

Give Thanks & Fill Your Piggy Bank: Risk-Savvy Year-End Fundraising Appeals



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Once again, it's time to start dreaming of turkey, taters, and cranberry sauce. Soon Thanksgiving will be upon us, which also means it is time for year-end fundraising appeals—an opportunity to give thanks to donors and share a cornucopia of information about your nonprofit's impact and plans for next year.

We all want a full piggy bank by December 31, and we also want to reconnect with our valued donors whose support helps sustain our missions year after year. Sometimes the holiday rush makes it tough to send out well-crafted year-end appeals, but your gratitude and deep respect for your donors should translate into thoughtfulness and ample time spent on designing fundraising messages.

Before licking the envelope on mail appeals or clicking 'send' on email appeals, review some of the fundraising no-nos shared in the 2012 Stanford Social Innovation Review article, "[End of Year Appeals: Five Bad Habits to Kick.](#)"

- **Don't tell stories at the expense of sharing data.** While emotional appeals can be quite gripping to donors, a better approach is to combine emotional appeals—such as stories about your programs or service recipients—with logical, data-driven appeals. Engage your donors by first tugging at their heartstrings, and then drive your appeal home by sharing solid proof that your programs work. This concept aligns with Aristotle's beliefs about the three modes of persuasion—ethos, logos, and pathos—which are far more powerful when combined than when used alone.
- **Don't write a novel.** Try connecting with donors through videos and infographics rather than just a wordy letter. Remember that your donors likely sift through tons of 'noise' that your appeal must compete with. Make your appeal memorable and visual so it stands out from all the other emails and letters hitting your donors' doorsteps and inboxes.
- **Don't squash a donor's sense of altruism.** Some studies have shown that donors are more likely to give repeatedly or in greater amounts when given a sincere thank you letter after an initial donation. Conversely, some studies show that sending donors *gifts* can backfire and cause them to feel uncomfortable with donating again. Give genuine thanks to your donors but be sure to choose an appropriate channel and message for your thank yous.

Aside from crafting annual appeals—with tailored messages for specific segments of your donor base—take note that many of the Center's clients are investing heavily in donor relations and donor retention efforts. Our clients recognize the cost savings to retaining donors and helping them move up the ranks into higher levels of giving

and engagement. You can do the same if you vow to care for your existing donors by thanking them appropriately, keeping them informed about key changes to your programs and operations, and responding to their complaints and concerns in a timely, thoughtful manner. You might have read the Association of Fundraising Professionals' (AFP) [Donor Bill of Rights](#) before, but these simple tenets of donor relations deserve at least an annual review. Be sure that your whole fundraising team is abiding by these tenets before sending your year-end appeals.

Finally, consider the language that you and your staff members use to speak about fundraising initiatives; this language might cause you to approach and speak to donors in a specific manner—sometimes a bad manner. Andrea Kihlstedt's article, "[Have You Hit Anyone Up This Week?](#)" which was featured on GuideStar this week, discusses the way our language shapes our fundraising mindset. If your team members talk about 'twisting arms' or 'bringing out the big guns' in order to be 'rolling in dough,' then they might subconsciously take a more aggressive or negative approach to fundraising. Kihlstedt recommends infusing the workplace with positive and profound language that better represents the mission-moving relationships between solicitors and donors.

For more advice about managing risks related to fundraising, read our RISK eNews articles from last year's holiday giving season.

- [Tis the Season for Nonprofit Fundraising Risk, Part 1](#)
- [Tis the Season for Nonprofit Fundraising Risk, Part 2](#)

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