

Nonprofit 911 – January 12, 2010
Thanks a Million: How to Thank Your Donors
So They'll Come Back and Give More
with Katya Andresen of Network for Good and Jocelyn Harmon of Care2
Sponsored by Network for Good

The MP3 audio transcript can be found at
www.fundraising123.org or www.nonprofit911.org

Rebecca Higman: I would like to give a brief introduction of our speakers and hand the floor over. First, we have Katya Andresen on the line. She is Network for Good's Chief Operating Officer. She is also a speaker, an author, and a blogger about nonprofit marketing and online outreach, as well as the basics of social media. So she has trained thousands of causes in effective marketing and media relations. And her marketing materials for nonprofits have won both national and international awards.

Also on the line is Jocelyn Harmon, and she is the Director of Nonprofit Services at Care2. Jocelyn is really passionate about helping charitable organizations and causes succeed online so that they can change the world. Jocelyn is also a blogger and a speaker on online marketing for social change.

So without further ado, I am really excited to turn the floor over to Katya to get us started.

Katya Andresen: Great. Thank you so much Rebecca. I will try to start this call off on an appropriate note by thanking everyone who is on the phone. I know this is a very busy time of year for your right now because you have just made your way through fundraising season and you have a lot of donors and, I hope, checks, and, I hope, online donations to process and folks to express your gratitude to. So I appreciate you taking the time out to be with us today.

And if you look at the first slide after the title slide of what we punt around today, slide 2, I will tell you I want to thank you for another reason. And that is that if you look at the data about how nonprofits do at thanking their donors, it is very alarming.

I have one example on the slide from the eCampaigning Review Study. And if you are interested in this, the URL is on there and it is posted in the presentation. But they did a study of nonprofits around the world; 2 million donors to 50 nonprofits. And they found that 70% of the nonprofits didn't send a follow up email within a month. And 37% never sent a thank you email for online donations.

Now, I bet if we were all together in a room and you weren't muted and we could talk, and I asked you to tell me the last time that you gave to a charity and the last time that you didn't give to a charity, you would be telling me stories about why you lost faith in a charity or stopped giving to certain charities because they didn't thank you. You didn't

know where your money went. You were barraged with appeals, but not gratitude. And I hear those stories over and over again from fundraisers.

But we have to take a minute to remember that we may not be doing this so well ourselves. And so, I also want to thank you for being on the call because we need to do better at this sector. And if you have taken the time out to think about how you want to thank your donors better, how you want to build relationships with them that are stronger, I am so delighted, because not only is that good practice, it is essential to your survival. And frankly, given these statistics, it will make you stand out, because clearly most of us aren't doing this as well as we should.

And I think one of the reasons that happens is, particularly in this rough economic climate, it is hard for us, as fundraisers and nonprofit marketers, not to be thinking about our needs. We have really important programs, including a couple that Rebecca highlighted at the beginning of the program, who are on the phone with us today, that we feel passionately about and we really want resources for, and we know how important those dollars are.

So it is easy to always come from a place of need and always come from a place of: "What can I extract from this donor, because I am trying to make a difference in the world?" And the problem is that when we do that, we might lose our manners, and we might forget that that donor needs to be seen and heard, feel recognized, and be cultivated. And that is going to be the focus of our call today.

So once again, thank you for being here. I am so glad you are here and I am so glad you care about this topic. And I hope that Jocelyn and I can give you some inspiration around it and get you fired up to do a fantastic job in 2010 with thank you's.

So I am on the third slide, very quickly, with our agenda today. I want to talk briefly about what we mean by gratitude. I want to answer the question, "Well, so what? Who cares? Why should this be something that is one of my top priorities this year?" And then, Jocelyn is going to go into the four components of a really good thank you. And thank you is singular here, but this is a process. How do you continue to thank your donors over the course of a year, and what are the four things that should be an essential part of a great strategy there?

We are going to intermix some examples in there of thank you's that we think are really off the charts gold standard. And then we are also going to, under "learn from the best" on the agenda, we are going to add a couple other case studies. We are going to touch on a few resources that might be helpful to you, and then we are going to take questions.

And I encourage questions. Any aspect of donor cultivation, Jocelyn and I are happy to talk about. So if you want to talk about thank you notes, great, but if you want to go a little beyond that and talk about relationship building, we are happy to take questions on that as well, and will leave plenty of time at the end for those.

So just to reiterate what Rebecca said, you want to email fundraising123@networkforgood.org with any questions you have at any time during the call, and she will be reading them out loud to us, and we can't wait to answer them.

On slide 4 I just want to talk briefly about gratitude. Jocelyn put together a couple inspirational quotes here. The first one is, ““If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice.” And the second one is, “The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated,” from William James.

Our need to feel acknowledged and appreciated in life is pretty primal, and that is what we are trying to get across here. It really is part of our psychological makeup. Most people give to a charity because they care about it, it has touched them personally, and they really want to make a difference. And it comes from that place of craving; it is a very personal, emotional choice to give away your money to something you care about.

And so, not to get too much of a psychoanalyst right now, but we are pretty deep emotional territory, and you want to handle those feelings of your donor with care, and, really, recognize them. They have taken this act that is deeply meaningful to them and we need to not just send them a form letter. We need to not just send them receipts. We need to acknowledge the deeper feelings that are behind that act and really convey a sense of gratitude for them. And just in doing that, we are not just thanking. We are expressing gratitude, which is the level we really want to be at when we are talking to our donors.

So why is that so important? I am on slide 5, “So what and who cares?” I wanted to share with you a couple things that I hope reinforce why making the decision to really focus on this is so important.

