



# HOW TO WRITE BETTER DONOR THANK YOUS

Start your donor relationships off right.

# Why donor thank yous are important.

What kind of impression do you want to make when a donor gives? You might say “Positive, professional, uplifting, and grateful.” A late thank you or a misspelled name can undermine your otherwise perfectly polished message. Whatever you do, don’t let the tax receipt stand alone as your sole message of gratitude.

Especially for new donors, the thank you note is your first opportunity to engage them, show them what their donation will do, and give them confidence that their decision to donate was a great one.

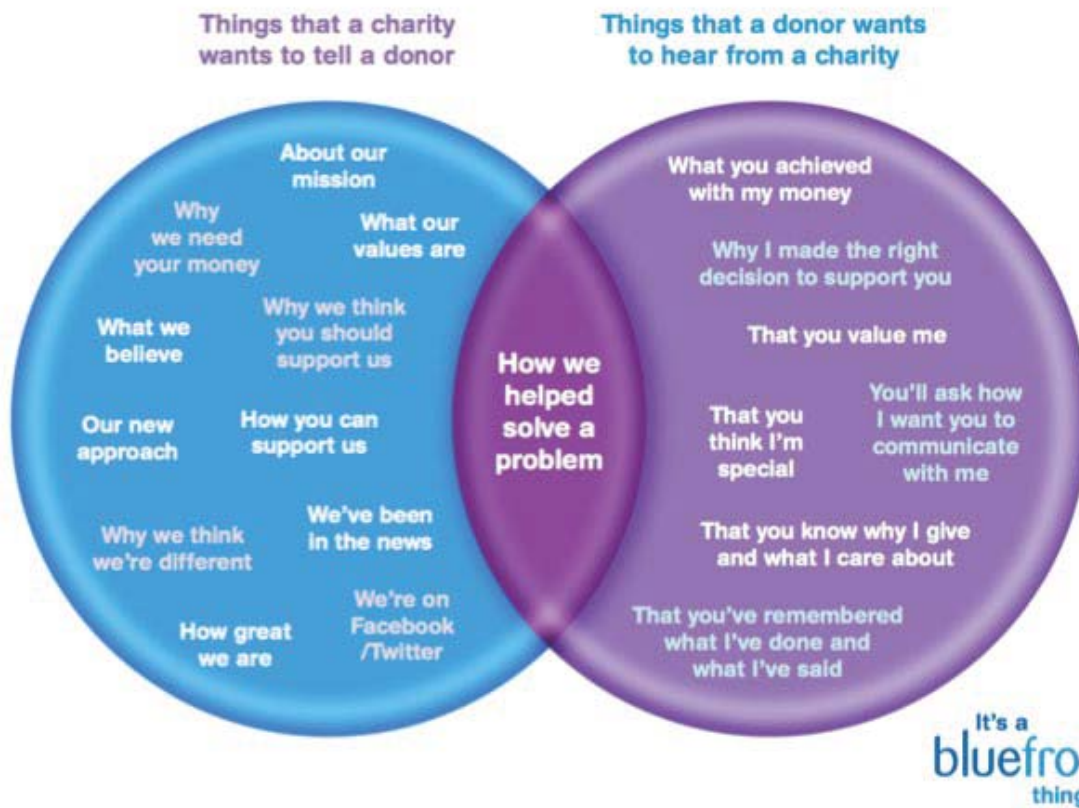
Read on to find out why a solid thank you is an important step in your donor relations strategy and discover new, creative ways to express gratitude to your donors.



Network for Good combines fundraising expertise with simple-to-use technology to provide [smarter fundraising software](#), tools, and coaching that are easy to use and raise more money. Since 2001, we’ve processed over \$1.4 billion in online donations for more than 125,000 nonprofits. We’re here to help you connect with donors and create more successful fundraising campaigns.

# What a Donor Wants to Hear

Have you ever read your thank yous from your donor's perspective? There can be a big difference between what your donor wants to hear, and what you want to communicate. If you have a hard time discerning a donor-centric thank you from a "my-nonprofit-is-awesome" thank you, here's a super helpful [venn diagram](#) from Mark Phillips, CEO of Bluefrog. Avoid statements from the blue circle, and instead focus your donor communication on statements from the purple circle.



# What a Thank You Is (and Is Not)

Amazing thank you letters feature five key qualities:

## 1. They are personal

First thing's first! Being personal, warm, and authentic with your donors is critical. People expect to have open and honest relationships with you. When communicating with your donors, make sure that you are being real and taking them seriously—not just treating them like an ATM.

In addition to creating a warm message, take the time to customize your thank you letters. One way to do this is to segment your audience and to group donors based on the gifts they give so you can message them appropriately. A good email tool should make this easy to do.

