

Write an Effective Appeal

As the “kick off” to your overall year-end giving campaign, your #GivingTuesday appeal and campaign theme should align with your year-end messages. Be sure that your campaign (especially your appeal) plans make it easy to tie in to your overall year-end message.

At Network for Good, we spend a lot of time analyzing what makes an ask more effective, because a really good fundraising appeal is so crucial for nonprofits to connect with supporters and inspire donors to give. Here are the 4 Ts for writing an appeal that works:

Timely: Your appeal needs to have a sense of urgency to move donors to act now. Let them know what will happen if they give immediately—or what might be lost if they don’t.

Touching: Effective fundraising taps into the emotional and personal reasons for giving. Your fundraising appeal must inspire your reader to feel something if you want them to take action. Compelling photos and stories help make your message come to life.

Trustworthy: Once you’ve inspired donors with emotion, they need reassurance to follow through with their donation. Build trust by including trust icons, testimonials, and sign your appeal with believable and relatable messenger.

Tangible: What will happen if someone gives? Show concrete results and the specific impact of a gift. Donors want to know that they can make a difference. Make it easy for them to see how their donation matters.

Leverage Stories

While it’s definitely important to remember the key components of an effective fundraising appeal, what will make your messages really stand out is an attention-grabbing, emotionally compelling, authentic story.

Your cause’s story is the heart and soul of your fundraising letter. It’s how your appeal will have a personality that allows you to connect with your donors and inspire them to give. Without it, your appeal will read like many other cookie-cutter letters your supporters will receive this giving season.

The best stories share some common characteristics:

- They’re authentic.
- They’re easy to understand.
- They revolve around emotion and are supported with facts.
- They make readers feel like they can make a difference.

Here are two kinds of stories that work well in appeals, courtesy of [Nancy Schwartz](#).

Your Impact Stories

These are the most frequently told nonprofit stories. They feature the before and after and illustrate the impact of your organization and supporters. They are unequalled in showing the value of your organization's work in moving your issue or cause forward and matching the personal goals of your prospects and supporters.

- Focus on the difference your work makes in someone's life. Ideally, keep each story to a single person or a family.
- Outline the before and the after in an emotional way.
- Testimonials, preferably with a face and name, have impact here.

Your People Stories

These are your donor, staff, volunteer, and client/participant profiles. Craft these stories so prospective donors can easily imagine standing in the shoes of your current supporters.

- You already have these stories on hand. Sometimes the most powerful story is about a staff member or supporter who has devoted time or resources to your cause. This story of a janitor who became a major donor is a great example.
- Avoid stories that are too unusual. There has to be a point of connection or others won't see themselves in your story.
- Fill your people stories with specifics. Details allow the reader or listener to feel your story, not just process it.

Bring Your Campaign to Life

Now it's time to pull everything together. Incorporate two to three of your campaign branding elements into every point of contact with supporters. In priority order:

- Campaign logo
- Campaign goal or tagline (Example: "200 by \$200" if you want 200 donors to give \$200 each.)
- Donation button or links to your donation page
- Key campaign visual
- Your key story or stories
- Your supporting visuals

Each of your outreach strategies should incorporate these elements so your donors, prospects, staff, board, and volunteers are informed and excited about your #GivingTuesday campaign. Do a quick audit to make sure you're including your #GivingTuesday campaign in all of these channels:

- Website
- Online giving page
- Thank you page that appears after online donation
- Email outreach and email signature line for staff
- Thank you email
- Social media
- Facebook cover image and your logo in the profile picture
- Twitter background and your logo
- Pinterest
- Instagram
- Other social channels (LinkedIn, Google+, etc.)

Remember your offline channels:

- Direct mail
- Board meeting materials
- Staff meeting materials
- Event visuals
- Press releases and media coverage

Spreading Your Message

A successful year-end campaign will depend on sharing. Using either your supporters' content or your original content, be sure to communicate consistently with your roster of supporters and your team. Their personal sharing is the most effective way to reach new and lapsed supporters.

Improve your chances of driving this "network effect" by creating a communication plan. This will include a calendar and a map of which communications you'll send through which channels to specific audiences. Create a sequence of communications that will announce your campaign and build excitement leading up to the big day.

At a minimum, we recommend:

- Encourage supporters to use ready-made posts, hashtags, tweets, and visuals in the days leading up to the giving day, and then hourly on the giving day and then again the last week of the year.
- On #GivingTuesday, share email and social channel updates as you reach key milestones, such as 50%, 75%, 90%, and 100% of your goal.
- Prepare thermometers and other visual elements in advance so you have them handy to share your progress and build excitement during your campaign.
- Maximize your team's reach while minimizing the time required from each supporter by creating a hub-and-spoke communications model. Organize and distribute content centrally to your key committee members and ambassadors. They can then distribute to a manageable number of contacts and be ready to support and answer questions
- Email your donor base at least once before the big day to let them know you're participating and then again on #GivingTuesday with your fundraising appeal. Don't be shy about sending out another email later in the day but suppressing those donors who gave earlier in the day.