

10 Tips for Better Annual Appeal Letters



- **Let the message guide the length.** Some people insist that shorter is better. But studies have shown that people give larger gifts in response to longer letters. My advice? Say what needs to be said, in keeping with your organization’s overall message and “personality.”
- **Show appreciation for past giving.** If the letter is going to repeat donors, thank them upfront for their past support.
- **Tell your story.** Where is your organization having an impact? What has happened since the last time you sent an appeal? How can you convey the value of your services or programs in an engaging and convincing way?
- **ASK for the money.** Don’t tip-toe around the real request. Just make sure you are clear and specific about what you’re asking the money for.
- **Highlight the benefits.** Every nonprofit has needs but most individuals don’t give to fund them. They give to make a difference in the communities and issues they care about. Be clear about how constituents will benefit from this financial contribution.

The Expert Communicator

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- **Repeat the ASK.** People often need repeated reminders to be moved to action. Don't badger, but ask (again), with different phrasing, if you can depend on them to send their most generous gift in support of your shared cause.
- **Have a designer's eye.** Appearance counts. Make your letter appealing and readable by using short paragraphs, bold text, bullets, and centering to guide the eye where you want it to go. Use these tools to help donors effectively find your key points even if only briefly scanning your letter.
- **Fact check and proofread throughout.** It's always a good idea to have a second pair of eyes on every letter before it reaches a prospective donor.
- **Remember the P.S.** Briefly reiterate your most important message. Let them know that if they prefer, they can give online – and make sure you have in place the ability to receive financial donations on your website.
- Once you get the gift **say “thank you” quickly, accurately, and personally.** The “thank you” letter is foundational to stewarding donors and the first step in securing a future gift.

**What's your experience with the length of donor appeal letters?
Which of these tips resonates with you?**