

Fundraising at Year End: 10 Annual Appeal Tips

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We all know how important the final month of the calendar year is for nonprofit fundraising. According to Charity Navigator, most nonprofits receive 40-50% of all of their donations in the month of December. It is important, however, to remember why your donors are giving at this time of year — not why you need their gift. And you want to help connect with your supporters in the right ways to make sure that your LLI is included in their giving plans.

Here are 10 tips to help your tax year-end appeal match with your donor's giving priorities:

1. Before you start writing, ask yourself these questions to create your case for giving and a call to action:
 - What do we do well, that no one else can do?
 - Why is this important to the recipient?
 - Why do we need his/her support?
 - Why should he/she give now?
2. Segment your list. Send one version to members who have given before and another to non-donors.
3. Remember that you are writing to one person. No matter how many appeal letters you mail out, each addressee only receives one letter! Do not use language like "all of you" or "many of you."
4. Sometimes it helps to think of one specific person when you write your appeal. In marketing, this is called "creating personas." In fundraising, it helps just to think of one of your donors — or non-donors — who you know well and write directly to that person.
5. Also remember that only one person is sending the letter so it should be warm and personal. Use "I" and "me" not "we" and "us," e.g., "I hope you will join me in making a donation ... "
6. Remember to say "thank you" to the donors. Let the recipient know what his/her gift has made possible in the past year.
7. Remember that the appeal should be donor-centric, about how the recipient will feel to give. Liberally use "you" so that the recipient thinks of the difference that only he or she can make with a donation; not facts and figures.
8. Remember to tell the recipient why to give now (to receive their tax deduction) and remind them to give today.
9. Write in a conversational and familiar tone. It's okay to break the rules and use incomplete sentences. Liberally use hyphens. Or start a sentence with a conjunction.
10. Remember that most recipients will skim the beginning, jump to any underlined, bolded or bulleted text; look at the signature; and, if you're lucky, read the P.S. And not necessarily in that order. So it's very important that you make the most of those elements of the letter:

- Have a strong opening that will entice the reader to continue.
- Go back to #1 on this list — are all of your answers incorporated into the opening and/or repeated in the PS?
- Make use of bulleted lists of reasons to give. A bulleted list is easier to skim and the extra white space can give the eyes a rest.
- Make sure that there is a call to action in the body of the letter and in the P.S. If you go onto a second page, make sure that you have a call to action on the first page, as close to the beginning of the letter as possible.
- Underline or bold the call to action, e.g., “give now,” not entire sentences or paragraphs.
- Indent paragraphs to create more white space for easy reading.