

Date Your Donors: Year-End Fundraising Essentials

(A Mini-Guide to Making the Ask and Creating a Great Donor Experience)

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About this Guide:

This guide is part of Network for Good’s “Date Your Donors” series which focuses on practical tips for attracting, cultivating – and keeping! – active and loyal donors.

Be sure to read the other guides in this series:

You Had Me at Hello: The secret to any great relationship is an amazing first impression. Create a compelling welcome series to stand out to your potential donors.

Woo and Wow with Social Media: Find out how to leverage the unique qualities of social media to engage, inspire and activate your supporters.

In this quick guide, you will learn:

- How to ask your supporters for a donation this year
- How to create a great year-end donor experience
- Ideas and best practices for inspiring the next gift

Introduction

After hitting it off with your supporters and building a strong relationship with them this year through email outreach and social media, it's time to make it official – and ask for a donation! Getting a commitment from your donors may require less candlelight and fewer rose petals than a momentous romance, but there are a lot of cues we should follow, including:

- 🌱 Set the stage for a pleasant and memorable experience (no flash mobs required).
- 🌱 Tell them how great they are – and what good you can achieve together.
- 🌱 Make it easy to say yes!
- 🌱 Once they commit, make them glad they did by being grateful for their support and providing updates on the impact of their gift.

In this guide, we'll show you what you can do ensure your donors will say “yes” to giving this holiday season – and beyond!



Keep Your Donors in Mind



As you create your year-end fundraising plan and craft your appeals, it's important to put yourself in your donors' shoes. This will help you to speak to their concerns and make it easy for them to say "yes". Here are some key concepts to remember:

Use Your Networks. People are more likely to take action if they know the person asking for help. This holiday, ask your biggest supporters to invite their friends and family to support you. The passion they feel for your cause is incredibly compelling to their circles of influence.

Show How Donations Will Be Used. If your audience has given before, tell them all the great things they've done - and all the wonderful additional things more support will bring.

Be Specific. Don't assume your donor knows what you want them to do. Ask for one concrete action. Asking people to click on a button to donate now is better than asking them to support your campaign. Specific actions are easier to do - and harder to decline.

Inspire Trust. Be honest and transparent about your programs, your spending, your impact -- everything. Show exactly where the money goes and what the donor's investment will do. Demonstrate your trustworthiness by displaying your Charity Navigator or BBB rating!

Keep it Simple. December is a busy month for everyone. Don't be longwinded or beat around the bush. Make an incredibly compelling yet concise case for why people should give.

It's Not All about You: Instead of only talking about how great *you* are, share amazing stories about your donors, volunteers and beneficiaries. Inspire your supporters to want to be a part of the action.

Tell Your Amazing Story



As the year winds down, now is the time to begin reminding your constituents of the great work you do and how they make that possible. Personal connections and stories have a big effect on giving — **so if you've got them, use them.**

Everybody has a story to tell. So go find them. If you don't already have a great story in mind, turn to your volunteers, turn to your coworkers, or turn to the people you help. Their point of view can help your potential donors feel more connected to your mission.

Avoid the "kitchen sink." Don't try to relay every single aspect of your organization in a story. This creates information overload. Instead, find one small anecdote or facet of your work and show how it relates to everything else.

Make it personal. People give more when they feel we're helping another person to whom we can relate. Don't talk about the masses who need help -- focus on one person's story.

It's tricky for fundraisers to grapple with restricted versus unrestricted giving. How can we tell an individual's story and connect our donors to that individual while still raising money for a larger cause?

This isn't easy, but organizations must work hard to transform their fundraising model to meet donors' emotional needs.

- Tell stories that exemplify the work of your organization, without using statistics.
- Incorporate these stories into your fundraising and marketing channels.
- Be clear these stories are emblematic of your work, but don't create an impression the donor's contribution is specifically earmarked for that individual — unless it is.

Share a photo. One powerful photo can go a long way in stirring emotion. Pick a clear photo of one person or animal looking straight at the camera.

Answer Their Questions

As you craft your year-end fundraising appeals, it's critical that you take the guesswork out of giving for your donors. That begins with understanding the questions your donors are asking themselves before they give.



