

How to Write a

Fundraising Letter

Prepared by: Stan Granberg | Last Revised: September 1, 2017

We all know (or should) that asking for money via a letter is not the preferred way to do it. Still, you will often find yourself in the position where that is just what you need to do. In that case, you might as well be able to write a great fundraising letter rather than just a mediocre one.

There are many websites to learn about writing a fundraising letter. Two of the better pages are <http://www.fundraiserhelp.com/fundraising-letters.htm> and <http://stepbystepfundraising.com>.

The following information selects some of the better instructional material and organizes it for your ease of access. Don't be afraid. Use this collection of tips and enjoy the process, then the fruits of your labor.

Parts of a fundraising letter

1. Name of organization and contact information
2. Date
3. Address of donor
4. Salutation
5. Your story
6. Ask for a donation
7. Say thank you
8. Closing
9. Your Signature
10. Your Name
11. Title (if you have one)
12. PS (for an extra punch)



The key to a good fundraising letter is to sound personal and conversational. Write to the potential donor friend to friend. Imagine that you are having a conversation with him or her. Here is where you can use the personal pronoun “ you” and “your” to good effect. For example, "Your gift today means a lot to me."

Keep in mind that your goal is not really to write a letter. It is to communicate the essence of your mission and vision in an insightful and compelling way, so that readers will respond with a donation.

As you begin you need to decide on the target audience for your letter. In general your audience will fall into one of two categories:

1. House (or renewal) mailings which are sent to your current supporters. These are tried and proven friends. Show them your gratitude and your respect.
2. Acquisition mailings are intended to acquire new donors. Response rates on acquisition mailings can be quite low, usually less than 1%. Because of this low response rate, you will need to calculate the number of letters that need to be sent in order to reach your goals.

Create a compelling letter

As you write remember to speak to the interests of the reader. So you have a great cause... why should they care? Appeal to them based on what benefits they personally receive from donating, either tangible benefits or the intangible sense of satisfaction they will have when they support a cause they believe in. This is why using the word “you” is an effective writing technique to address the reader directly.

One of the most successful ways that you can get your message across is to tell a story of a specific person or situation where your organization has made a difference. When writing a fundraising letter include stories that will engage the reader, not just show off accomplishments. Take a look at “5 attention getting strategies” below for more tips.

Asking for donations can be as difficult. Write your fundraising letter so readers will want to give from genuine caring rather than from pressure or guilt.

- Get the reader's attention. This part is optional, but it can be very effective if not overdone. Include pleasantries and address the reader as if you were talking to a friend.
- State the cause and/or credentials of your charitable organization. This part is absolutely essential and should be the longest part of your fundraising letter. Use about 150 words in this section. You should clearly identify a critical need. Explain how your organization can effectively address that need.
- Solicit a contribution. This is another required section. This part of the fundraising letter should be concise and to the point—about 30 to 50 words. List the benefits of supporting the cause and then ask for a specific donation amount. Explain to the potential donor how much charitable contributions in this amount have helped your cause in the past, but that the need is still great.
- Offer an incentive. This part can be optional, but it provides a reason for the reader to act now. The incentive you offer could be a tangible gift with a substantial perceived value, or it could be intangible.

Example: "Imagine the feeling you'll get, knowing you have helped an underprivileged child learn how to read..."

- Additional insert. This is another optional section. If you can afford another page, you can use photographs or other evidence to help validate your point and keep the reader's interest longer. Be sure to refer to the insert in your fundraising letter.

Be sure you proofread your letter for spelling, grammar and to make sure you have not left out any important elements. Then give it to someone else to proofread as well. You don't want to embarrass yourself or send the wrong signal by sending a poorly typed letter.

Make it easy to respond

Besides the letter itself, you need to consider and coordinate all the other pieces that are printed and mailed along with it. A typical direct mail fundraising package consists of:

1. an outer envelope
2. a letter
3. a response card
4. a return envelope

The response card and return envelope are important elements of your mailing. These two pieces further encourage your friend--and make it super easy--to mail in their donation. The response card takes out all doubt in the reader's mind as to what to do next, including how to make out the check, what level of donation levels are suggested and whether they can specify a particular project. The envelope removes the hassle of figuring out where to send the gift.

Finally, if a reader wants to respond but for whatever reason cannot do so that day, it's likely that they will throw away the letter and keep just the card and envelope. In this case it's even more important to have a response card. It helps remind them why they wanted to donate in the first place. Just the envelope may not be enough, especially if they are not current supporters.

According to Philip Gerard, author of [Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life](#), quoting people adds texture beyond anything you can communicate as the author. Real voices of real people deepen your story. "Their words make it true," says Gerard.

Additional Fundraising Letter Writing Tips

1. Good news - Always start the letter with a series of good news bullets to build momentum. That will help make the entire fundraising letter entertaining and informative.
 - Use foreshadowing to tease your reader and keep him or her reading.
 - Create a "widow" at the end of the first page (a thought that's finished on page two).
 - Make your reader turn the page.
2. Describe what you want to do next
 - Tell what you're going to do.
 - Why you're going to do it.
 - How you're going to do it.
 - What results you expect.
 - Make it personal and heartfelt.

