

115 Tips to Raise More Money By Mail

Direct mail is by far the source of most gifts to nonprofits. And it's one of the most important communications vehicles your organization has.

Raise all the money you need by following these best practice tips:

- Use the **same appeal message** in your mail solicitations, on your website "call to action" and in your email communications – to reinforce your message over and over.
- **Focus more on your donor** and what he wants to accomplish than on your organization.
- The appeal letter can have only one objective: **a clear ask for support**. It is not a newsletter, an end-of-year report or mixed in with other communications.
- Your top priority is always to **renew your past donors**.
- Don't solicit any donors until you have shown them **what results you have accomplished** with their first gift.

DRAW YOUR DONORS IN

- Use the word **"you"** immediately in the first sentence of your appeal.
- **Repeat the word "you"** frequently: it's most important word in your letter.
- Always **immediately thank your donor** for their past support in the first or second lines. I like to open letters with "thank you" because it draws the donor in.
- **Use the word "I"** in the letter to make it more personal and friendly. It does wonders changing your tone from "institutional" to "personal."
- In the letter copy, talk about your donor's interests and their **"kind" or "loyal" or "valued"** support.
- **Use photos** in your letter or accompanying materials. Captions under photos will be read before your letter copy.

- Always use photos of **people**.
- Photos of **cute kids** and attractive people draw better than photos of sick kids. (Cute animals draw better than sick animals.)
- **Always send out personalized letters.** (Dear Mr. Smith rather than Dear Friend)
- Make your letter as personal in tone as you can.

UPGRADE YOUR DONORS

- Focus on **more frequent gift opportunities** each year as a way to upgrade your donors to higher giving levels.
- Establish a **monthly giving** program.
- Use **gift clubs** to encourage higher-level donations and ask donors to move up to the next level.
- When you ask for an upgraded gift: talk about an **increased or enhanced partnership.**

CREATE A DYNAMITE CASE

- Talk about **opportunities** not needs.
- **Make your message emotional.** Donors give out of emotion, then justify it with logic.
- **Tell a story.** Narrative is far more powerful than a set of statistics and organizational accomplishments.
- **One story** is more powerful than three stories. Think simplicity. Stories inspire and encourage action.
- Emphasize how you change or save lives: your **life-affirming**, or life-saving work.
- Talk about your **vital or important or key** initiatives or efforts.

- DON'T use the words "**programs**" or "**services**" any more than you have to. They are boring and too generic.
- Repeat the **case for support** – the need and its urgency – several times in the letter.
- Use **statistics** to build credibility and make the cause more concrete.
- Describe your project as "**innovative,**" **trailblazing**" or "**groundbreaking,**" and your work as "**wide-ranging,**" "comprehensive," or extensive."
- Offer the **donor proof** that your organization has made a significant impact and can do much more.
- If you are a membership organization, be sure to **emphasize membership** in your appeal. Membership helps create a closer bond between the donor and your organization.

WRITE A LETTER YOUR DONORS WILL READ

- **Break up your letter copy** with boldface headings.
- Make your letter **easy to skim** and still deliver its message.
- **Have plenty of white space on the letter,** which makes it easy to read.
- **Use snappy action verbs that convey action.**
- Use **short, concise** sentences and paragraphs.
- Write on the **5th grade level** for easy reading. (like these tips)
- Use **present tense.**
- Never, ever use the passive voice. ("people are being helped")
- Use **wide margins** to add white space.
- **Use type large enough to read easily.** 12 point type is the minimum size appropriate for fundraising material.
- **ALL CAPS** is ok for emphasis.

- **Boldface** is wonderful for emphasis, and helps break up the copy.
- Use the word **“you”** in headings.
- **Use bullets** to break up the copy.
- **Eliminate every possible word** – including adjectives and descriptive phrases - in your copy.
- Include **a date** on the letter.

CREATE A KILLER ASK

- Use a **matching or challenge gift opportunity** and tell your donors it will make their gifts go further.
- Always ask for a **specific amount** or **“the largest contribution you can make.”**
- **Place your ask in the first part** of a paragraph. Don’t bury your ask at the end of a sentence or paragraph – it will get missed.
- Don’t ask for a “gift,” ask instead for an **investment**, a contribution, for help or to supply something special.
- Ask for a **“generous” or “special” or “thoughtful”** gift.
- Create a **sense of urgency** by asking for an immediate contribution or asking for help with an **urgent or critical situation**.
- Use **please** such as “please send your gift today” or “please consider a leadership contribution of xxx.”
- Ask based on your donor’s **giving history**.
- Give the donor **a deadline** for responding and a reason for the deadline.

END THE LETTER WITH A BANG

- In closing, include your warmest or deepest or **heartfelt thanks**.

- Say “I urge you to **do your part** to help.”
- **Use a handwritten PS** at the end. This is always read first.
- Use these words **for the PS**: “Thank you for helping with this important need” or “Please send your check today to help with....”
- Include a **personal handwritten note** to the reader from the sender.
- **Personally sign letters.** The more personal the letter, the better chance you have to receive a gift.
- Whenever possible, have the signers of the letters actually **sign in blue ink.**
- WHO SIGNS is vitally important: it should be a person whose name the donors will recognize – **someone with clout and authority.** This is never the development director and rarely the executive director.
- **Endorsements** of your work by celebrities or local personalities can add credibility.

