

WHAT SHOULD A “THANK YOU” LETTER LOOK LIKE?

Nothing trumps the power of a sincere, personal “thank you” note. Plus, this is where donors are going to start deciding whether or not they are going to give to you again.

All too often, donor acknowledgements are treated like merely a tax receipt or a pro forma confirmation. But, saying “thank you” is the first step to getting the next gift. So don’t mail it in – no pun intended!

Here are some strategies for writing an effective and genuine “thank you” letter...

- Don’t start with the traditional “thank you” or “on behalf of.” Just like with fundraising appeals, the first line is where you draw your reader in. For example, “We needed you and you were there,” or “A child’s heart was repaired today – you have given her a second chance at life.”
- A great thank you is a real letter, not a pre-printed card. It is personally addressed, personally signed, and has a personal salutation (no “dear donor” or “dear friend”).
- A thank you should come from the top. Think CEO, Executive Director, or Board President. One exception is if the Development Director or another staffer has a strong relationship with the donor. Another is if the letter is signed by someone receiving services from the organization, someone working your hotline, etc.
- Have whoever is signing the letter add a handwritten note.
- Reference the specific gift and its intended purpose. Note any restrictions that the donor wanted placed on the contribution.
- Tell the donor specifically what you will be able to do because of their generosity. Make sure the impact is connected to the designated purpose of the donation and be as specific as possible.
- Tell your donors when they can expect a progress report on what you’ve accomplished because of their support. And then follow through on sending it when you promised!
- Do not ask for another gift or anything else (completion of a survey, etc.) in your letter.

(continued)

- Acknowledge past giving (how many years they've been giving, if they've already given that year, etc) where appropriate.
- Thank the donor, not the gift. It's not what their gift will allow you to do; it's what they enable you to accomplish.
- Beware the second paragraph pitfall where nonprofits often drift into "we-speak." "We did this..." "Our programs do that..." Rephrase it. Remember, a thank you is all about "you" — and "you" means your donor.
- Give your donors the contact info for a real, live person to call/email directly if they need anything at all.
- Avoid bold and italics. A "thank you" letter is a personal correspondence. You wouldn't use underlines and bullets in a letter to a friend, so don't do it in your thank you.
- Write for readability. That means – use a serif font for print, and a sans serif for e-mails. Avoid long paragraphs, fancy words, and jargon.
- Cross channels. Direct donors to your website — point them to a new resource available there, videos, updates, etc.
- Communicate excitement, gratitude, warmth, and a positive "can do" attitude.
- Be brief. Two short paragraphs can be all you need.
- Send all letters within 48-72 hours of receiving the gift. After allowing for weekends and delivery time, this is the only way to guarantee that your donors receive them within two weeks (10 business days).

While it will take more time to implement these best practices, you will soon see how it affects donor loyalty and gift size. Despite the fact that these tips aren't any great secret, few organizations prioritize implementing them. If you do, I promise you – your donors will notice and remember you for it.

With more and more nonprofits popping up all the time, it's becoming more and more important to stand out from the crowd. This is one of the easiest but most meaningful ways for you to distinguish yourself.