The first one is survival. I say this all the time, and I really apologize if you have heard me say it repeatedly or you have ever heard me do training, because I bring it up in every single training. But there are several research studies that point to the number one reason that donors stop supporting a nonprofit is the way they were treated by nonprofits.

And I am just going to keep beating that dead horse and saying it while I am speaking, because I gave to about seven charities in December and I have only been thanked by half of them. So I am just going to keep at it until I feel like we are doing the job we should be doing in our sector.

People don't usually stop giving to a charity because they run out of money. They may give less, but if they love the charity and feel appreciated and gratitude from the charity and a sense of impact, they will keep giving. When they stop giving is when they stop feeling that they are making a difference. And how does that happen? It happens when the nonprofit stops expressing gratitude, stops talking about the impact of their gift, and goes back to that place of need, and continually emphasizes how that donor needs to give again.

I am not saying you can't ask donors to give money, but you have to pair that with gratitude, thanks, and a sense that they had an impact. And if you don't, you are going to be in trouble, and you are going to have very bad donor attrition. So that is the first reason. It is much easier to keep and cultivate a donor than to go find a new one and convince them to care about your cause. So let's make this the first strategy to our fundraising success and the survival our organization is pursuing.

The second one is, it really works. Your gratitude bonds the donor to your cause. It is going to make you very successful in your outreach to your donors. The third one I mentioned a little bit at the outset, which is differentiation. As I said, most nonprofits aren't good at this. And if you are good, you are really going to stand out and you are going to rise to the top, and particularly in 2010. These are tough times. The jobless rate is still really high. People are still pinching their pennies. They are getting barraged with appeals from nonprofits, and they are going to be increasingly critical and selective about where they are giving. And if you want to be top of mind, and you want to be the nonprofit that they aren't going to reduce their donations to or stop giving to entirely, the way to do that is to differentiate yourself with your outreach and with your thanks.

And then the last one, for heaven's sake, is polite. Just like our mothers taught us, saying thanks often and well is just simply the right thing to do. It is just rude, and it is unfair not to do so. If for no other reason, we should do that.

And one last thought in making the case for this, which is on slide 6, Kivi Leroux Miller, who Jocelyn and I both know, and she is at nonprofitmarketingguide.com and will be doing some upcoming training calls for Network for Good, she has written and thought about this a lot, too.

What she says is, if you start to listen to everything about how you should be thanking and cultivating donors and you start feeling like, "You know what, I don't have time for that. That is really nice that that nonprofit did that really elaborate thank you strategy. I don't have time for that," let me read you what she says.

She says, "Think about how much time a typical nonprofit spends on generic "outreach," like newsletters, with the purpose, at least in part, of generating new supporters."

OK? So, going after new people.

"If you are so pressed for time, wouldn't those precious hours be better spent thanking the people who have taken the next step and given you money, no matter how much or through what method?"

So, don't forget those folks who have already given and how worthwhile it is to spend time on them.

OK. So we are at slide 7 if you are following along. If you are not, I am reading you the slides so that you can follow along. I am going to turn it over to Jocelyn now, who is going to take apart the four parts of a good approach to thank you's.

Jocelyn Harmon: All right! Great! Thank you Katya. I am really happy to be on the call today. And I will add my note of gratitude. Just a big thanks to Network for Good, who has a tremendous learning center that all of you who are on this call certainly know about, obviously. But if you don't know enough about it, or if this is one of your first calls, there is just a wealth of resources on their Fundraising 123 website, which I urge you to take advantage of- white papers, and teleseminars, and just great documents and thoughts they have shared on how to be a better fundraiser. So thanks to Network for Good for sharing that with the community all for free.

So Katya and I were talking about thank you's, and we kind of brainstormed four parts of a good thank you. And if you are on this slide, then you will see what we came up with. And the first thing is, your thank you should be personal, it should be tangible, it should be emotional, and it should be about the donor and not you. And then, of course, it should be timely. And Katya has already told us about the dire job that we are doing in the sector right now in terms of not following up on our donations quick enough. So let me get into that a little.

I love this funny part, two. If you are on slide 8, pretty funny. It talks about, "Some warm words of encouragement in a cold and personal world, 50 cents only." And it is sort of funny, obviously, because this gentlemen is paying to get some gratitude.

But being personal, and being warm, and being authentic, again, we don't want to sound too, sort of, fuzzy, or too psychological or philosophical here, but it is actually a really important and really good strategy, in particular, I think, in the online world where people expect for you to have open, honest, and authentic relationships with them.

So if you are doing email marketing and you are doing online marketing, whether it is through social media or through your website, you want to make sure that you are being real and you are taking people seriously and you are not just treating them as kind of an ATM machine.

So some of the tips, in terms of how to be more personal, if you are using an email marketing tool like EmailNow, one thing that is great about email marketing is that you can segment your audience, and I strongly encourage you to do that. You don't have to get into millions of segments if it is complicated, but making sure that you are putting your donors in the right "buckets", if you will, based on the gifts they are giving, based on the amounts of the gifts that they are giving, so that you can message them appropriately. Email tools make it very easy to do this relatively cost effectively. So hopefully you are doing that.

If you are doing snail mail outreach, consider writing a handwritten note. It is interesting. Like Katya said, this will differentiate you. We are all doing a lot of email marketing, and

we are all used to getting direct mail. So it is such a nice surprise to get a handwritten note in the mail, and that is something that can really make you stand out from the crowd. So if you have the time, or you can make the time, go ahead and send a handwritten note to thank a donor for a gift.