If you're doing snail mail outreach, consider writing a handwritten note. Donors are receiving a lot of email marketing and generic direct mail. It's an unexpected treat to get a handwritten note in the mail. This can really make you stand out from the crowd.

Another way to differentiate your organization is to pick up the phone and tell donors just how important their support really is.

Don't be afraid to do something different—customize your thank yous. Investing the time to be personal pays dividends in good vibes from your donors.

## 2. They are specific

Your thank you should connect the donor with what they've done for others. It is not enough to say, for example, "Thank you so much for your investment in childcare services," or, "Thank you so much for helping to save the environment." Show exactly how their donation is making a difference.

Donors want to know that their dollars matter, so tell them what you did with their money. Telling one specific story of how a donor's gift is making a difference. Personal stories help make the impact of a gift more tangible.

If your donors are local, invite people to spend time with you and tour your facility. Show them the work you do, and, if possible, meet some of the people you serve. Let your donors experience and become bonded to your cause. Seeing the results can make your cause come to life. to make a cause tangible.

## 3. They are creative

Don't look at sending thank you letters as drudgery—use it as an opportunity to be creative and connect with your donors. Differentiate your organization by sending photos or videos of your work. Pictures or a video can create a stronger emotional connection with your donors.

Another creative idea is to let people who love you—some of your best evangelists—speak on your behalf. Instead of sending a thank you note from an executive director, consider sending letters from volunteers, community members, or the person who was directly affected by the gift.



Honor Flight Capital Region's thank you letter included this photo of World War II veterans visiting their memorial. Since Honor Flight raises money to fund trips for veterans to visit their memorial, this was the perfect way to show a donor's gift in action. It can go on the fridge or bulletin board and serve as a nice reminder of the impact a gift made in the lives of these veterans.

#### 4. They are donor-centric

Be mindful of the fact that your donors make your work happen. They should get the credit! List the accomplishments they've made possible and put them front and center in all of your outreach. Don't talk about your organization as if it's somehow outside of the work and the investment of your donors.

The idea is that donors made this possible. What did they accomplish? A great thank you letter is not "Thank you for your gift. Here are all the great things we did." As you write your thank you letters, imagine all of the good you do with the donor at the center of it. Strive to make your donors feel a sense of accomplishment. Make your thank you about them and the difference they are making together with you.

## Now that you know what a thank you message is, here are a few things that thank you messages should not be:

### 1. All about the nonprofit

After you write your thank you message, count the times you use the words “us,” “our,” and “we.” Now count how many times you used the word “you.” Be sure there are plenty of “yous” throughout the letter, and keep the “we,” “us,” and “our” usage at a minimum. Here’s what an organization-focused thank you message looks like:

Dear Friend,

Thank you for generously donating \$10 to our organization. We are very grateful for your generosity and your support of our mission.

Our work is very important, and what we do is valued in our state. Our organization was formed to aid homeless and abused domestic and farmed animals in Arizona. We assist local humane societies and rescue groups with animals that cannot be adopted into permanent homes. Our mission is to provide lifelong care for these animals and to educate the public about humane animal care and practices, and we are very successful in accomplishing this. We rehabilitate these animals, both physically and psychologically, and, if possible, we work very hard to find appropriate homes for them. In an effort to prevent further cruelty to these animals, we educate the public on caring for companion animals as well as issues concerning farmed animals.

Your in-kind donation helps us to continue the important lifesaving work we do. Again, thank you for your contribution toward our organization. Our work is essential in our state, and donations are how our work is made possible.

Not only is this letter all about the organization and the work they do, there is no emotional story to connect the donor with the cause. From the donor’s perspective, this letter is just words on a page. There is no emotional connection to the organization or the clients they serve, and the donor isn’t shown much appreciation for their gift. Be sure your thank you message is just that: a message of thanks.

### 2. Late

Lynne Wester, author of *The Four Pillars of Donor Relations*, suggests getting thank yous out the door no more than two weeks after a gift has been made. Timeliness on your part shows the donor that their gift was valued and important. If your donor intake process doesn’t allow for a thank you to be delivered quickly, it’s time to make a change. This is your first opportunity to form a positive relationship with your donor, make it count!

### 3. Complicated

Thanking donors should not be a complex or a time-consuming process. Here are some quick ways to begin re-thinking your thanks yous:

- Begin drafting your email thank you letter for donors who give online-there's a template included in this guide.
- Schedule a meeting with your director to talk about his or her involvement in the donor thank you process.
- Survey a few donors about your current thank you process. Did they remember receiving a message of thanks?
- [Watch Lynne Wester's webinar](#) about donor relations.

### 4. The last time they hear from you

Add your donors to your newsletter list, include them in special event invitations, send them holiday greetings, and give them the opportunity to connect with you if they have any questions. This should be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.