



Quick Start Guide to Year-End Fundraising

10 pages of helpful tips for creating a donor-centric, story-driven, goal-hitting year-end

About This Guide

It's never too early to start thinking about your year-end fundraising. A well-planned year-end campaign will increase your fundraising totals. Here are seven things you can focus on right now:

1. Check your online donation process—it must be easy.
2. Make sure your year-end efforts are donor-centric.
3. Write a stellar appeal that features a story.
4. Have a clear call to action in every message you send.
5. Set a SMART goal.
6. Say thanks.
7. Track results.

Use this guide to prep the big picture of your year-end campaign. Learn about these seven essentials, and then begin drafting a year-end appeal that inspires donors to give and give more. Are you ready? Let's dive in and start working on your donor-centric, story-driven, goal-hitting year-end campaign now!

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Rock a Donor-Centric Year-End

As you begin drafting your year-end fundraising campaign, it's important to put yourself in your donors' shoes. Keeping donors in mind during every step of your fundraising campaign ensures that your campaign speaks to them and inspires them to take action—that is, to give!

Leverage these five essentials for creating a donor-centric year-end:

- 1. Show how donations will be used.** If your audience has given before, tell them all the great things they've done and all the wonderful things that more support will bring.
- 2. Inspire trust.** Be honest and transparent about your programs, spending, impact—everything. Show exactly where the money goes and what the donor's investment will do. Demonstrate your trustworthiness by displaying your Charity Navigator or BBB rating on your donation page.
- 3. It's not all about you.** Make the donor the superhero of your nonprofit's success instead of talking only about how great your organization. Be clear that their support is vital to your mission.
- 4. Make it easy.** Ask donors to give, and then make it incredibly easy so they have a hard time saying no. Be sure the donation button is easy to find on your website and in all your emails so donors can simply click and give without wasting time hunting for your donation page.
- 5. Say thanks.** Send a thank you message as soon as you can—and make sure it does just that: says thanks. Sending a sincere note of gratitude (without including donation history or an another appeal) will be remembered next year!

Write a Story-Driven Appeal

It's time to write, rewrite, and edit that story-driven year-end appeal! An effective appeal is equal parts emotion and urgency. You want to pull people into your message with a compelling story, and then push them to act with a specific, clear, and urgent call to action. Before you begin writing, decide how you'll tell donors your story. Here are three storytelling strategies:

Strategy #1: Choose one story and allow its arc to mirror your campaign touchpoints. Every story has a beginning, middle, and end. A story also includes rapport building: a conflict, a character trying to solve that conflict, and the resolution.

This strategy works really well in year-end appeals because you're probably sending two or three (or more) emails, depending on the size of your donor base or campaign. You can divide a story into "chapters" and use them as a core communications tool in your campaign.

Here's an example:

The Nonprofit: An organization that supports cancer patients and their families.

The Story: A woman whose husband is diagnosed with cancer.

Appeal 1: Introduce the woman and discuss her challenges and uncertainty in coming to terms with her husband's cancer diagnosis (the conflict). In this chapter, she talks about her thoughts and feelings, what it was like coming home from the doctor that day, and the experience of sharing the news with families and friends. This appeal connects donors to the person their donations benefit.

Appeal 2: This chapter shares the woman’s experience of navigating the medical system and getting her husband the help he needed (the character trying to solve the conflict). In this case, the woman answers these questions: Did the doctor answer all of her questions? Was she overwhelmed? How did she and her husband make treatment decisions? This appeal ties your story directly to the goal of your organization’s work.

Appeal 3: Here we come to the resolution. The woman shares her relief in finding this particular nonprofit, which offered her much-needed counseling and ongoing support during her husband’s treatment. This is where you get specific about your organization’s work and how your donors’ money makes a difference.

Remember: In every communication, include a call to action (a donate button) that mirrors the appeal.


Strategy #2: Share stories from current donors.

Make it easy for donors to submit their reasons for giving (via email or a submission page on your website). Highlight their stories on your website and blog, in your email and newsletter appeals, and on your social channels. With each story, include a slug or headline intro such as “Why I Give.” Make your donor stories highly visible—and, of course, include a donate button.