"Why me?" Your donors need to know why your cause is relevant to them and why should they care. They need to connect to you on a human level. Use pictures, tell stories and do anything that can help your audience relate.



"Why now?" Is there urgency in your appeal? Create a sense of immediacy. Explain why a donation is needed right now. (Toward the end of the year, donors will generally answer this themselves knowing the tax deadlines are approaching.)



"What for?" Describe what their gift can accomplish and the impact it will have. Share how other donors have impacted individuals in need. **Important:** avoid talking about massive numbers, mind-numbing statistics, or intangible outcomes. This makes it harder for donors to relate to your cause!



"Who says?" People are increasingly skeptical and will trust what their friends, family and even acquaintances say over all of your marketing efforts. Ask existing supporters to share why they give to you and what it means to them -- use these testimonials in your outreach.

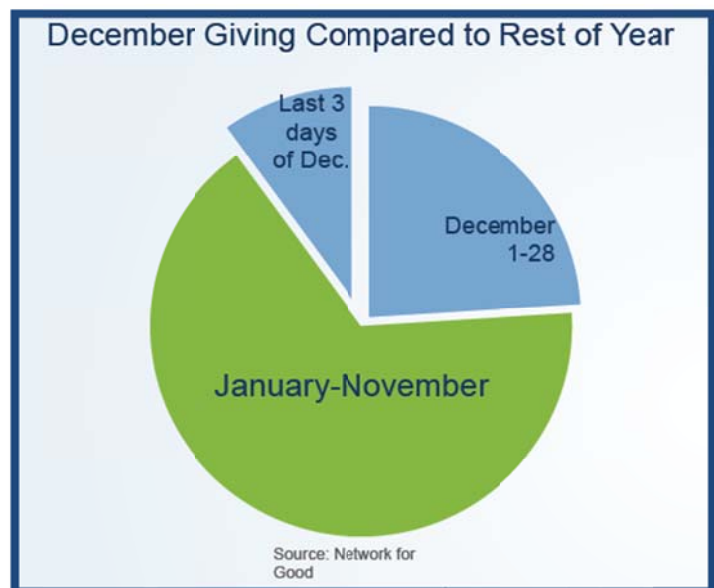


Timing

Prime the Pump: Don't wait until the last minute to start working on your year-end campaign. Start cleaning up your mailing lists and emailing people now. Begin working to get people thinking about your cause and why they should give to you. Make it part of every conversation you have - whether it be through email, print or social media.

Be Top of Mind: Send a few final emails the last week of the year. **Plan to send an appeal on December 27th, one on December 29th or 30th and then a final one on December 31st.** Be concise and emphasize the deadline. You want to increase visibility and reach donors when they are most inclined to give.

Roughly one-third of annual giving through the Network for Good giving system occurs in the month of December alone; and in 2011, over 10% of donation dollars came in on the last three days of the year. The vast majority of those donation dollars were contributed directly on charity websites. (Source: [Network for Good Digital Giving Index](#))



Test and Track

Continue to track your organization's open rates, click through rates and conversion rates (how many people end up giving as a result of an appeal). Be ready to adjust your approach based on the results you see. Test different versions of your calls to action, subject line and stories to zero in on what works best for your unique audience. Base your final emails of the year on what's performed well. For example, if an appeal that focuses on volunteer stories results in more donations, make your last appeal of the season similar!

Clear a Path for Donation Success

Once you've made the ask, don't put roadblocks in a donor's way by creating a confusing or complex donation experience. From your first appeal to your thank you page, clear a path that will make it easy for your supporters to give to your cause.



Common Mistakes that Derail Donations

- ❖ No easy way to give online.
- ❖ Microscopic or missing donate links on the organization's website.
- ❖ Conflicting calls to action.
- ❖ Too many distractions on the nonprofit website or giving page.
- ❖ Lack of urgency (donors might think "I'll do this later..." – and then never come back!)
- ❖ Overwhelming the donor with statistics instead of appealing to their emotions.

8 Ways to Make It Easier to Give

1. Simplify your nonprofit home page to [offer one call to action](#): Donate.
2. Make your donate buttons large, colorful and easy to find.
3. Send donors straight to your donation form from email appeals.
4. Include your donation link in your Facebook, Twitter and other social profiles.
5. Encourage recurring gifts.
6. Test your online donation process and fix problems *before* sending your appeal.
7. Include third-party ratings or testimonials on your donation page.
8. Create a "Why Donate" page that makes a case for why someone should care.

