

### **Nine Clever Ways to Thank Your Donors**

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Saying thank you to your donors, and saying it well, is only polite, right? The truth is that good thank yous are much more than good manners: they are a very smart and savvy fundraising strategy.

#### **Donors Are Testing Nonprofits, and Nonprofits Are Failing**

Sixty-five percent of first-time donors don't make a second gift. That's what Penelope Burk's [donor-centered research](#) tells us. Donors want something quite simple: a prompt, meaningful thank you letter and additional communication that explains how the donation was used. That's it. Eighty percent of donors say that would convince them to make the second gift.

And yet the typical thank you note that many nonprofits send is more like a transaction receipt that speaks to a donor's inner bookkeeper more than a donor's inner angel. Let's speak to that angel! Here are nine clever approaches to thank yous.

#### **1. Write a Greeting Card, Not a Business Letter**

The best nonprofit thank yous feel friendly, warm, and personal. And yet they are still relatively short. Even if your thank you appears on stationery, think of a good Hallmark card as you write (not the ones with four paragraphs of flowery script, but the shorter ones that lay it all out there in under 30 words). They feel personal, even though we know they were written for thousands of others.

#### **2. Share Recent Progress, However Small**

Your supporters want to know that they matter. So give them little gems of progress that show that with their support—and directly because of that support—you are bringing about some kind of change, or making life easier for someone, or advancing the cause. Maybe it's a short anecdote, or a telling testimonial, or an impressive statistic.

#### **3. Add an Invitation—But Not to Something That Requires Another Donation!**

You want your supporters to stay on with you, so invite them to do so, without asking for another financial donation. Invite them to your next free event, a behind-the-scenes tour, or a special conference call with a staff expert. Mention any volunteer opportunities, and ask them to follow you on Facebook or Twitter.

#### **4. Use a More Creative, Personal Opening**

Forget "On behalf of" or "Thank you for" and start your letters with a more creative and personal opening. Try something like "You made my day" on one line by itself. Then jump into a story: "Your donation crossed my desk today and ..." Explain how the money will be used. Or start with, "I have a great story to share with you." Launch right into a success story and then talk about how the donation will create even more happy stories.

#### **5. Include Results-Oriented Photography**

Including photos, either in the body of the letter or stuffed in the envelope, will make an instant connection between your donor and your work. A photo of a client or smiling people making a difference out there in the world will light up your donor's day. Get a group of people whom your organization helps together and take a photo of them holding a big banner that says, "Thank You."

#### **6. Record a Video Message**

One of my favorite thank-you e-mails came from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), with a link to a short video. [The video features real TNC scientists around the world](#)—not polished spokespeople—in their own

countries, speaking in many different accents, saying, "Thank you for helping to save [whatever natural area they work on]." It's so genuine, and yet so easy to duplicate!

### **7. Send a Postcard from Behind the Scenes**

Several digital photo apps let you turn your photos into instant postcards (see [Postagram](#) or [Touchnote](#), for example). What if your program staff took some photos during the course of their everyday work out of the public eye and turned those into personalized postcards for your supporters? It's hard to get more timely and personal than that.

### **8. Be Specific about How the Gift Is Being Used**

Very quickly but clearly describe a specific program where the gift will be used. If you are fundraising for specific programs this will be easier than if you are fundraising for general support. But even then, you still need to give supporters a sense for what you're doing with the money. You can use anecdotes as examples for how the money is being spent, or you can assure donors that their gifts are going to "where the need is greatest."

### **9. Change Who's Saying Thank You**

If you have clients who benefit from programs funded by individual donations, ask a few clients to explain in their own words how your organization has changed their lives and to thank the donor for making it all possible. They write the letter, but you send it. Or ask board members to send a separate hand-written thank you note or even an e-mail, as a follow-up to your "official" thank you letter.

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