

# Checklist for Donor Thank You Letters

When was the last time you gave someone a gift for which you were never thanked? Even if it's your favorite nephew, were you inclined to give to him again? Many nonprofits spend a lot of time and energy cultivating donors, but not enough thanking them. Be sure to include the following elements into your thank you letters.

- **THANK THEM QUICKLY.** As an organization, you should decide on your standard response time for a donation. Is it a same day email? Does a phone call occur within 48 hours? Is a letter generated within 72 hours? Whatever your method, try your best to respond within 3 business days.
- **SPELL THEIR NAMES RIGHT.** Make sure you have the spelling of the donor(s) name(s) correct, as well as having a correct address. When in doubt, give a quick call to verify – you can kill two birds with one stone and thank the donor at the same time.
- **TRACK THEIR PREFERENCES.** Did your donors give to a special appeal? Was there a note on the pledge form? Was the gift in honor of someone? Is there any additional information you can add to their file from this donation?
- **DIRECTLY EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE FOR THE GIFT.** Be sure to use words like “appreciate”, “gratitude” and “thanks” at least 3 times in your letter – in the beginning, middle and end.
- **TELL A STORY.** Start your letter off with a quote or a story from someone who has been helped by the donor. Focus in on one person that is just like “Jane”, and then expand the story to give a sense of how many people you help every year (through the generosity of donors like yourself?) thanks to generous donors. Use pictures whenever possible.
- **PUT THE DONOR FRONT AND CENTER.** Use the word “you” in your letter a lot more than the word “we”. Paint a picture of what your donors’ contributions have allowed you to do and make note that it would not have been possible without their support.
- **TALK ABOUT HOW THE MONEY WILL BE USED.** If donor gifts will help 5 families transition to permanent homes, say so. If the funds will help to fund the new wing for kittens at the local shelter, talk about how many kittens will benefit.
- **KEEP THE DOOR OPEN.** When feasible, invite a relationship with the donor via a phone call or visit. Provide direction regarding where they can go for more information. Better yet, if you have an upcoming event, include that in the PS – “Hope to see you at our gala in December.”
- **HAVE A REAL PERSON SIGN IT.** Just as you attempt to personalize donor request letters, try to personalize this as well. Can someone who knows the donor add a note? Can the signer of the letter include something like, “Hope you had a chance to visit the museum this summer and see our latest exhibit.”
- **THANK THEM IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.** A thank you letter is the minimum communication and is often used as the verification for a tax-deductible gift. For a larger gift, consider having the Executive Director send a letter, the development director send a note, and a board volunteer make a phone call, the donor will feel mighty special and may just give again!