Again, another way to differentiate yourself: don't send a note or do email at all. Just go ahead and pick up the phone. One of my colleagues made a donation to her Alma Mater and got a phone call. It is interesting, because she got a phone call from one of the students who was obviously benefiting from one of her donations. So that sort of did double duty, from the college both showing thanks but also showing how her gift was at work, because, obviously, it was putting someone else through college. So that is another unique idea.

Signing your email, or your note, or your direct mail piece from a board member is really, really a great idea. People always kind of roll their eyes when I make this suggestion, because, again, it is time consuming and board members are supposed to do really important things like come up with strategy. But put together a brunch, or a lunch, or a coffee hour and get a bunch of beautiful cards out on the table and make a game of it, and get a whole bunch of board members to just sign 10, or 20, or 100 cards each and you will get it done, and you will have a little fun. And people will be surprised and, also, impressed with your organization.

So I guess the theme here, as you can see, is do something different, but also make sure you customize your thanks, and this will insure that you have given the personal touch.

Katya put in this nice slide, also from our friend Kivi, which is slide 10. This is a great, great example of giving a personal touch. I will just read what Kivi said.

“The typewritten part of the note I received from Ocracoke Child Care is about as short as you can get, something close to “Thanks for the donation. We really appreciate it. This letter is your receipt.”

So pretty generic, right?

“Not much more than that and certainly not remarkable. And then she goes on to say, “But the letter is still on my desk because of what fills up all the white space left under that short official note, which is this drawing,” which is a beautiful duck by Yoselyn, who is probably one of the recipients of their program, their child care program.

So again, something not that time consuming, but really added the personal touch and just made it special and different.

OK. So now we are going to go on to the second component of a good thank you, and that is “be tangible.” And I put this funny slide here because one of the companies that is really good at being tangible is IKEA. And we can see exactly what we get for \$15.99, which is this special mat rug here that we can buy.

One of the things nonprofits have to get better at, and we are, I think, as a sector, is really connecting what people are investing in to a program. So it is not enough anymore to say, “Thank you so much for your investment in childcare services,” or, “Thank you so much for helping to save the environment.” There is really an expectation on behalf of our donors to show exactly how their donation makes a difference.

And I will be honest with you. On some level, it is kind of a pain, having done development work myself. Directing donor funds to specific programs is often difficult, and we are all looking for operating money and cash, and we know that is really important.

But again, we can’t be organization centric. We have to do what donors want us to do, and they want to know that their dollars matter, and they want to know how their dollars matter.

So one of the things you want to do, in addition to being personal, is you want to tell them what you did with their money. And one of the best ways you can do this is by not giving high level statistics at infinitum, but actually just telling one specific story of how a donor’s gift is making a difference.

I think some of the blue-chip charities, or organizations, I should say, because Kiva is not a charity, doing this are Kiva.org, Donors Choose, which is in the next slide, and another charity called Charity Water. They just make it so clear. And they really invite you, also, to be part of the process of kind of showing or saying how you want your investment or your donation to be used. So we think that is really important and a good thank you.

The other thing that you can do if your donors are local, and again, if you can make the time, and you can make it fun, is invite people to come and be with you and tour your facility. Show them the work that you do, meet, maybe, some of the people that you serve if that is appropriate. Obviously, if you are an arts organization, this is something you are doing all the time, hopefully. You are inviting people to shows...

You want your donors to really experience and, again, be bonded to your cause, to become front and central to what you do. So there is nothing like having an experience to make a cause come alive or become tangible.

Jocelyn Harmon: OK. Slide 13 is an example. Katya, do you want to talk about this one?

Katya Andresen: Sure. I would be delighted.

Jocelyn Harmon: OK.

Katya Andresen: Yeah. As Jocelyn mentioned, Donors Choose I hold out as the gold standard of the tangible thank you. Not only are the thank you's personal, they are very tangible. I'll give you an example.

So if you are not familiar with Donors Choose, do check out their website and you'll see just how tangible they are, but you can basically go online and send money to buy specific things for specific teachers and their classrooms.

And Jeff Brooks, who was formerly with the Donor Power Blog and now he works with True Sense and has a new blog I encourage you to follow, he recently blogged about one of his favorite thank you's he's ever gotten, and of course it was from Donors Choose. He had bought a classroom microphone. And he received not only the thank you from Donors Choose but he got 40 letters and drawings from people in the class.

And not only that, the kids pointed him to where on the web they could hear a recording of "Hot Cross Buns" that they made with the microphone. And you can visit the link below if you want to hear it, too. And he says, "In terms of emotional ROI, I would say the gift was among the best charitable donations I have ever made."

Now, Donors Choose is a gold standard, so maybe you can't do this. Maybe you don't have... We've given two examples that have kids in them. OK, maybe you don't have children who can draw or do recordings. But you certainly, certainly can move the needle from a generic thank you letter to something that's more personal, and it's something that goes back to the ask.

What's done so well here is he bought a microphone for class. He then actually saw how they were using it. Now, if you're not necessarily earmarking funds and raising money for something specific, you can still come back and tell a story of a typical person that benefited or a law that was changed.

If you send out an appeal around a specific issue, be sure your example ties back to that in a tangible way. I can't tell you how many times I've recently given to a charity and what I got back was a generic thank you that didn't even tie back to the nature of the appeal.

So, at least move the needle on that degree of tangibility, being personal and tying it back to the original ask.

Jocelyn Harmon: Awesome. So the third component of a good thank you, and again, I guess you can tell Katya and I have children. [Laughs] We were on the child theme. Be creative. And I love this gratitude tag that I found, actually, on Flickr. It's such a clever, and again, a little way to show your thanks.

