

The Donor Thank You Mini-Guide

A short guide to help you create
fridge-worthy donor thank yous.

“But I already sent the gift receipt.”

You might be thinking this is a guide for what to put at the top of the gift receipt. Think again! Although you should include thank you language in your receipts, the receipt should not serve as your thank you message. Thanking a donor is not a receipt’s primary purpose. Read on to find out why a solid thank you is an important step in your donor relations strategy.

Table of Contents

- “But I already sent the gift receipt.” 2**
- Who Gets a Thank You? 3**
- What a Thank You Is (and Is Not)5**
- Stellar Donor Thank Yous 8**
- Beyond the Written Thank You Letter14**
- About Network for Good 17**



Who Gets a Thank You?

Pop quiz: Who should receive a thank you?

- a. A recurring donor who gives \$15 a month.
- b. A major donor who gives a \$10,000 gift.
- c. A first-time donor who gives a \$50 gift.
- d. A regular donor who gives a gift to a special campaign like #GivingTuesday.
- e. All donors.

If you answered “e,” you’re right! Every donor should be thanked for their gift. The type of thank you will vary, but no matter the size of the gift or where it came from, every donor should get a thank you.

“Should I send multiple thank you messages to a recurring giver?”

Have you ever heard of anyone getting mad for receiving too much gratitude? Not very often. Recurring donors are a special group of supporters who love your cause enough to give a financial commitment on a consistent basis. You should thank these donors as often as you see fit. If that’s an email every quarter, go for it. But listen to donors’ preferences. If a donor provides helpful feedback that the frequency of communication they are receiving is too much (or too little), take it to heart and respect their input.

“Is a thank you note enough for a major donor?”

A thank you note is just the first step in your donor relations strategy. In addition to a thank you note, major donors should receive an appropriate level of recognition for their gift (or the option to remain anonymous), engagement with your organization, and updates on how their gift is used.

Depending on who the donor is and what the funds will be used for, the thank you should come from your executive director or board director. We aren’t discussing the importance of a phone call as a thank you in this guide, but this would be the perfect opportunity for the development director to pick up the phone and chat with a generous donor.

“Can the receipt serve as the thank you for a first-time donor? I doubt I’ll see them again.”

It’s an unfortunate but true reality: Most first-time donors won’t return to make a second gift. But with a sound donor relations strategy that starts off with a stellar message of thanks, you could turn this onetime donor into a loyal supporter who gives year after year!

“Is it awkward to send another thank you to someone who gave to a specific campaign?”

Most definitely not! In this case, your thank you message should focus on how the donor was part of the campaign’s success. If the campaign is ongoing, thank them soon after the gift was made, and then send a second note of thanks to update donors on the campaign’s success. Check out this great #GivingTuesday thank you from Collective Action for Safe Spaces.

Did you notice how many times the word “you” was used in this thank you message? This is an excellent example of what a donor-centric, campaign-specific thank you message should look like.

Now that we’ve made it clear that every donor gets a thank you message regardless of who they are or how big the gift, let’s dive into what a thank you message should include (and what should be left out).



Dear Elizabeth,

Thanks to you, we raised \$17,270 in 24 hours to end public sexual harassment and assault in DC.

It's moments like this, when *hundreds* of community members come together to take action, that prove our power to incite change. With every dollar you give, you are making our city safer, and showing people most at risk for public sexual harassment and assault that they are supported.

Our goal yesterday was to raise \$12,168, a dollar for every person in DC who experiences harassment or assault on a daily basis. **Because of you, we raised over 130% of that goal.**

You are amazing.

With so much love and gratitude,

Chai Shenoy
Executive Director

P.S. Feel like celebrating? [Our friends are throwing us a party next week -- join us!](#)

Share Tweet Forward



What a Thank You Is (and Is Not)

Amazing thank you letters feature five key qualities:

1. Personal

First things first! Being personal, warm, and authentic with your donors is critical. People expect to have open, honest, and authentic relationships with you. When communicating with your donors, make sure that you are being real and taking them seriously—not just treating them like an ATM.