3. List suggested contribution amounts
 - Use even numbers in graduated amounts: \$50, \$100, \$200
 - Offer a monthly auto charge credit card option (\$10 a month is \$120 a year).
 - Include a blank line for write-in amounts.
4. Remind readers that their contribution is your budget
 - Your successes have been possible because of their past contributions.
 - Thank them!
5. Use P.S.'s for skimmers
 - May titillate skimmers and get them to read the entire letter.
 - To create a sense of urgency.

Your Fundraising Letter P.S. - 10 Ways to Write Powerful Postscripts

Your postscript is one of the most important parts of your fundraising letter. It usually stresses the point of your letter and asks for action. Some donors read it first. Some professional writers write it first.

Since the P.S. is one part of your letter that you can be confident your donors will read, you need to write something there that will motivate donors to send you a gift or take your desired action. A donor reading a P.S. is a donor looking for information. And that's your opportunity. So don't treat your postscript as an afterthought. Here are some ideas to get you started on finishing your letter.

1. SHOW WHAT A DONATION "BUYS"

"Remember, your gift of just \$25 will provide a hot supper every day for a week. Please give today."

2. MAKE YOUR DONOR MAD (AT THE PROBLEM YOU SOLVE)

"I've included a rather sad photo of a giant panda--a mother who'd been nursing her new baby--who was killed by poachers. Take a look. Then give some gift, of any amount, to stop tragic panda deaths and help save these harmless and wonderful animals. I am waiting to hear from you."

3. MENTION YOUR FRONT-END PREMIUM

"By the way, the enclosed 2010 calendar is a gift of thanks for your support this year, and your continued support next year."

4. MENTION YOUR DEADLINE

"We must have your responses to the enclosed National Survey in our hands within 10 days. Please complete and return it to us in the enclosed postpaid envelope provided. If you'd like to join the Rails to Trails Conservancy, simply mark the appropriate box on the Survey form and mail it with your check in the enclosed envelope."

5. SUGGEST A LARGER GIFT

"Your last gift was \$250. If you could match it again (or even increase it a little), I'd be mighty grateful to you."

6. DRAW ATTENTION TO AN IMPORTANT ENCLOSURE

"I've included with this letter an article about our response to the recent gang violence. Your support right now is critical to our work in this campaign. Many thanks."

7. INVITE YOUR DONOR TO TAKE ACTION

"If a loved one or friend of yours is addicted to drugs or alcohol, please call 123 456-7891. Because of your financial support, we're here to offer advice, help and professional direction to those in need."

8. STRESS THE URGENCY OF YOUR APPEAL

"Tens of thousands of Angolans are at risk right now of starving to death. We are already in the country helping, but we can only do more if we receive more funds. Please help the people of Angola. Send us a gift right now."

9. SHOW WHAT HAPPENS IF THE DONOR FAILS TO ACT

"I need to send this shipment of clothing to Liberia within 10 days or we will miss this opportunity. I am counting on you, Alan, to help us right now with a gift of \$50 or more."

10. ASK A QUESTION

"Do you know that our scholarships are supported entirely by charitable donations? The Foundation does not receive any funding from government, Sharelife or Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto. Please give generously to our Hope for Children Foundation Scholarship Fund today."

5 Attention Getting Strategies for Fundraising Letters

1. Create Headlines

Even though a fundraising letter should be in the format of a letter with a salutation, body and closing, a headline at the top of the page can be an attention grabber. Headlines are usually just 1-2 lines and are printed in larger type than the rest of the letter. For added interest, use a different font.

2. Use Attention Getting Words

Using very specific words as sentence openers grab the readers' attention. Notice that many of these sample phrases ask the reader to do something. Here are a few examples:

Just imagine if...

Right now...

Think about...

Why is it that...

Without a doubt...

For instance,

Please don't overlook...

3. Ask Questions

Open-ended questions are great ways to begin a letter. Questions are designed to get the reader to think. When asked a question, people automatically try to answer it. Avoid using yes/no questions, because this is too easy an answer and the conversation in the reader's mind stops.

Here's an example: "How many people in our city go hungry at Christmastime each year? Statistics say that on average 357 will miss at least one meal between Christmas and New Year's Day because their cupboards are bare. Many of these are senior citizens. This year let's keep this statistic from becoming a reality."

4. Make Bold Statements and Exclamations

Another way to open the letter is by using a bold statement, often related to shocking situations or statistics. For example, "Every day 7,400 people become infected with the HIV virus."

Sentences using exclamation points work well for a letter with a light hearted tone. For example, "It's that time of year again – the Clark County Yam Festival is almost here!" A few well placed exclamation points at the beginning and/or other sections of the letter add energy. Just be sure to use exclamation points sparingly in the overall letter. Having too many of them gives the impression of hype or insincerity.

5. Include Personal Narratives & True Stories

One of the most successful ways to get your message across is to describe a story of a specific person or situation that your organization has helped. If your group has made some major achievements and successes these can also be of use. Always remember to include stories that will engage the reader, not just show off accomplishments.

OK, now you've got a few pages of great ideas from some professional fundraising letter writers. Now get to your computer and write your own. You're a professional too!