

# NON-PROFIT Know-How

## 4 ways to make your next appeal letter a barn-burner

**D**onations are harder and harder to come by these days. So it is high time for you to examine your appeal letters to see if they are aimed accurately to target the hot buttons of gift givers.

Kim Klein, publisher of *The Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, writes to offer you these four pointers:

- **Zero in on why your contributor gives.** Most of your donors send you money because donating makes them feel better about their own lives.

Your donor, with millions of other people, belongs to one or more demographic groups. But he perceives himself as an individual. Most likely, he will give to help another person. Does your appeal letter tell a human-interest story about a single needy individual?

- **Why should your prospective donor read your letter?** It competes for attention against thousands of attention-riveting advertisements, not to mention worries about losing a job, the mushrooming costs of family health care, paying the mortgage, and what's for dinner tonight.

Your message must break through all such psychological static before you have a chance for a donation. In that context, it had better be relevant to your donor.

Messages about your outfit's history and nobility of purpose do not pull gifts. Letters promising a better future do.

Refer to your reader two to four times more often than to your organization. Whenever you can, personalize. (You do have a database, don't you?)

Make sure your letter is easy to read. Use typography astutely (12-point serif faces for your body copy — or larger, if your donors are older). Break your text with punchy sentences, short paragraphs, indents, and subheads.

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*“There is no point in sending a letter unless you are also able to send a thank-you note and keep good records.”*

— Kim Klein

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- **Aim to persuade your best donors.** Run a provocative headline on your outer carrier envelope. After that, don't fret about the people who toss their envelopes into the round file. They do not give.

Pay attention to opening your letter with a dramatic first paragraph. Close it with a pointed last paragraph and an urgent postscript.

The people most likely to give to your cause are precisely the minority of readers who will read your whole letter.

Always remember that your prospects do not owe you a dime. They read your appeal, and donate, voluntarily.

- **Don't be shy about asking for a donation.** Many non-profit executives ask too quietly for money. Remember that your donor wants to know exactly what you want him to give. And that donations are your non-profit's life blood.



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