Anyway, let's talk a little bit about being creative. It's funny, because again, I think sending out thank you letters, we look at it as drudgery sometimes, even when we are

doing personal thank you letters for holiday gifts and things like that. But really you can use it as the time to be creative.

So, again, with my idea of getting your board members together or some volunteers together and just bind some beautiful stationery or even making some stationery and sending out cards. You know, you can make it fun.

The other thing you can do is you can send an e-card and a little plug for Care2 where I work. Care2 is an online community about 12 million do-gooders who care about health and welfare and healthy living and non-profit causes, progressive non-profit causes.

We also have tons of free e-cards. So again, if you want to come on our site and you want to send some e-cards out to your supporters, you are more than welcome to do that. And again, just something different, something creative, something special.

Or if you have someone on your staff who is sort of a whiz at putting together a flash card, go ahead and send that out. Be sure to host the card somewhere else other than in the email so that people will actually be able to see it and they won't get turned off when it comes through their firewall. But sending e-cards can be a really fun and creative thing to do.

We've also talked already about writing in your own hand. That's something that can differentiate you, can be special.

Sending photos or videos of your work is a fantastic idea. Again, when you do this over email, you don't necessarily want to put the photo or the video in the actual email. You want to link to it. You want to link to your video on Youtube or you want to link to, say, Flickr or another photo sharing site. Just send the hyperlink out to folks so they'll be sure to be able to access that. But there's nothing like telling your story in a picture, as many of us know. And this will really create an emotional resonance with your donors.

Again, we're kind of being repetitive here, but it's always good to also let people who love you, some of your best evangelists, speak on your behalf. And that's really, really impressive. I got a thank you note from the Nonprofit Technology Network after sponsoring someone to come to their annual conference.

And instead of getting the thank you note from their executive director for my gift, I got it from the person who was able to go to the conference because of my gift. And I was just really, really impressed with that.

So letting people you serve send thank you notes on your behalf, letting other donors send thank you notes on your behalf, or even volunteers is really compelling.

On slide 16 we have a great video that Katya found on Allison Fine's website, and she actually has archived some of the best videos of 2009. Now again, many of you on the phone may not have footage like the Anaheim Ballet, which is pretty darn impressive.

But it's pretty cost effective these days to get a flip camera, to give it to maybe some of the folks that you serve, or to kind of do a backstage, give a backstage pass, if you will, of your work and what you are doing, and to just go ahead and throw it up on Youtube. So video is a great idea and much more accessible to folks.

By the way, the URL for this great thank you video from the Anaheim Ballet is archived on Allison Fine's site in this post and she has a number of other great videos. So I urge you to go to this URL and check out that web post.

Katya Andresen: And I'd like to interject there. If you watch the video, it's obviously done with a flip. It's not professional at all. Someone went backstage to rehearsals of "The Nutcracker." and just talked about what they were doing, talked about the upcoming season. It's incredibly casual, which is actually really appealing.

And it sort of combines two of the things we had on the previous slide. One is video. There is nothing like seeing what it looks like, and that's wonderful to have it shown through a different medium.

But also in a way, because you are watching the dancers, they are speaking for you, for the organization. You see the rehearsal and you feel like you made that happen, that you set up a situation where the ballet had the resources to put on this performance and here they are working on it.

So it actually does an incredible job with a very short segment that obviously did not cost very much to produce at all and really stands out.

Jocelyn Harmon: Great. So the last thing that we urge you to do, and this should seem like a no-brainer since we are sending thank you notes, and since this is all about expressing gratitude to someone else. But it's still really important to remember that when you are doing all your cultivation, but especially when you are saying thank you, that you are putting your donor front and center.

And so that is why we have this funny graphic here of a ruler saying "You Rock" And a rock saying, "You Rule." I think, Katya, you coined this term and I love it, but when we talk about making your cause all about your donor and not about you, what we're saying, in essence, is don't be a non-profit narcissist.

Again, we get really impassioned by our causes, we are really excited about the work that we do, and we spend a lot of time talking about all of that good work. But sometimes it can come across as a little bit closed minded or narcissistic, and we don't want to do that.

We want to be really mindful of the fact that our donors make our work happen. And we want to make sure that they get the credit for the work that they do. We want to list their accomplishments. We want to put them front and center in all of our communications.

Make sure you are editing the notes that you are sending out, even your thank you notes, and make sure you're making your donor front and center. Make sure you are not talking too much about just yourself and your organization as if it was somehow outside of the work and the investment of your donors.

Katya, you have a great appeal that is an example of that.

Katya Andresen: Yeah. So I went to Haverford College, a very small college in Pennsylvania, a liberal arts school, and I was really irritated as a professional nonprofit marketer and fundraiser. I had gotten appeals from them in the fall that sort of horrified me. It said, "It's fall. People around the world are doing this in the fall. And for us, it is fundraising season. It's time for us to ask you for money."

I just thought, "This was so awful. You couldn't get more narcissistic than the fundraising or development department within the college. And how their fund raising calendar works is absolutely meaningless to me. And what does that have to do with my educational experience there or how I might feel about supporting the institution?"

So it was a bad miss. And then I was so relieved, within a year, to get a fantastic appeal from them, which I have on here, which was also sort of a thank you as well. And you can thank people and give them an opportunity to give again. You can incorporate gratitude into an appeal. And that's what this does really well.

