



How to Write a Fundraising Letter

What are the keys to raising funds by mail?

Q: Could you provide a sample fundraising letter for me? As a member of a very small nonprofit, I have been asked to prepare a general fundraising letter for our group. But I've had no luck finding a sample letter anywhere.

A: We adapted the following from Mal Warwick's wonderful *How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters* (Jossey Bass, www.josseybass.com, www.malwarwick.com):

Use this letter (at right) as an example along with the following rules that Mal Warwick describes in his book:

1. Use "I" and "you," but mostly "you." Abolish "we" from your vocabulary when writing fundraising letters. It smacks of condescension and will detract from the personal character of your appeal. Also avoid the plural "you" (as in "all of you" or "Dear Friends," for example.) Only one person at a time reads a letter.
2. Appeal on the basis of benefits, not needs. Describe what donors will receive in return for their money.
3. Prepare a package, not just a letter. Your fundraising letter is the most important element in the mailing package, but it's only one of several items that must fit together smoothly. At a minimum, your package will probably include an outer envelope, a reply envelope, and a reply device in addition to the letter.
4. Ask for money, not "support." Ask directly, and repeat the ask several times in the body of the letter as well as on the reply device.
5. Write in simple, straightforward language. Use short, powerful words and punchy sentences. Minimize the use of adverbs and adjectives. Appeal directly to the reader's emotions.
6. Format your letter for easy reading. Avoid paragraphs more than seven lines long, but vary the length of your paragraphs.
7. Give readers a reason to send money now. Create a sense of urgency. Try to find a genuine reason that gifts are needed right away.
8. Write as long a letter as necessary to make the case for your offer, even if it runs to many pages.
9. Always include a P.S., and make it irresistibly interesting. That's what readers usually read first.
10. Have just one person sign the letter. That way, you can enliven your letter with personal details and emotional asides that come naturally in a letter from one person to another. Brother David did this brilliantly in his fundraising letter.
11. Remember that, whatever your mission, your organization addresses human needs. Those are the things people care about. Notice that Brother David doesn't write about budgets, fiscal years, or fundraising shortfalls. He writes about *the kids*. ■

St. Joseph's Indian School
Chamberlain, South Dakota 57326

Dear Friend:

You are a dream catcher.

The Lakota (Sioux) believe that dreams and nightmares float in the air, and that a special willow frame strung with sinew can screen out nightmares and let only good dreams pass through.

They call the ornament a dream catcher and put one in every tipi and on the cradle board of every baby.

The other evening I was walking through the William House, one of our children's homes. I peeked in on some of the younger kids who were already asleep. I watched the children sleeping and dreaming peacefully.

Sweet dreams are something new for so many of the children. They've come from such troubled homes—and nightmares are far more common on the reservations. I thought about the Lakota (Sioux) dream catcher and my thoughts turned to you.

You protect our children from nightmares. You save them from poverty, illiteracy, and despair—a nightmare fate that befalls so many Native Americans on the reservations.

You bring them good dreams—of a bright future as well-educated, young adults with a purpose and strong values. And you help make those dreams come true. You are a dream catcher!

Because you are a guardian of good dreams for the children of St. Joseph's, we want you to have a special gift. I've enclosed a Thanksgiving card that features the Lakota dream catcher.

I hope you'll keep this card to bring good dreams to yourself and your family, or pass it on to bring good dreams to a faraway loved one at Thanksgiving.

Because so many of our friends are interested in Lakota traditions, we have ordered a small number of Lakota dream catchers in antique brass.

If you can send a special gift today of \$25 or more, I'd love to send you one of these unique ornaments as a special gift from the children of St. Joseph's.

These highly detailed dream catchers make wonderful gifts for children and new parents, and make unique Christmas tree decorations.

In any event, please send a gift today of whatever you can afford to bring dreams of hope to the children of St. Joseph's. Without people like you, their lives would be a nightmare.

Thanks!

Sincerely,

Brother David Nagel
Director

P.S. Thanksgiving is a special, happy time around here. It's one of the few times when America remembers all the gifts Native Americans gave to this country—and how little they received in return. Please remember the children of St. Joseph's when you offer thanks over your Thanksgiving dinner. We'll be praying for you.