

# DONOR RELATIONS 101: WHAT DONORS WANT

All too often, someone will give money to an organization, receive a generic, impersonal “thank you” letter weeks – sometimes months – after donating, and will not hear from the group again the next time they ask for more money. This is unacceptable. Unfortunately, it is also common practice.

- As a result – 50% of people who make a first donation to a group never give again!

Donors want three simple things from an organization before they give again.

1. A prompt and personal thank you.
2. Confirmation that their gift will be used as intended.
3. A report on what was accomplished with their contribution.

Let’s look at the importance of each of these.

- Prompt thank you – This tells donors their gift was quickly noticed and appreciated. This sign of efficiency also tells donors that the nonprofit is well run and that they will use the gift effectively. The industry standard is to send a thank you within 48-72 hours of receiving the gift.
- Personal thank you – Donors want to be treated like individual people who are making a difference. A formulaic, uninteresting letter that begins, “On behalf of..., I want to thank you for your generous contribution of XX to...” couldn’t be less compelling. Write like you’re a human being writing to another real person.
- Confirmation on use of gift – This can be as easy as a line in the thank you letter that simply reiterates what the donation will be used for. It just tells the donor that you understood the intent of their gift and that it’s been recorded appropriately.
- Report on accomplishments – Donors want to know that their gift made a difference. They want to see the good work they were able to accomplish through their contribution. If you’re using a newsletter to report to donors, be sure that the content is written with them in mind as your audience and that they are thanked effusively throughout. Very few newsletters actually do this! For high-level gifts, a personal letter written directly to the donor may be a more appropriate update than a newsletter.

If you put these three things into practice, research by Penelope Burk shows that:

- 93% of donors would definitely or probably give again next time they were asked.
- 64% would definitely or probably give more.
- 74% would continue to give indefinitely as long as they continued to receive meaningful information.