This was a direct mail piece and it shows Katie, Class of '09, is mentoring, Matt, Class of '08, is researching, Rebecca, Class of 2010 is painting, Paul, Class of '09 is teaching, and then I'm in the middle. So this is a very literal interpretation about making it about the donor. But I had a real moment when I looked at that and I said, "Oh. They are real students like me and they're doing different things right now and I'm supporting that."

And when you open it, it says, "Haverfordians make a difference in the world through their support." The appeal is about me, who I was helping, the difference that we all make together. And it just connected me both literally and emotionally back to my institution in a way they had really failed to do previously.

So, this is a great example of that. Jeff Brooks also has a great, "How to Thank a Donor" and he has how to do it and how not to do it. One how not to do it is, "Dear Donor, me, me, me, me, me." And the correct way to do it is, "Dear Donor, you, you, you, you."

That's what we are getting at here, is the idea that you the donor made this possible. They get the credit. What did they accomplish? Not, "Thank you for your gift. Here's all the great things we did." So just be sure to recall in your head this picture I have on this page where there's a "You" in the center. That's your donor. And you want to make them feel that way when they get a thank you or when they get an appeal; that this is about them and the difference they are making together with you.

Jocelyn Harmon: OK, and so on our bonus slide we have two more things just to remind you of. So if we will recap for a second, we want you to be personal, we want you to be tangible in your thank you's, we want you to be creative, and we want you to make it about your donors and not about you.

We also want you to be positive and we want you to be timely. And I just want to pause here for a minute, because this is the hard time to be positive and there's a lot of really difficult things happening in the world. We are still...I guess the recession is technically over, but it doesn't feel like it in many ways.

So this is not to say that you should lie to your donors or you should not express the need that you have. I mean, nonprofits are doing so much with less. Foundation funding is down and we sort of all know all the stories.

At the same time, you just can't be hopeless in your communications. You just can't. If you overwhelm people with these dire statements about how you are going out of business and you can't pay the lighting bill and things like that, then people come to feel like it is hopeless and their donation won't make a difference.

So I think you have to really balance, kind of, telling the truth about what's going on and the need that you are facing in your community with also giving a sense of hope that this can be accomplished if people come together, and if people do give and share their resources.

The last thing I want to say as a sort of musing on thank you's is thank you's, in a very practical sense, are a great time to reinforce branding for your organization. And it's funny, because we don't always put thank you's into our content strategy; they are kind of an aside. It is like, "Oh, yeah, we have to send out a mass thank you note," like Katya said. "We have to pull all the people who donated last week and we have to get those form letter thank you's out."

People actually read thank you letters and they read receipts. So think of those as really important touch points in your content marketing strategy. Make sure that it reinforces the brand that you want to reinforce, both in messaging but also in look and feel. So that's something I think is good to keep in mind.

Katya Andresen: Great. We have a couple of examples here, and, Jocelyn, we have about a dozen questions so far, so we want to leave time for those. But really quickly, because we do get asked for examples a lot, we want to be sure to give you examples from all types of non-profits.

On Slide 21 the Pride Foundation doesn't do an annual report. They do a "Gratitude Report." I just love that. And they gave their whole home page over to it during the holidays. And it's called Breaking Through. It has a nice visual.

But this idea of, “This is our gratitude report. This is what you made possible,” is just so innovative, creative, fantastic and inspiring. So I encourage all of you to, as Jocelyn so astutely said, don’t think of thank you’s as a tack on. Think about how you imbue everything you do with gratitude.

So how can an annual report become a gratitude report? How can everything you do become cast in a different way where it is making people feel so wonderful about the difference they are making? And then I think we have an example. Jocelyn, do you want to talk about from IFAW.

Jocelyn Harmon: Sure. This is International Fund for Animal Welfare, which is a great organization. And it’s interesting, because I liked something about this and then I didn’t like something about this.

Interestingly enough, I did not donate to IFAW this year. I am on their list, however, because I care about their cause. And I like that I got this thank you because it thanked me for just being engaged with them, which I thought was interesting.

The one problem that I do notice, and maybe some of you see it as well, is because I haven’t given my first name yet, or for some reason it’s not in their database, it’s says, “Dear first name,” which is kind of a no-no.

[Laughs] It’s isn’t obviously customized or very personal. Again, these are some of the things you just want to double check. It could say friend. They could have “Dear Friend” here or something like that, or maybe their default could be to leave that out if they don’t have the first name of someone.

So kudos to IPAW in some ways, and then also, hopefully they can do a little bit better job at making sure that they personalize their email marketing.

Katya Andresen: And while we’re talking about dogs, on Slide 23 there’s just a quick example from Saving Shelter Pets, which is an animal shelter that is very small and just does amazing marketing and outreach work in general. We are always impressed by them here at “Network for Good.”

They participated in one of our Six Degrees campaigns, which was a campaign where they got their supporters mobilized to ask their friends and family for money. And the way they thanked them was so wonderful. They said, “You know, we would like to extend a heartfelt thank you. We’ve made new friends through this experience and re-connected with old ones.”

And then here comes the tangibility: “\$5,186 of the donations have already been used to save over 30 dogs and puppies from death row, including the ones below.” And there are adorable photos of dogs included.

So this is a great example of weaving together everything we talked about in a really simple way, it's just an email, but in a really eloquent way, in a way that has real emotional impact.

On the last slide we have here, slide 24, we just listed a few resources that we like. There is an article, "The Art of Recognizing and Thanking Your Donors" from Terry Axelrod. I blog about thanking donors, as does Jocelyn. And she recently wrote a column on this for "Fundraising Success Magazine."

