## Tips for Writing an Email Fundraising Letter

Online giving still lags behind contributions that are made in response to in-person requests or traditional fundraising letters, but it increases every year. Good emailed letters are short and sweet. They need to draw in their readers right away, with strong subject lines and opening sentences. Here are some tips you can use to succeed with your emailed fundraising letters:

* **The identity of the person who sent the email matters to the reader.** Make sure the sender is someone who is recognized by your supporters.
* **Write an appealing subject line.** The recipient of your letter will choose to open your message or not based on this 40- to 50-character phrase. In many ways, it is the most important part of your email. Write it, think about it, and test it on others. If you don’t get a strong response, write another subject line and resend the appeal in a few days.
* **The first few lines of your letter are extremely important.** Many of your readers will be scanning their email through a preview pane where all they see is those first few sentences. Write clearly, directly, and dramatically at the opening of your letter.
* **Write the way you speak.** Use short, brisk sentences. Don’t be afraid to ask the reader a question in the body of your letter: Questions can add to a conversational tone.
* **Use short paragraphs and draw attention to the benefits of your organization’s work or to its varied programs by using subheads and bullets.** However, avoid turning your letter into a long, bulleted list.
* **Engage the reader.** Use short human interest stories or testimonials from people who have benefited from your organization’s work.
* **Incorporate a graphic element — photos, a video, or an illustration — usually in the upper-right corner.** At the same time, don’t overload your email with graphics, which can slow down its delivery and cause it to be caught in spam filters.
* **Ask for the contribution.** Don’t bury the request deep in the letter. Be specific and clear about your expectations.
* **Each donor’s gift makes a difference to your nonprofit — tell them how.**
* **Make it easy for your reader to click through from your letter to the “Donate Now” feature on your website.** While you’re at it, include two or three opportunities for your reader to click through.
* **Let donors control their frequency of contact with you.** You want to stay in touch with an e-newsletter and future solicitation letters, but be courteous and give them choices about how you’ll stay in touch. While you’re at it, give clear and courteous unsubscribe instructions for how to get off of your email list.
* **Inject human contact into your e-fundraising if at all possible.** After someone has made a contribution, make a brief call of thanks. Better yet, invite him or her to take a behind-the-scenes tour or witness your nonprofit’s work in person.