In addition to creating a warm message, take the time to customize your thank you letters. One way to do this is to segment your audience and to group donors based on the gifts they give so you can message them appropriately. A good email tool should make this easy to do, so take advantage of this option.

If you're doing snail mail outreach, consider writing a handwritten note. We're all doing a lot of email marketing, and we're all used to getting direct mail. It's an unexpected treat to get a handwritten note in the mail. This can really make you stand out from the crowd.

Another way to differentiate your organization is to pick up the phone and tell donors just how important their support really is.

Don't be afraid to do something different and take the time to customize your thank yous. Investing the time to be personal pays off by making a good impression on your donors.

2. Tangible

Your thank you should connect the donor with what they've invested in to a program. It is not enough to say, for example, "Thank you so much for your investment in childcare services," or, "Thank you so much for helping to save the environment." Show exactly how their donation is making a difference.

Donors want to know that their dollars matter, so tell them what you did with their money. One of the best ways you can do this is by telling one specific story of how a donor's gift is making a difference. Stories help make the impact of a gift more real.

If your donors are local, invite people to spend time with you and tour your facility. Show them the work you do, and, if possible, meet some of the people you serve. Let your donors experience and become bonded to your cause. There's nothing like having an unforgettable experience to make a cause tangible.

3. Creative

Don't look at sending thank you letters as drudgery—use it as an opportunity to be creative and connect with your donors. Plan to do something that will differentiate your organization. Sending photos or videos of your work is a fantastic idea. There's nothing quite like telling your story in a picture or a video. This allows you to create an even stronger emotional resonance with your donors.

Another way to get creative is to let people who love you—some of your best evangelists—speak on your behalf. Instead of sending a thank you note to an executive director, consider sending letters from volunteers, community members, or the person who was directly affected by the gift.



Honor Flight Capital Region's thank you letter included this photo of World War II veterans visiting their memorial. Since Honor Flight raises money to fund trips for veterans to visit their memorial, this was the perfect way to show a donor's gift in action. It can go on the fridge or bulletin board and serve as a nice reminder of the impact a gift made in the lives of these veterans.

4. Donor-Centric

Be mindful of the fact that your donors make your work happen. They should get credit for the work they do. List the accomplishments they've made possible and put them front and center in all of your outreach. Don't just talk about your organization as if it's somehow outside of the work and the investment of your donors.

The idea is that donors made this possible. They get the credit. What did they accomplish? A great thank you letter is not "Thank you for your gift. Here are all the great things we did." As you write your thank you letters, imagine all of the good you do with the donor at the center of it. Strive to make your donors feel that way when they hear from you. Make it about them and the difference they are making together with you.

Now that you know what a thank you message is, here are a few things that thank you messages should not be:

1. All about the nonprofit

After you write your thank you message, count the times you use the words "us," "our," and "we." Now count how many times you used the word "you." Be sure there are plenty of "yous" throughout the letter, and keep the "we," "us," and "our" usage at a minimum. Here's what an organization-focused thank you message looks like:

Dear Friend,

Thank you for generously donating \$10 to our organization. We are very grateful for your generosity and your support of our mission.

Our work is very important, and what we do is valued in our state. Our organization was formed to aid homeless and abused domestic and farmed animals in Arizona. We assist local humane societies and rescue groups with animals that cannot be adopted into permanent homes. Our mission is to provide lifelong care for these animals and to educate the public about humane animal care and practices, and we are very successful in accomplishing this. We rehabilitate these animals, both physically and psychologically, and, if possible, we work very hard to find appropriate homes for them. In an effort to prevent further cruelty to these animals, we educate the public on caring for companion animals as well as issues concerning farmed animals.

Your in-kind donation helps us to continue the important lifesaving work we do. Again, thank you for your contribution toward our organization. Our work is essential in our state, and donations are how our work is made possible.

Not only is this letter all about the organization and the work they do, there is no emotional story to connect the donor with the cause. From the donor's perspective, this letter is just words on a page. There is no emotional connection to the organization or the clients they serve, and the donor isn't shown much appreciation for their gift. Be sure your thank you message is just that: a message of thanks. It's not the time to explain your organization's mission (the donor already knows or they wouldn't have donated!), to talk about all the great things your organization has done (the message should make the donor feel awesome), or to serve as a receipt.