And then Kivi, of course, we put her website on here. You can find any of these five popping them into Google and you will find those resources. And so, we would love to pause here Rebecca and take questions. I'm going to turn it over to you to let us know what people are asking.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. Thank you both for the presentation. And with that, I would love to just dive right in. I would like to just thank everybody who has already sent their questions in. We have a great pile to dive right into.

So the first one I want to share is from Veronica. And Veronica also thanks you. She says, "Thank you Katya and Jocelyn for your great insight. I really enjoyed your presentation. My question is this. Can you provide some ways on how a nonprofit can motivate and/or make their staff and board receptive to practice your tip of gratitude that you shared with us today?"

Katya Andresen: Oh, I would love to take a gander at that one. I think you can really motivate your staff to do this by reminding them of the impact your programs are having. So by expressing gratitude to them and helping them feel what is happening on the front lines of your organization and how you are advancing your mission, can mobilize them to want to then share that in a more passionate, emotional, creative, personal way.

Let me give you an example. Here at Network for Good, one of the things Rebecca does in our monthly staff meeting is she reads fan mail. So if someone writes us a heartfelt note, which we are grateful happens quite often, a training really helps them or something that we did for them made a huge difference in their fundraising campaign, we read that aloud to our entire staff.

And it makes them feel so good about what we do, and it gets them in a spirit of wanting to extend that gratitude toward others. Jocelyn, do you have something to add to that?

Jocelyn Harmon: Well, no, it's interesting, because having an internal marketing effort is really important, isn't it? And sometimes the people we most need to show gratitude to, or to thank, or just like you said, to remind of our work is the staff, because we all get overwhelmed or we get in the weeds and we sort of can't see the forest for the trees. So I love that idea.

I also think it's a great, though, if you can send a thank you to your team members and just remind them how much you value their work and how they are helping to achieve your mission. And Katya, I know you are really good at that.

Katya Andresen: Well, and what happens when you do that for your staff, you know, with respect to the question, is they get it. [Laughs] So they felt your gratitude in they're like, wow, that felt so good and energizing. Then the next day when you say to them, "OK, now we're going to go out and thank our donors," they will remember how it felt to be acknowledged, and it will really put them in touch about why this is such an essential thing of what you need to do.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. OK. So Andrea's question...She actually has a couple questions, and I have a feeling some other folks can relate to her, especially on this first one. So Andrea, thanks in advance for your honesty here.

You mentioned being timely with your gratitude during the presentation. So Andrea's first question is, "How would you suggest I handle the thank you letters that are, say, five to six months late in being written? Do I apologize for their lateness or do I just simply get them out? I am really hanging my head about this."

Jocelyn Harmon: That is an excellent question. And I don't know what your take is on this Katya, but I would probably acknowledge being so late. I would probably go right to the objection, if you will, and say, "You know what? We have done you a disservice by not thanking you, and so we are doing it now." I wouldn't belabor the plan, but I probably would acknowledge it.

Also, in this instance, the person may have forgotten that they have given, so it might be good to say that up front. What would you say about that Katya?

Katya Andresen: I couldn't agree more. There is nothing more disarming and endearing than sincere contrition over something like this. So that is bad that they weren't thanked for five or six months, but you know what? You can turn it into a positive. You can write and say, "I am writing with an apology first." And if you have a fantastic reason why, like you have had an incredible year and you have been serving a lot of people, you can say that, although you don't want it to come across as an excuse. I'd make it clear that there is no excuse.

So make clear that is no reflection on how you feel about that donor or what they have accomplished and dive right into that. But I think it would be an elephant in the room not to acknowledge that. I couldn't agree more with Jocelyn. It is really good advice to list what gift they gave and remind them in case they have forgotten, particularly if they gave at an event they were invited to by someone else or they sort of have a looser tie to your organization; they are going to need that reminder.

Last, Terry Axelrod, who we cited as a source, also recommends that that is just good practice in general when you are thanking. If someone has been a donor over time, thank

them for all the gifts they have given so they can see that selective impact and realize that they have made a real investment in the organization.

You might say to me, “Oh, I would rather they not remember the last time they gave so I can hit them up again.” But that is not a very good relationship builder for long term strategy. In fact, as human beings, psychologically, when we have done something a couple times, we tend to do it more and more, because we want to reinforce in our mind that we made the right decision. So it becomes a habitual behavior.

So it is just good practice in general to cite people’s past gifts. So I would absolutely include that, as well.

Rebecca Higman: Great. And then Andrea’s second question is, and I assume this relates more to offline gifts where folks are not getting automatic receipts sent back to them. She says, “Also, I get hung up on sending the “official” tax deductible letter on letterhead with our tax ID number. So I do attach this inside the handwritten note that I have put on stationery or do I personalize the typed official note? How do you recommend handling this portion of the follow up?”

Katya Andresen: Great question. My first response is don’t forget timeliness is essential. So if the handwritten note is going to take you a couple weeks to get together, don’t let that get in the way of getting the receipt out right away. You want to be really timely with receipts.

As Rebecca noted, when it is online, hopefully, especially if you are using Network for Good, it will be instantaneous; we do it for you. But certainly make sure those go out right away.

If you have time, it can be beneficial to combine them. We had one example of that today. There was a note that Kivi had received that was just very, “Thanks for your donation. Here is the amount. This is your official receipt.” But then on the bottom, some of the children from the Ocracoke Center, obviously for coloring time, they just passed out those receipts and had them draw on the bottom of them.

So I think enclosing something personal is advantageous, but not if it comes at the expense of timeliness. Jocelyn, where would you come down on that one?

