

Keys to Super Charged Fundraising Appeals

SUPER CHARGED CONTENT

1) Start with their name & make sure you get it right

- No “Dear Friend” letters
- Use their name in the salutation
- If you can’t, cross out the “Dear Friend” by hand and write in their name
- An incorrect or misspelled name is an instant NO

2) Start with a story & killer opening line

- You must capture the reader’s attention instantly
- Lead with a story & go right into it (no standard introductory paragraph)
 - a. *“Just the other day, Marci walked into our facility with a big problem.”*
 - b. *“Johnny didn’t go to school last week because something was wrong.”*
 - c. *“Last week, I was walking down the hall and stumbled upon something magical ...”*
- Story characteristics
 - a. Compelling story about one person, place or thing
 - b. Rich detail / create a vivid picture in the donor’s mind
 - c. It must be about a SOLVABLE problem
 - d. Make the donor the HERO of the story
 1. *“Without you, this would not have happened.”*
 2. BOY: *“Because of you ...”*
- How to find stories
 - a. Make story asks
 - b. Have conversations with co-workers (especially program staff), and volunteers
 - c. Set aside time to get out from behind your desk and collect the stories

3) Use “you” and “your” at least twice as much as “we” and “our”

- It’s about the donor, not YOU or YOUR organization
- Do the circle test

4) Write like you — and your readers — talk

- Aim for a natural conversational tone, this is not business writing
- Use contractions
- Begin sentences with “and” or “but”
- Use sentence fragments
- Write for a 4th to 6th grade level
 - a. Use Flesh-Kincaid scale (built-in tool in MS Word, websites available)
- Read it out loud to see if it sounds like your voice (this is also the best way to proofread)

5) Assure your ‘Call to Action’ (CTA) is clear

- Ask the reader to do one thing, and one thing only (donate)
 - a. If you want them to volunteer, attend an event, etc. ask them to do that another way
- Ask for a specific amount

- a. Use an ask amount (1.5x last donation is a good starting point)
- Ask more than once / repeat your call to action using different words
 - a. Use hard asks
 1. *“Your donation of \$50 or more - sent by April 30th - will provide meals for over 20 families.”*
 2. *“Please join me in supporting this wonderful cause.”*
 3. *“Won’t you make your gift right now?”*
 - b. Use soft asks
 1. *“You make it possible.”*
 2. *“Without you, this would not be possible.”*

6) Make it urgent

- You must answer the question, “Why should I give today, rather than wait three months?” or they will
- Ways to show urgency
 - a. People won’t survive
 - b. A window of opportunity will close (matching funds)
 - c. Conditions are going to change
 - d. Tell them what will happen if they don’t give, TODAY

7) Add a compelling visual

- Use a visual to help tell the story & break up the text
- Photo requirements
 - a. Must be a real photo, not a stock photo (don’t worry about quality)
 - b. It shows one person, rather than a group
 - c. It shows direct eye contact
- No image at all is better than the wrong photo

8) Don’t forget the P.S.

- It is the one part of the letter that is guaranteed to be read
- Use it to repeat your call to action
- *“Won’t you join me and help the kids today with a \$100 donation?”*
- *“Your vital donation of \$100 will be put to work immediately and will have a huge impact in our local community.”*

9) Minimize reviews

- Ideally nobody else should read your letter
- If someone reviews it, they should proofread for spelling and clarity only (not grammar, content, form, etc.)
- Try to avoid letting it go to a committee for review
- Don't let the marketing team review/edit your letter -- this isn't business writing & if they edit it that way they will kill your result

SUPER CHARGED FORMATTING

1) Aim for 2 pages

- Page count has a connotation
 - a. 1 = “It must not be that important if they can say it in one page.”
 - b. 3+ = “They’re just droning on and on.”
 - c. 2 = THE SWEET SPOT (proven to have higher response rates & average gifts)
- Use repetition to get to two full pages
 - a. Repeat the story (tell it another way / from another viewpoint)
 - b. Repeat the ask (hard & soft)

Make it readable

Use a serif font

Use black text

Use 12 point font (minimum, 13-14 is even better)

Indent paragraphs

Keep paragraphs short (5 lines max)

Use a few one-line paragraphs

Use short sentences (fragments are okay)

Don't use big words (find a simpler alternative)

Emphasize key parts

- Use strategic underlining
- Underline the following:
 - a. The call to action
 - b. The most dramatic part of the story
- If they just read the underlines & the P.S. they will know who they are supposed to save, how they can do it and why they have to do it NOW

4) Keep the package simple

- Keep inserts to a minimum
- Not including your organizational brochure actually improves response rates
- Just the letter, a reply device and a reply envelope is fine

5) Make sure it gets opened

- Pick the right envelope (listed in order of response)
 - a. Plain envelope (with no return address and a live stamp, not an indicia)
 - b. Colored envelope (the brighter the better)
 - c. Oversized envelope
 - d. Standard #10 envelope that you use for all other organizational mail
- Teasers printed on the envelope don't work (they give away your purpose)
- A live stamp is opened more frequently than mail with an indicia mark
- Anything hand written will drastically increase open rates (but fake handwriting can backfire)

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