2. Late

Lynne Wester, author of *The Four Pillars of Donor Relations*, suggests getting thank yous out the door no more than two weeks after a gift has been made. Timeliness on your part shows the donor that their gift was valued and important enough to warrant a prompt thanks. If your donor intake process doesn't allow for a thank you to be delivered quickly, it's time to make a change. This is the first step in forming a positive relationship with your donor, and you want to make a great first impression!

3. Complicated

Thanking donors should not be complex or a time-consuming process. You aren't expected to overhaul your donor thank you process immediately, but you can focus a few quick wins right now:

- Begin drafting your email thank you letter (see the template included in this guide) for donors who give online.
- Schedule a meeting on your director's calendar to talk about his or her involvement in the thank you process.
- Survey a few donors about your current thank you process. Did they remember receiving a message of thanks?
- [Watch Lynne Wester's webinar](#) about donor relations.

4. The last time they hear from you

Add your donors to your newsletter list, include them in special event invitations, send them holiday greetings, and give them the opportunity to connect with you if they have any questions.



Stellar Donor Thank Yous

A basic thank you letter is a perfectly acceptable way to show a donor some gratitude. But if you want to go above and beyond and add some creative flair to wow your donors, go for it!

To help get the creative juices flowing, we collected some favorite thank yous that Network for Good staffers have personally received and some submissions that our nonprofit friends have sent us. All of these thank yous share a few things in common that you should apply to your messages of gratitude:

- They contain just one (or one primary) message: THANK YOU.
- Receipt information is not included. Read why Lynne Wester, one of our favorite donor relations experts, says you should never combine a receipt with a thank you.
- There is no second solicitation.

Kudos to all the fundraisers who shared their thank yous!

Written Thank Yous

Collective Action for Safe Spaces

After giving a small donation to a #GivingTuesday campaign, this short, handwritten postcard arrived in the mail:

Dear Elizabeth,
Thank you for supporting
Collective Action for Safe
Spaces! We're putting your
gift right to work.

In solidarity,
Chai, Julia, Renee,
Zosia + the CASS
Board

Honor Flight Capital Region

After the April Honor Flight visit, donors received this thank you letter that recapped the day's events along with a keepsake photo of the veterans who visited the National World War II Memorial.



Honoring America's Greatest Generation

Jane Doe
1234 Maple Lane
Winfield, IL 60190

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your generous donation to Honor Flight Capital Region. We are an all-volunteer organization and our Honor Flight trips are funded entirely by contributions from caring individuals like you- thank you for your support.

On April 5 we honored 22 WWII veterans from the Washington, DC area. Their trip included a visit to the WWII Memorial where they joined more than 350 fellow WWII veterans from around the country. We had hundreds of folks out to greet our veterans at their Memorial, and the DC Police provided our veterans with an honor escort into their Memorial. It was a powerful experience for all who were involved, particularly for our veterans. Many of our veterans remarked that it was the first time they had ever been thanked for their service, and they were all overwhelmed by the outpouring of appreciation and gratitude they received throughout their Honor Flight trip.

In addition to our trip to the WWII Memorial, we visited the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the Air Force Memorial, the Iwo Jima Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. At this latter stop we were met by Major General Jeffrey Buchanan, the head of the Military District of Washington. Major General Buchanan provided our veterans with a personal escort to the Tomb of the Unknowns, and he also led four of our veterans in a very special wreath laying ceremony. One of the veterans who laid the wreath, James Riffe, told me that this was one of the highest honors of his life, and that he was grateful for the chance to formally honor the countless friends he lost during his combat service in the Pacific during WWII.

Our day ended with a 'welcome home' celebration that was 70 years in the making, and we treated our veterans to a dinner and a brief concert by the West Point Glee Club. It was an amazing day all around, and we could not have honored our veterans without your support.