Strategy #3: Tell your story in real time.

Big year-end events like fundraising galas, telethons, or giving days are natural venues for telling the story of what’s happening right now at your nonprofit. For example, if your organization is hosting a telethon, update your email list in real time:

Morning email: Introduce the event, and include a call to action. “Tune in today to our telethon. Give now to help us reach our goal.”



Midday email: Update people on your real-time results—how much money people have given and how close you are to your goal. Again, include a call to action: Ask people to make a gift if they haven't already, or thank donors for their support and ask them to share your event with their social network.

End of day: This is the “you did it!” email. Give a final tally of your fundraising efforts. Share the day's successes, and show donors your gratitude for their generosity. Offer another opportunity to give for those who haven't yet.

While these storytelling strategies may require a bit of planning, they'll make your year-end appeals stand out in a crowd of campaigns and ultimately raise more money for your cause.

And remember:

Everybody has a story to tell, so go find them.

If you don't already have a great story in mind, turn to your volunteers, co-workers, or the people you help. Their point of view can help potential donors feel more connected to your mission.

Avoid the “kitchen sink.”

Don't try to relay every single aspect of your organization in a story. This creates information overload. Instead, find one small anecdote or facet of your work and show how it relates to everything else.

Use imagery.

One powerful photo can go a long way in stirring emotion. Pick a clear photo of one person or animal looking straight into the camera.

Make it personal.

Telling the story of thousands of people who need help is too overwhelming. People give more when they feel like they're helping another person to whom they can relate.

Create a Goal-Hitting Campaign

Is your year-end fundraising campaign focused on getting results?

It may sound like a silly question, but many organizations don't approach fundraising campaigns with clear, concrete goals. And without clearly defined goals, it's pretty tough to know if you're succeeding.

Setting a fundraising goal helps to ensure that you and your colleagues are on the same page with the desired results of a fundraising campaign. Keeping track of where you are in terms of meeting your goal can give you the information you need to adjust your strategy or improve your outreach.

Now is the time to define what results you and your organization want to achieve.

Keep these key pointers in mind:

Set a specific goal for your fundraising campaign.

Before you finalize your plans, know whether your overall goal is to add a specific number of new donors or to reach a certain donation level. Have a clear and measurable end result in mind. Decide how you will define success, such as "raise \$20,000" or "add 200 new members."

Check that your goals pass the SMART test.

Remember: Your goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. That last one is already covered for a year-end fundraising campaign.

Segmentation is the key to engagement.

Some audiences are likely more important than others within the context of your campaign. Do you need your current supporters to mobilize and become fundraisers on your behalf? Think about your goals and who holds the key to your success. Lack of participation from primary groups can cause your campaign to falter or fail.

If you're having trouble clearly defining your goal, ask yourself these questions:

- What are you trying to accomplish? Picture what your ideal end result will be.
- Who are you trying to reach? Decide on your key audiences before planning your campaign.
- What do I want them to do? Give your supporters a clear call to action. Will you ask them to donate a specific amount or pledge a recurring gift? Make sure this is baked into your planning and communications.
- What is the best way to reach my audience? Once you've identified your audience and calls to action, think about the best way to reach and activate your supporters.

Once you've established a clear goal and communicated it to your staff, your whole team should be ready to make the big push to hit it.

Amplify Your Year-End

If you are looking for more ways to increase year-end giving, here are some ideas to take your fundraising to the next level:

Participate in #GivingTuesday

#GivingTuesday is growing: Last year, giving increased by 146%! Network for Good clients that launched a #GivingTuesday campaign saw more success at year-end overall: Our nonprofit customers who participated in #GivingTuesday raised an average of 369% more in December than our nonprofit customers that did not participate. Want to learn more about this biggest giving day of the year? Visit networkforgood.com/givingtuesday.

Try Social Fundraising

Social fundraising is simply equipping your supporters with the tools to raise money on your behalf. Also known as peer fundraising, your supporters can help you expand your nonprofit's reach and bring in new donors who will fall in love with your cause. Launching a social fundraising campaign during the year-end giving season is a great way to form a deeper relationship with current supporters and an excellent way to acquire new donors.