Optimize Your Donation Form

When a prospective donor lands on your donation page, each component should reinforce their decision to give while making it quick and easy to complete their donation. For best results, a nonprofit donation page should look like the organization's website and ask only for necessary information to make the form as short as possible. Review your donation page to ensure that it's in shape for eager donors this holiday season.

The Ingredients of a Great Donation page

The screenshot shows the WaterAid donation page. At the top left is the WaterAid logo. Below it is a navigation menu with links: HOME, ABOUT US, WHAT WE DO, LEARN ZONE, GET INVOLVED, DONATE, and CONTACT US. The main content area features a blue header with the text "Give water, give life" and a sub-header "WaterAid's water, sanitation and hygiene programs cost just \$25 per person." Below this is a compelling photo of a young girl. The form includes a "Please donate online today:" section with a "Need to edit your recurring donation? Click here!" link. The "Donation" section has a "Amount*" dropdown menu with options: \$25.00, \$50.00, \$100.00, \$250.00, \$500.00, \$1,000.00, and Other. The "Frequency" section has radio buttons for "I want to make a one-time donation" and "I want to make a recurring donation". The "Dedication" section has radio buttons for "on behalf of", "in honor of", and "in memory of". There is a "Send Dedication Acknowledgement" checkbox. At the bottom, there is a "Donate by mail or phone" section with a photo of a young boy, contact information for WaterAid America, and a "By phone:" section with a call number and hours.

Branded page that looks like the nonprofit website, including the nonprofit logo and name

A compelling photo that illustrates the impact of a donation to your cause

Brief, emotional call to action

Suggested giving amounts

Recurring giving option

Third-party endorsements or ratings

Another way to contact the nonprofit with questions or additional gifts

WaterAid America optimized their DonateNow page to collect the necessary information while reinforcing a donor's decision to give.

Mind Your Manners



The relationship isn't over once you've asked for a donation and a donor makes a gift! Keep love alive by planning a great donor stewardship program and continue to cultivate your connection with your donors:

Thank Quickly and Graciously.

Send out the receipt instantly and thank profusely. Remember: the number one irritation of donors is lack of gratitude or information on the impact of their gift. It's the season to ask for money, but it's also the season to give thanks.

Celebrate Your Donors. Find ways to recognize and celebrate your donors on your website, in your newsletters and in your future outreach.

Extend an Invitation. Keep the door open for your donors to do more – such as volunteer, attend an event or help you spread the word about your cause. They want to feel like they're part of the team.

Make them Feel Special. Don't send a generic thank you that feels like it came from a robot. Personalize your acknowledgements to include relevant details to each donor, like additional information on the specific programs they support.

Keep in Touch. Reach out regularly to update your donors on your progress and how their donations are making a difference.

Listen for Feedback. Your donors are a valuable source of insight and inspiration. Be open to their comments and suggestions, and take note of indirect feedback, such as unsubscribe requests.

Remember:

- ♥ Make it easy for your donors to give with an easy to find donate button that goes straight to your donation page -- and optimize your form.
- ♥ Create an emotional appeal that inspires action by using a compelling story and powerful image.
- ♥ Reach out to your supporters now, but don't forget to send at least two additional appeals between December 27 and 31.
- ♥ Keep the good feeling going by following up quickly with a well-written thank you letter and continue to cultivate your donors throughout the coming year.

DonateNow

Raise more money online

DonateNow is our premier online donation processing service that allows nonprofits to easily accept credit card gifts on the Web. DonateNow gives your organization the tools to put the strategies from this guide into practice. We offer your nonprofit a branded donation page that will help you raise more money vs. a generic page, plus additional features that help increase giving.

[Find the right package for you and start raising more money with DonateNow.](#)

Network for Good Premium Training

Reaching your fundraising goals takes hard work and the right tools, along with a solid system of support and expertise. We know you have the passion, so let us help with the rest. Premium training subscribers get access to our team of experts, guided tutorials and templates that focus on key action items and keep you on track.

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