



*Helping Organizations
Take the Next Step*

Making the “Ask”: *Six Fundamentals of Writing an Effective Fundraising Letter*

By Lisa Toller

The reason many donors cite for giving money? They were asked!

One of the most common methods that nonprofits use to raise funds is the appeal letter. Not only can an appeal letter bring in much needed funds, it can strengthen the connection with current supporters, reactivate lapsed donors, encourage more donors to become major donors, and increase the size of major donor gifts.

How effective was your last appeal letter to existing donors? If you didn't receive at least a 6% response from your mailing list, try using these six fundamentals for your next campaign.

1. Develop a unifying concept or theme

Your theme could be centered on a recent event (for example, last year we tied one client's fundraising letter to the national hurricane disasters); a major success; a compelling beneficiary story; or, a new program or population served.

2. Acknowledge your donor

We all want to be appreciated and feel that we are making an impact. Be sure to thank your donor within the first paragraph of your letter and let them know how their donations have made a difference to the clients your organization serves.

3. Make it easy to read

Studies have shown that the typical appeal letter has about 20 seconds to grab the reader before it ends up in the trash. Furthermore, 90% of donors start by reading your P.S. The key is to write a strong P.S. and compose the letter with subheads and brief paragraphs.

4. Tell an emotional story

Put a face on your organization with an upbeat story about how your organization helped a client. If confidentiality isn't an issue, use photographs and names of clients.

5. Personalize it

If at all possible, your envelope should be hand-addressed and hand-stamped, and the letter should be addressed to each donor by name. Personalizing your appeal has been shown to increase your response rate by almost 30%!

6. Create a stand-out reply card

Let's say your mailing has managed to stay out of the trash, piqued your donor's interest, but has been relegated to the dreaded bill pile where it may sit for weeks. Make it stand-out with a larger format, interesting graphics, and a summary of your appeal.

Communicate with your donors at least *four times a year*, including two appeal letters. The other two pieces can include a simple newsletter, or an update about your organization's successes. By reaching out to your donors on a regular basis, you will be building relationships that will help sustain your organization in the future.

Do you need help strengthening your relationships with existing donors and reaching new potential donors? Lisa Toller, a Senior Marketing Consultant with NewLevel Group, LLC, can assist you with developing successful appeal campaigns, newsletters, and other donor communications. She can be reached at (707) 255-5555 x 103 or ltoller@newlevelgroup.com.