



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

HOW TO WRITE FUNDRAISING APPEALS

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With thanks to Mal Warwick & Eric Overman,
authors of the book "How to write fundraising appeals"

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Reasons People Respond to Fundraising Appeals

- You asked them to
- They have money available to give away
- They're in the habit of sending money
- Their gifts will make a difference
- Gifts will accomplish something right now
- You recognize them for their gifts
- You give them something tangible in return
- You enable them to “Do Something” about a critical problem
- You allow them to get back at the corrupt or unjust
- You give them the opportunity to “belong” as a member, friend, supporter
- You enable them to offer their opinions
- You provide them with access to inside information
- You help them learn about a complex and interesting problem or issue
- You help them preserve their worldview by validating cherished values and beliefs
- You allow them to gain personal connections with other individuals who are passionately involved in some meaningful dimension of life

How People Decide to Read Your Letter?

- Answer their questions before they even ask
- Specific and direct in introductory paragraph
- A P.S. message that intrigues the reader
- Paragraph, subheads, underlining that are easily read
- Format and design will affect understanding

“Forget about your organization’s needs. Instead, focus on the needs, the desires, and the concerns of the people you’re writing to. Your job is to motivate them.”

Things to Determine Before You Write:

Who

Will sign the letter?

Will receive the letter?

What

Is it you want the reader to do?

Will the reader receive in return?

When

Do you want the reader to respond?

Where

Will the proposed action take place?

Why

Should the reader take this step?

How

Will the proposed action make a difference?

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

1. Develop the Marketing Concept

“As Executive Director of Hope Is Alive! I’ve written you many times in the past about the terrible challenges faced by the homeless in our city. Now I’m writing to you, as one of our most loyal and generous supporters, to tell you about a challenge that’s a wonderful opportunity: two members of our Board of Trustees have volunteered to match your gift on a dollar-for-dollar basis if we receive it before January 15 – up to a total of \$10,000. The money raised in this Challenge of Hope will be used to outfit our new shelter, so that thirty more homeless families can find a warm and secure place to sleep in the difficult weeks still to go before winter ends.”

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

2. Determine the Contents of Package

Basic Elements of the Appeal:

- A number 10 closed-face outer envelope printed in black on the front only, including addressees' name, address laser printed on the front, and mailed first class with a postage stamp
- A 2-3 page letter, printed in two colors, on one side only of two sheets, with page one laser personalized and subsequent pages printed to match but not personalized
- A reply device printed on one side only, in two colors, on card stock, with name, address and the ask amounts laser personalized
- A number 9 business reply envelope printed in one color on one side only

Other Elements of the Appeal:

- A 2-part email series, one sent before the letter, the other one afterward

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

3. Draft the Reply Device

“Yes, I’ll help meet the Challenge of Hope! So that thirty more homeless families can find a safe, warm place to sleep in the difficult weeks remaining before winter ends. To beat the January 15 deadline – so my gift is matched dollar-for-dollar by the Trustees – I’m sending my special tax-deductible contribution in the amount of:

\$ [Last + 50%]

\$ [Last + 25%]

\$ _____

”

[Click for example](#)

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

4. Write the Outer-Envelope and E-mail Subject Lines

- Determine several subject lines for emails that can be tested in advance in order to pick the most appealing
- A well developed teaser that will entice the reader to open the envelope
- No teaser at all can add a personalized affect as well for direct mail

[Click for Outer-Envelope example](#)

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

5. Write the Lead

Lead with a story that is a brief, but inspiring. An example about a six-year-old client of the agency who personifies everything that's best about its work:

"Jennifer just knew things were going to get better. Molly told her so.

Jennifer was only six years old, and she'd spent most of those years on the streets. Drifting from town to town with a dad who could never find work that lasted. No school. No friends, really. No pretty clothes like the other girls she saw sometimes.

But one day Jennifer and her dad showed up at our Front Street shelter. Molly D'Alessandro was on duty and greeted the new arrivals. You might say it was love at first sight."

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

6. Write the P.S.

90% of the time readers eyes go directly to the P.S., so in both direct mail or email, direct your full attention to making this intriguing.

The 3 strongest elements of the appeal:

- The deadline
- Where gifts will go
- Beneficiaries

“P.S. Your gift will be matched dollar-for-dollar – but only if we receive your check by January 15. In this difficult winter, please help us outfit the new shelter and take thirty more homeless families off the streets!”

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

7. Consider Subheads and Underlining

- Must appeal directly to the reader
- Emphasis on donor benefits, tangible or intangible

“If you respond by January 15th, your gift will be matched dollar-for-dollar.

With generous support, Hope Is Alive! will be able to open the new shelter on time – and thirty homeless families will be off the streets for the rest of the winter.”

8 Steps Towards Successful Fundraising Appeals

8. Write the Text

- Fill in the blanks of after the lead, the close, and the P.S.
- Stick to the points you selected for emphasis by underlining

[Click for example](#)

8 Rules to Follow

1. Use “I” and “You (But Mostly “You”)
2. Appeal on the basis of benefits, not needs
3. Ask for money, not for “support”
4. Write a package, not just a letter
5. Write in simple, straightforward language
6. Format your letter for easy reading
7. Give your readers a reason to send money NOW
8. Write as long a letter as you need to make the case your offer

Rules of Writing Email Appeals

- From line should be consistent
- Avoid using the recipient's name in the subject line
- Make sure the portion that will show through a preview pane is compelling enough to induce readers to open the message
- Limit the length of your lines to 50-60 characters
- Make sure there's plenty of white space on all sides & between paragraphs
- Limit paragraphs to no more than 5 lines
- Don't overload your message with web links (include only necessary ones)
- Minimize your use of asterisks, stars, and other typographical devices
- Test each message before sending it

Types of Donations

- ❑ **Special gifts** urge donors/members to focus on one of the organization's individual programs, specific issue, a season of the year, or a particular need or opportunity.
- ❑ **Year end contribution** is the time when most NPOs receive the most donations. Often is variable in amounts, mailed to large proportions.
- ❑ **Monthly sustainers** dwells on convenience and impact of monthly gifts rather than on specific programs. Best done through phone calls.
- ❑ **High dollar gifts** often have a range of possible gift levels, but all with costly returns. Often directed at NPO's most generous and responsive supporters.
- ❑ **Annual gifts** is to maximize donor participation and renewal of donations for the following year. Usually in general and institutional terms rather than focusing on a particular program or special need. Deadline is implicit.

Thanking Your Donor

Writing an Effective Thank you

- Reassure your donors that it was a good idea to send a gift. Reinforce their original belief that your group is effective, caring and worthy of their support.
- Be warm and friendly. If they're new donors, welcome them to the "family".
- Praise their generosity. Tell them how, by joining with other supporters, they're having a significant impact on your work.
- Reaffirm your gratitude at the end of the letter, or in a P.S.
- Give examples of recent organizational successes donors can feel proud of.

Thanking Your Donor

Standard Elements

- ❑ Outer envelope sets tone with a bold “THANK YOU” teaser.
- ❑ Specifically refers to the date and amount of the gift.
- ❑ Promote corporate matching gifts at the back of the letter.
- ❑ Text of the letter reinforces the case for giving and counters what commercial marketers call “buyers’ remorse”.
- ❑ The message is brief and to the point.
- ❑ Response device offers “Other Ways You Can Help”.
- ❑ Insert provides further reinforcement for the donor with a head-line “*You’re making a difference!*”

[Click for example](#)