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Fundraising Essentials – Writing A Fundraising Appeal Letter



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At the heart of great and successful organisations are great stories. Tales of lives saved and opportunities granted against the odds. But are your fundraising appeals provoking the response your organization needs?

The team at FundsforNGOs has pooled our many, many years of experience in the charitable and development sectors to create a list of our top tips for maximizing the impact of donor fundraising appeals. We will show you how to design a fundraising appeal letter that effectively encourages donors to make financial contributions to your organization.

Ask early

Don't hold back on the reasons you are writing to your donors. You should be clear about the reasons for communicating with them near the top of your letter and ideally in a headline. There is no reason to be shy, especially as research shows that people are more likely to stop reading if they don't know what they are reading than if asked for a financial contribution. Ask for support, be clear why you need it and detail what will happen without the income.

Develop long term donor relationships

Fundraising appeal letters should always seek to develop your organization's relationship with the reader. There is a fine line between making a passionate and emotional appeal for urgent support and applying so much pressure that your donor wilts away and chooses to no longer support your organization. Be precise in the words, language and images you use whilst it is always advisable to get your stakeholders to comment on your proposed materials before you print them. Even if your donor chooses not to support your appeal at this time it is vital to leave them empowered with more knowledge about your organization and your beneficiary's situation to prepare them for future appeals in the future.



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Make it tangible

Donors are much savvier than in past decades. Services such as GiveWell and Charity Navigator have resulted in donors that are far better informed generally as well as only ever being a few clicks away from comprehensive information on the efficiency and effectiveness of a given organization. Conscious donors require something tangible for their money. They want to see it be used and used well.

You can provide this service to them in a donor appeal by providing a shopping list of outcomes that can result from different sized donations. For example, \$15 will buy school books for ten children, £25 will provide a training session and \$50 will provide a teacher for a full day. Donors want to know and feel what their money is working for, by providing this information you are enabling them to make smart, informed decisions.

Use deadlines

Increasingly donor appeals use deadlines and time limited appeals to create a sense of urgency among donors. Such a strategy reaffirms the idea of providing a tangible outcome for donors as you are stating that you need a certain amount of money within a certain time frame to achieve a given task. Research has shown that appeals that include a deadline result in donors responding faster than they would otherwise and combats a frequent occurrence of people simply forgetting about your appeal. Deadlines will always work best if there is a clear reason for the cutoff date such as a funding meeting or the closure of existing facilities.

Use powerful imagery

Countless years on from the first photograph, the old adage that a photo tells a thousand words still stands true today. The most successful fundraising organizations have often invested in high quality photos of their services and beneficiaries in order to showcase their work and impact. If you have ever seen a television fundraising appeal you will be familiar with the lingering images of people in need of support. There is little question that this technique is enormously effective, especially when balanced well among a strong written appeal.



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Make it easy

Great fundraising letters have as few barriers to donating as possible. The more obstacles between a donor and the organization the less likely they are to make a contribution. Make the different donation options clear and make the form as simple as possible to fill in and return to you. Some organizations invest in partially filled in return slips and free envelopes to encourage supporters to donate whilst removing any barriers that may get in the way. Don't ask for any information you don't need and instead focus on maximizing the contribution of each donor.

Personalization

It is more cost effective to rise from existing donors than to recruit new donors to your cause. Therefore it is important that you treat your past supporters respectfully and acknowledge their contributions as best as you can. When writing to previous donors it is important to use their name, acknowledge their last donation, thank you for their continued support and ideally inform them of the progress in your organization since the last time they made a donation. Don't treat them like a number but instead nurture them, encourage them to learn more and get involved in different ways of supporting your cause.

Be clear

With more organizations active in fundraising than ever before, people have seen a steady increase in the number of charitable appeals they see landing in their letter boxes and email accounts. Despite this growth in the availability of different charities to support, some research has shown that many donors have actually become more entrenched in their giving habits and look for organizations that they believe they "know". Organizations should work to be clear, accountable and transparent to secure donations, especially from new donors.

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