Jocelyn Harmon: I agree. And I think we don’t need to totally over think it either. I think go ahead and get the letter out, it is really important, and enclose something else. I think, more than anything, what people are looking for is effort; that you really took the time and the energy to do something special, to acknowledge their gift, to be timely. I would just say, also...maybe this is not helpful, but don’t over think it to the extent that you would become completely paralyzed and do nothing. Get the letter out.

Rebecca Higman: That makes a lot of sense. OK. Let’s see. We have another two parter, and this is from Dee. Dee’s first question, and I think, Katya, you already touched on this

a little bit with your Haverford example, but I will bring it up again. She says that she actually works at a college. And she wants to know, “What are your thoughts about including a personal note from “a typical student” explaining how they are directly helped by those scholarship dollars?”

Katya Andresen: Do it. That is fantastic.

Jocelyn Harmon: Yeah, it is awesome!

Katya Andresen: Yeah, it sounds absolutely amazing. And talk about standing out; I don’t know very many colleges or universities that do that. And you know why it is so powerful? One, that it is personal, and tangible, and all the things we talked about today. But also, particularly when you think about your college or university experience if you had a good one, and I hope you did, when you get a note from someone that is there now, it puts you back in touch with your own memories. And that is a very emotional territory, right? It is why we still support the institution if we are a donor, because we know, from our own experience, how much it meant to us, and we want other people to get to have that experience.

And so, you are really bringing that home when you have a student write something like that. I think it would turn that person into a lifelong donor, so it is well worth your time.

Jocelyn Harmon: I think you could step that up, too. You could even take that to the next level if you had information on what that person majored in. So, you found another engineer, or you found another writer, or you found another writer. Again, if it is going to be too time consuming, don’t do it. But if you could do that and you could pair someone who even was in a similar field, I think that could take it up to even the next level.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. And then her follow up question, because it looks like, in the meantime, the letters are coming from her boss. So she says, “My boss does not sign the thank you letters. Instead, he prefers me to use electronic signatures. So what are your thoughts about how donors perceive that lack of personal time on the acknowledgments?”

Katya Andresen: I am not a big fan of that, but there are a couple things you can do if he is just not going to sign them. What I would do is...that doesn’t prevent you from writing a little handwritten note on the bottom.

I said about half the organizations I gave to in December thanked me. OK. So I got one thank you from Puppies Behind Bars, which is an amazing organization that uses Network for Good for fundraising. And they bring dogs to prisons. The prisoners train the dogs for service to people who have been injured in the war, for example, the Iraq war or the conflict in Afghanistan, and turn them into service dogs. And they also turn some into bomb sniffing dogs. And it is just this amazing organization, and they were on Fresh Air, which is a show on NPR. And I heard it, and I was just like, “They are so amazing. I am going to go give right now.” And I did. I went online and I donated money to them. And I was feeling really excited about it.

And then I got a note from them. At least I got a note. I got it in a timely way, but it was sort of...It said, "Dear _____," and someone hand wrote in my name. And then there was a little form letter, and it said, "Thank you for your gift. We really appreciate it." It had a story of a dog and who it was a service dog for, which is quite nice.

But it just missed the mark. Because while it had the story and it had so much of it, it just sort of had this "Dear, fill in the blank." So obviously, everyone is getting the same story.

I will support them again, but I have to admit I was a little disappointed. And I think they could have counteracted that really simply by jotting on the bottom, "We are so glad you gave this year. This and many other pets and veterans thank you." Even just something like that on the bottom would have made a big difference.

So that would be my suggestion: find another way to slip in some kind of signature or personal touch.

Jocelyn Harmon: I totally agree. Let's be realistic here. Sometimes you have to basically create a template and you are slipping in a few different things to customize your thank you. But it is a very common practice to then go ahead and cross out, like, sort of the formal salutation and put "Dear Don" instead of Donald Smith, and then put a quick note that the ED can write, or somebody can write, saying, "Hey. It was great to see you a couple weeks ago," or, "I look forward to getting together in the new year," or something like that. You can customize it very easily like that.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. It looks like you have both managed to answer the next couple of questions that came in. Both Allison and Sharon wanted to know some ways to kind of jazz up that form letter.

Sharon says that the letters that go out to the donors are signed by the board members, so she tries to make it a little better. She writes a little handwritten thank you from herself under the signatures of the board members. So she would like to know if you do think that makes it a little bit better.

Katya Andresen: I think it does make it better. Also, depending on what she does, there are lots of other things she could slip in there. I have seen all kinds of interesting things. I have seen people slip in a piece of mosquito net when people are buying mosquito nets for Africa. Even slipping in a bunch of photos. Like, what if you took some...even if they are a little amateurish, it makes it feel very authentic, some pictures of your programs. Have a bunch printed up and just slip one of those in with the form letter with a note on the back, like, "Here are some folks engaged in XYZ," whatever your particular programs are about. That can make a difference. Jocelyn, what other things do you think they could do?

Jocelyn Harmon: You know, I think get your staff together so it doesn't rely, also, on just one person to come up with this thank you strategy or thank you tactics, and do a

quick brainstorming meeting over lunch one day. “What would be a great way for us to thank donors this year?” People will come up with fantastic ideas, things you have never even thought of, like little trinkets, like you are saying, Katya, to slip in, or a different color stationery to use, or something like that. People will come up with great ideas.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. OK. We have gotten a number of questions from folks who are really curious about what you guys recommend as an appropriate format to send your thank you. Is it always a phone call? Is it always a handwritten note? How effective are emails? So do you have any recommendations or tips about the best format and the best way to reach out to these donors with your gratitude?