RAISE MORE FROM YOUR TOP DONORS

- Send your **Top Donors** special, custom-tailored personal letters and appeals.
- Have board and staff members **write or visit them** personally with an individualized appeal.
- Use words like “**exceptional**” or “**outstanding**” when you refer to their past gifts, support and involvement in your cause.
- Thank them in the opening sentence for their continuing and steadfast support. Emphasize their **partnership** with your cause.
- Ask the donor to send **the largest gift they can.**
- Ask these donors to make a leadership gift.

CREATE A PLAN and SCHEDULE YOUR MAILINGS

- Set up a **calendar of mailings** and plan ahead.

- **Mail several times a year** to your entire donor base.
- **Segment your mailing list and mail personalized appeals to specially targeted groups.** (i.e., past donors, volunteers, people who have attended your auction, corporate sponsors, board members, past board members)
- **Mail to donors** more often than nondonors.
- **Track your LYBUNTS** (people who gave Last Year But Unfortunately Not This) carefully and send them repeated (cheerful and enthusiastic) appeals to be sure they renew. Once a donor has given for two straight years, they are likely to remain a donor for the long run.
- **Develop a series of appeals to SYBUNTS.** (People who gave Some Year But Unfortunately Not This year). “We’ve missed you!”
- The letters you send to your LYBUNTS and SYBUNTS should remind them of their **past support** and remind them how much they have helped create your success.

COMMUNICATE WHEN YOU ARE NOT ASKING

- Find ways to communicate cheerfully with your donor base **outside of the newsletter** and mailing solicitations.
- Don’t send a dull newsletter. Studies show that donors think nonprofit newsletters are boring.
- **Write to your donors often** with newsletters, alerts or other news – both in the mail and via email.

FOLLOWUP MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE

- Send a **followup letter** a few weeks after your appeal: “we didn’t hear from you and we need you to respond.”
- Studies show that followup letters are the most important factor in securing the donor’s gift.
- Followup letters need to be short and play on urgency and the emotions.
- Write your **followup letter** at the same time you write the first letter.

- Use a different kind of **envelope** for the followup letter.
- **Organize the board members to make phone calls to follow up** appeals to donors. You can't lose by following up with a personal call.

WELCOME NEW DONORS

- Send first time donors a "**welcome**" **package** and several special communications. Only 35-50% of new donors will typically renew.
- **Invite new donors to get involved.** Move quickly to develop the relationship so they will renew.

DON'T FORGET THESE PROSPECTS

- **Identify local businesses** that you have a relationship with and send them a special appeal for higher amounts.
- Solicit **all the businesses** who supported your most recent auction or gala. Ask for additional support apart from the auction.
- Add your **vendors** to your appeal list and request their support at least twice a year.
- Don't forget these prospective donors: **foundations, churches, civic clubs.**

LINK TO YOUR WEB SITE

- Include your **website address**. Donors, even when they give with a check in the mail, are highly likely to check out your website.
- Use different landing pages and urls to track donors' responses to individual appeals.
- Create a **landing page** on your web site for replies to appeals.

CREATE A MAILING PACKET THAT BRINGS RESULTS

- **Your mailing packet** should include four pieces:
 - The solicitation letter
 - A reply/pledge card
 - A return envelope for the reply card
 - The outside envelope.
- **Always use a return envelope.** It is critically important to make sure it is easy for people to give.
- Your package can also contain a **fundraising brochure** but does not have to. A good letter can be sufficient.
- Any brochure enclosed with a solicitation should have a **specific fundraising message** or it should not be included.
- The reply slip needs to **stand out** in the package.

USE A REPLY CARD THAT SELLS

- Put a **headline** on the reply card such as “Yes! I want to help!”
- Add a **one-sentence summary** of your case.
- Show **gift levels** in terms of how it would help your cause:
 - \$100 will buy xx shoes
 - \$500 will help 5 families with food
- **Limit the amount of information** you request.
- Use **checkboxes** on your reply slip.
- Make sure there is **room** for handwriting on the reply card.
- Make the reply card **paper** easy to write on.
- **Circle the amount** you are requesting from the donor on the reply card.
- **Pre-print the donor’s name** and address on the reply form.

- **Include a postage paid** business reply envelope.
- Stock your reply envelopes so they are always on hand.

DON'T FORGET YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE!

- Use a **mail house** to process your mailings efficiently.
- **Upgrade your fundraising software** – you must have a sophisticated state of the art data base system in order to manage an expanded mailing program.
- **Longer letters** with more pages are more successful than one page letters.
- **The print quality** of everything you send out needs to be first class. Never cut corners – this appeal represents your organization and needs to look professional.
- **Make updating your list a priority.** Assign a staff member whose responsibility is to keep the mailing list up-to-date and clean.