



Twelve Ways to Say “Thank You”

Your creativity in saying “thank you” will go a long way toward securing your next gift.

BY ANDY ROBINSON

My colleague Kim Klein, publisher of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, once wrote an article entitled, “Donors Are Not Water Faucets.” If you contact your contributors only to request money and ignore them the rest of the time, she wrote, pretty soon they will stop contributing. Her advice, based on both good manners and common sense, is nonetheless disregarded by many novice fundraisers.

Think about the last time you made a gift to your favorite organization. In return, you probably received a form letter or postcard. For many groups, this letter—brief, direct, and way too formal—is their only effort to acknowledge donors.

You can, and should, go a lot further. By showing appreciation, you invite donors into the “organizational family” and increase their sense of participation. Your creativity and subtle persistence in saying “thank you” will go a long way toward securing the next gift. In other words, your acknowledgement strategy (how you say thank you) is a big piece of your cultivation strategy (how you renew donors and increase the size their contributions).

Here are 12 ideas to get you started:

1 Send a formal thank you. This is required by law for gifts over \$250 and is a good idea for all donors. Always have a real human being sign the letter and add an informal

postscript: “Thanks for your continued support,” “We appreciate your help,” or the like.

2 Acknowledge upgrades and cumulative giving. Recognize growth in giving: “Thanks for increasing your donation to \$50.” When thanking long-time donors, consider totaling their gifts: “Since 1992, you’ve contributed \$200. Thank you! We really appreciate your continuing enthusiasm for our work.” These notes can be incorporated into the body of the letter or added by hand.

3 Have board members write notes. At least twice a year, put together a list of your top donors, along with their addresses. Circulate this list to your board members, and ask them to write thank you notes, on personal stationery, to any donors they know.

4 Use the phone. While some people don’t like solicitation phone calls, almost everyone appreciates the words “thank you.” You will surprise and delight your donors with a quick, painless acknowledgement call. “Thank you—we appreciate your support” also works well on answering machines. If you’re nervous about the call, or want to limit your time on the phone, try calling when no one will be home and leave a brief, upbeat message on the answering machine.

5 Acknowledge donors in your newsletter. Many organizations publish names of contributors in their newsletters and annual reports. Before doing this, give donors the chance to remain anonymous. Add a check-off box to your donor response card: “Please do not publicly acknowledge my gift in your newsletter.” If donors don’t check the box, it’s okay to print their names.

6 Invite donors to tour your facility. The best way to engage people in your work is to show them, first-hand, what you do all day. If appropriate, have them meet the clients or beneficiaries of your programs.

7 Invite contributors to your activities. Ask them to join you at your annual meeting, rally, performance, press conference, community workshop, whatever. Use every opportunity to showcase your group in action.

8 Encourage donors to become volunteers. Some will refuse—lots of people give money because they can’t give time—but will appreciate your desire to involve them in the work. (By the way, don’t forget to solicit your current volunteers for gifts. People who donate time are the most likely group to make financial contributions.)



CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Switch Colors to Boost Response

When you repeat a mailing to the same people, use a different color the second time. People will be more likely to respond. Savvy marketers switch colors as soon as response falls off. It works!

For more information, see *63 Very Profitable Ways to Boost Your Direct Marketing Response*, 130 Garden Street, Santa Barbara, California 93101.

Use Preauthorized Donation Checks

Nonprofit organizations are discovering the advantages of preauthorized checking as a fundraising device. With this approach, the organization receives a packet of special checks which the donor has preauthorized for payment. The organization holds the checks, then deposits them into its bank account on the date the money is due. There's no billing, no waiting for payment, no computer software or hardware to invest in. Cash flow can be projected accurately. The checks cost 9 to 26 cents each, depending on volume—lower than any other payment method typically available to small nonprofits, including EFT. For more information, contact MICR Data Systems, 304 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y. 10013 (212-255-5688, www.micr-data.com).

Make It Easy to Give

When someone donates to your organization, send them a coupon book along with your thank-you letter. On each coupon, include your organization's and your donor's name and address. Also provide envelopes addressed to your organization with the donor's return address. To give again, all the donor has to do is fill in the donation amount, write a check, and mail it in. The easier you make it to give, the more often donors will do so.

9 Send special program updates. Two or three times a year, write reports specifically for your top donors, including foundation and corporate grantmakers. Keep these reports brief—no more than two pages—and informal. Create a sense of intimacy; make the reader part of your “inner circle” by sharing information about emerging strategies and opportunities.

10 Send “comp” tickets to your next benefit event. While it doesn't make sense to give away too many tickets, consider “comping” your best donors and prospects. For example, Native Seeds/SEARCH, a cultural restoration organization in Tucson, organizes a big “Chile Fiesta” each fall. All \$100+ donors receive a pair of admission tickets (worth \$5) to encourage their attendance and reinforce their relationship with the organization. Once at the festival, they also spend a lot of money on food, crafts, and

other items, so this strategy actually increases income.

11 Share the good news: send press clippings. If you receive substantial coverage in a newspaper or magazine, clip the story, paste it up with the publication's masthead, and make photocopies. Send these to your top donors with a note such as “Thought you might enjoy this” or “Thanks for your support.”

12 Send photos of your group in action. Everyone loves snapshots. Take action pictures—planting the community garden, picketing city hall, repairing the abandoned house—and share them with your contributors. Put a note on the back: “Your gift makes this work possible. Thank you!” ■

Selected References

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Robinson, Andy, *Grassroots Grants: An Activist's Guide to Proposal Writing*.

These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

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