Jocelyn Harmon: I will start on that one, Katya. I think if people are giving to you online, you should respond to them online in the same medium that they gave to you. And then, I have a caveat, having said that. I also have a good friend who gave to a human rights campaign, and she also took one of their actions, and then was really pleased to get an online thank you.

So I don’t think there are hardened best rules. I think, though, you should try to respond in the medium that the person gave through. What do you think Katya?

Katya Andresen: I think that is a good rule of thumb. I also encourage you to mix it up. You want to sort of surprise and delight your donor, so I think, first of all, I wouldn’t get...back to Jocelyn’s point of over thinking, I wouldn’t over think it too much. Remember that if you are being personal, timely, tangible, telling the story-all the things we talked about today, the medium is less important. It is just the fact that you hit those very important qualities of a good thank you. Put that first over the medium.

And whatever medium allows you to do that fast and for everyone effectively is a good medium to use, because that is really important. And then secondarily, if you have time, in the lecture, getting into how to do it, I encourage you to mix it up some. And I encourage you to think of it not in terms of, “This time I am doing email, this time I am doing direct mail.” But if you have some online donors who have been really constant, drop the note in the mail. It will really surprise them and delight them.

If you have someone who gave a large gift by direct mail, call them up. It is not just an opportunity to thank them. It is an opportunity to find out why they gave and were so motivated. It is a learning experience for you, and you can collect some really great data that way.

Rebecca Higman: Let’s see. Our next question is from Valerie. Valerie says, “Our foundation deals primarily with end of life and grief or bereavement, so the only way to keep positive is to tell the impact it has on families. Is this enough?”

Katya Andresen: I have worked a lot with hospice care in my career, so that is something really close to my heart. And frankly, we were always wrestling, yeah, how do you deal with death, and how does this come across?

I would hazard a guess that the people who support you and who are you donors are people who lost loved ones, but who have had a wonderful supportive experience because of you, or maybe the friends and family of those people. So all of the those people feel gratitude to you and wanted to support your organization, because made one of the hardest times that they ever went through, and that their loves ones went through, you made it a little bit easier. And that is a really positive thing.

I would use those stories, because they are ultimately uplifting. The idea that something hard was made a little easier is ultimately something that is really powerful. And I think all of these principles apply to you, and I think that there is no reason you would not want to tell stories. There is no reason you would not want to...

If you have incredibly active volunteers or people who speak out for your organization who can tell their story, I think that is all entirely appropriate. Because your audience is probably not the general public. It is probably people who have someone in their extended family or in their circle of friends, which is a lot of us, who have faced a life threatening illness or who lost someone. And that is sort of the way that you want to shape your messaging. Jocelyn, would you add anything to that?

Jocelyn Harmon: You might be in the unique experience, though, of wanting to just check in with people before you share their stories. That is the only thing I would probably also add.

Katya Andresen: Oh, of course. Absolutely.

Jocelyn Harmon: But I think you are right. I think talking about celebrating someone's life and what it means to celebrate someone's life is the way to tell that story. But I would probably just check in with the families and see if you could get permission to share that story with other donors.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. So I see we have hit our two o'clock mark, so I just want to check in with our presenters, if we have just a couple minutes to take in a few more questions, or if we want to take the rest of them offline after?

Katya Andresen: How about we take one more question?

Rebecca Higman: Great. We will do that. So this is an interesting situation from Liz. I wouldn't be surprised if some other folks maybe run into something similar with volunteers.

So Liz wrote in and said, "I have recently discovered that one of our thank you team volunteers wasn't actually writing notes, but just photocopying "dear donor" notes that were only signed with the name of our organization, not even a person's name. I was horrified and have corrected this for the future, but what do I do for the donors? Unfortunately, I am not sure who all of them are, because they were mailed, that have

received these awful notes. So do you have recommendations for what to do with thank you's gone awry?"

Jocelyn Harmon: I would say you use it as a training and a learning moment, and you go back to the volunteer and say, "Well, that is not exactly what we meant in terms of asking you to help you personalize our thank you's." But as this person has already mentioned, they are not sure who they went to.

If you can track people down and you can send the thank you letters out again, this is probably one of those times, I don't know about you Katya, where I would just proceed and send the proper thank you note, and I wouldn't make a big deal of it.

But obviously, for the people you have missed, you use it as a learning experience and you try not to do it again.

Katya Andresen: Yeah, I agree. Since you don't really know who the folks were, I would just say a couple things. One, clearly, if you are having volunteers, and even if your staff is doing this, you need to keep an eye on things. So have a little quality control in there. You want to kind of eyeball big mailings or groups of notes before they go out. It is not a bad idea.

Also, make sure that you are donating to your own organization and that you are getting all the thank you's as well, because then you can see what is really going on. That is very important as well. Make sure that you know how you get treated.

And last, yes, I agree with Jocelyn. Going forward, just do the best job you can. Because if I were one of your donors and I got kind of a lame photocopy thank you, I probably wouldn't be very thrilled. I would be used to it, OK? That is how most thank you letters look. I may not give up on you because of the one letter. And if you did a fantastic job going forward, I would be surprised and delighted.

I also wouldn't hand-ring over it too much. It sounds like you nipped it in the bud and you are not going to do that going forward. That is the best you can do. And you can just try to focus really hard, with all of your donors, doing an extraordinary job cultivating them going forward. And they will pay you back with their loyalty.

Rebecca Higman: Excellent. Well, thank you so much. First, thank you Katya and Jocelyn for presenting this today. And thank you to everyone who joined us. We are really excited that you could be with us and took an interest in this very timely topic.