

Are You Making These Mistakes in Your Fundraising Letters?

Check out these simple ways to make your letters more appealing to donors.

By Gail Perry

Your fundraising appeal letter just might be missing the boat. Here are some things you may be doing wrong:

Your call to action is weak.

Lots of fundraising letters beat around the bush. They don't tell the donor explicitly what step to take.

You've got to tell people what to do. And you have to lay it out in very specific words.

Give them the next step. Say, "Please fill out the reply card and send it today." Say, "Please make a gift right now." Words like "today" and "right now" give the letter a sense of urgency and a deadline. Donors need both – so they'll take action and not set your letter aside to consider later.

MUST DO: Make your call to action completely clear.

You're not asking enough times.

You should be asking at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the letter. There should be asks all over the place. That's what the letter is for, isn't it?

MUST DO: Use all these different ways of asking in your letter:

- "Please join . . ."
- "Can't do it without you."
- "Take part."
- "Take these two steps. . ."
- "Make your gift right now."

Your type font is too small.

When donors in focus groups are asked for feedback on the fundraising letters they receive, one of their main complaints is, "The letters are hard to read."

Your likely donor is a woman who is over 50 years old. She needs to be able to read the dang letter, right?

MUST DO: Always use 14 point type. It's the gold standard for appeal letters.

“Your fundraising appeal letter just might be missing the boat.”



The word “you” isn't showing up enough.

It's the most important word in your letter. "You" is an emotional trigger. It immediately pulls people in.

If you don't have "you" and "your" showing up tons and tons in your letter, throw your letter out and start over.

MUST DO: Add the word "you" wherever you possibly can.



Gail Perry inspires nonprofits around the world with cutting-edge fundraising strategies and new tools to make fundraising more successful and more fun. Find smart strategies to help you raise tons of money at Fired-UpFundraising.com.

Make Your Letter Sing

For more on creating a dynamic appeal letter, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

What Are the Three Most Boring Words in Fundraising Appeals? (Vol. 36, No. 2)

Choosing the Right Typeface Means Cash for Your Cause (Vol. 15, No. 6)

How to Write a Fundraising Letter (Vol. 29, No. 5)

Think Out of the Box for Fundraising Gains (Vol. 29, No. 5)

How Jargon Undermines Communication (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Breakthrough Tips to Boost Your Fundraising (Vol. 33, No. 2)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity (NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute).