946)	14.79	284 (43)

Notes: Donors can decide to donate any possible amount. The first column contains average donation levels in US\$ (standard errors in parenthesis). The second contains average donations of all donors with positive donations. Third column indicates the donation probability. In the last column reports the number of observations (of observations with positive donations in parenthesis). Only data of households that opened the door are included. The rows "All" contain observations of male and female donors as well as a small number of observations without a record of donors' gender.

Appendix B: Figures

Figure B1: Distribution of Donation Rates by Treatment

Notes: Donors can decide to donate any possible amount. The histogram depicts the distribution of donations in percentage by treatment. The line depicts a univariate kernel density estimation of donation amounts.

Appendix C: Scripts for the Door-to-Door Solicitation

C.1 Solicitor Script ("*Paid-Info*")

Hello, I am <u>being paid by </u>UW-Madison to <u>work</u> raising money for UW Family Voices.

Family Voices is a program that tutors low-income students with reading, writing and math, sets up role models to increase college attendance and gets parents involved. 100% of your donation will go toward covering costs in educational materials and food for tutors and students.

We appreciate any amount that you can donate. You can donate using cash, check or credit card.

Would you like to donate?

If yes, ask how much, then *Thank you for your donation!*
If no, *Thank you for your time!*

C.2 Solicitor Script ("*Unpaid-Info*")

Hello, I am <u>an unpaid volunteer</u> at UW-Madison <u>volunteering </u>to raise money for UW Family Voices.

Family Voices is a program that tutors low-income students with reading, writing and math, sets up role models to increase college attendance and gets parents involved. 100% of your donation will go toward covering costs in educational materials and food for tutors and students.

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We appreciate any amount that you can donate. You can donate using cash, check or credit card.

Would you like to donate?

If yes, ask how much, then *Thank you for your donation!*

If no, *Thank you for your time!*

C.3 Solicitor Script ("*Paid-NoInfo*" and "*Unpaid-NoInfo*")

Hello, I am <u>from</u> UW-Madison raising money for UW Family Voices.

Family Voices is a program that tutors low-income students with reading, writing and math, sets up role models to increase college attendance and gets parents involved. 100% of your donation will go toward covering costs in educational materials and food for tutors and students.

We appreciate any amount that you can donate. You can donate using cash, check or credit card.

Would you like to donate?

If yes, ask how much, then *Thank you for your donation!*

If no, *Thank you for your time!*

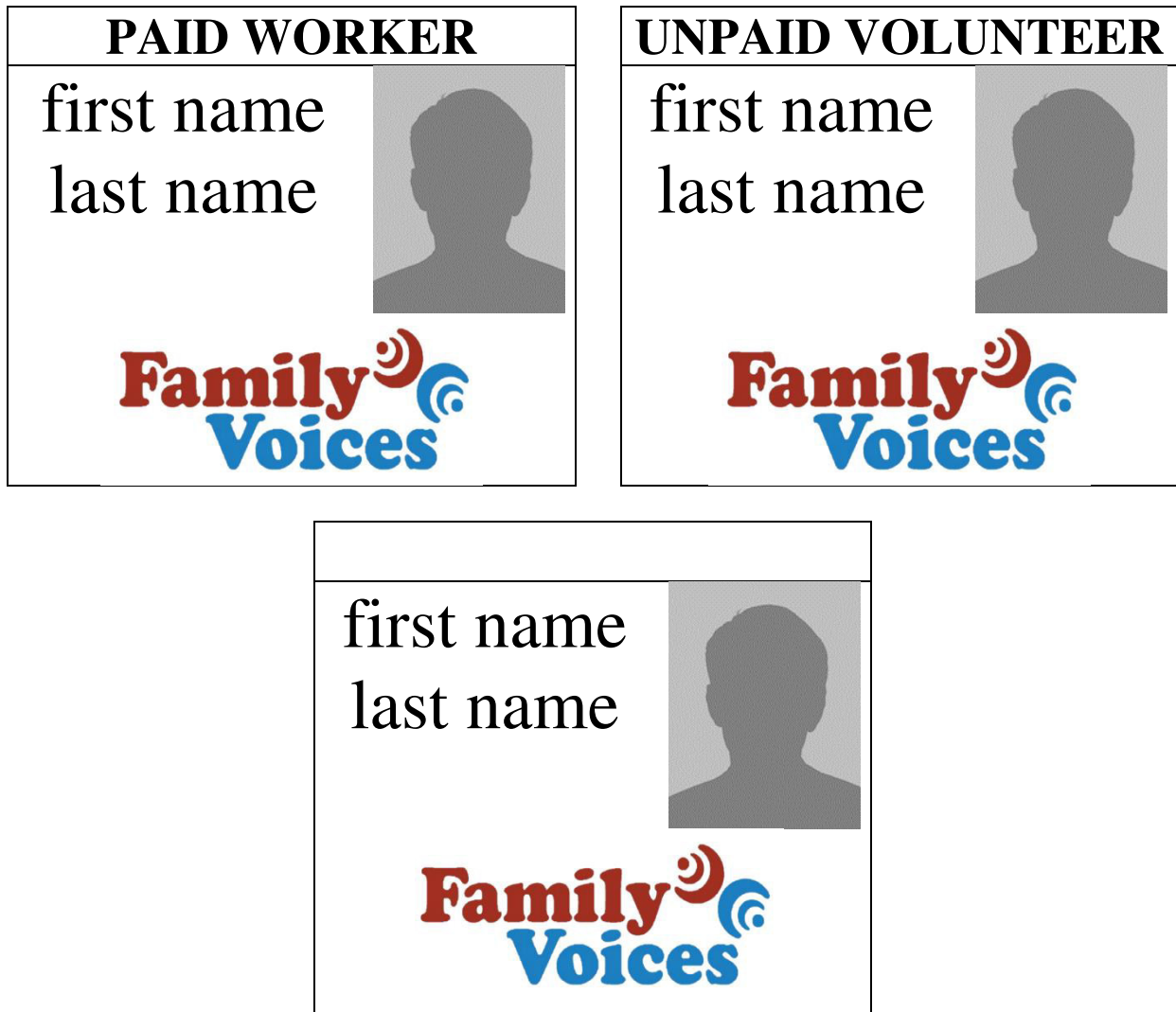**Appendix D: Name badges for the Door-to-Door Solicitation**

PAID WORKER	UNPAID VOLUNTEER
first name last name	first name last name

first name
last name

Figure D1: Name badges

Notes*: Solicitors wear name badges while approaching the households. A badge includes a picture of the solicitor, his/her name, a logo of the charity organization and, depending on the treatment, information on the remuneration of the solicitor.