On behalf of the 22 selfless Americans who traveled with Honor Flight Capital Region on April 5, thank you for providing these members of our Greatest Generation with the day of honor and recognition that was due to them for so long.

Yours in service,

Michael Garceau
Director, Honor Flight Capital Region

Honor Flight Capital Region
3051 Idaho Ave, NW, #216 Washington, DC 20016
www.HonorFlightCR.org

Fridge-Worthy

Gardens for Health International

Gardens for Health asked some of its constituent communities to take photos with customized thank you signs. In a world where mass communication is the most cost-effective route, personalization at this level is often unexpected.



Here2There Ministries

Here2There Ministries sends its donors paper currency from a country where the organization worked. Quite the souvenir!



HealthFinders Collaborative

Showing the people who are most affected by a gift hits a home run in the donor's heart. HFC donors received a thank you in the mail with a special message from 14 of the nonprofit's clients.



Videos

Grassroot Soccer

Grassroot Soccer put together a great [Valentine's Day thank you video](#) featuring handmade valentines, soccer tricks, and a fantastic musical performance from the Grassroot Soccer community.



Save the Frogs

Save the Frogs produced a [short and low-key holiday thank you video](#) featuring the organization's founder surrounded by the sounds and sights of Congaree National Park in South Carolina.



YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City

In addition to the fun and joy that students get from participating in the Y's programs, it looks like these YMCA regulars had a great time putting together this [thank you video](#) for donors.



GTECH

Although GTECH's staff talks about physical purchases that help their organization run, [their video](#) makes it clear how these supplies have an impact on many Pittsburgh communities.





Beyond the Written Thank

Ready to go above and beyond with your thank yous? Here are nine more ways to show your donors some love:

- Send a birthday card to donors, and remind them that they are important to the work your organization accomplishes.
- Have your board members personally call donors to say thanks.
- Ask those who directly benefit from donations to write a handwritten note of thanks. Animal organizations could try letting their clients express their thanks to donors with a [special piece of artwork](#).
- Create a YouTube video to thank donors when you reach a campaign goal. Great examples of this are [Charity: Water's fifth birthday thank you videos](#).
- Have some exciting news to share? Send a special announcement to donors with images and a big, bold note to thank them for making the accomplishment possible.
- Invite donors to a thank you reception. You'll show your appreciation and get face time with your donors, giving you the opportunity to learn more about why they support your organization.
- Many organizations send thank you cards and year-end appeals during the November/December holiday season. Don't overlook [other holidays](#) as occasions to express your love and thanks.
- Dedicate social media shout-outs to thank and recognize donors.
- Send donors a top 10 list of accomplishments for the year to demonstrate how donations make an impact—and then make it clear that without their support, you wouldn't have a top 10 list.

Thank You Letter Template

Start your donor relationships off right! Send a stellar thank you message to all donors in a timely fashion.

Dear _____, (make sure donor's name is spelled correctly)

Start with a vivid image or short story of what the donor made possible.

Say thank you and give the donor credit for the impact of their donation. If the gift was to a campaign or fund, customize your letter to include specifics on what their donation accomplished.

Tell donors how they can be in touch with you. Include your phone number, email, and website.

Tell your donors thanks one more time and sign a real person's name.

Keep in mind: Receipts and thank yous are two separate pieces of donor communication.

Need More Help?

Download free fundraising eGuides, webinar recordings, and more at www.networkforgood.com/npo.

Donor Thank You Checklist

Want to have loyal, lifelong donors? Show your gratitude early and often.

Making a Timely Plan

- I have a plan and a budget to thank donors all year.
- I have a system in place to promptly thank all donors.
- I have written an exemplary thank you letter template.

Personalization and Accuracy

- They're signed by a real person.
- I acknowledge gift designations and dedications.
- I reference the appeal or campaign that prompted the gift (if applicable).
- Thank you notes are personally directed to the donor—not to "Dear Friend."
- I include contact information so donors can get in touch.

Gratitude

- I express heartfelt thanks for the gift at least twice in each note.
- I give the donor credit for the impact of their gift.
- I give thanks without asking for anything else—neither time nor money.

Ongoing Donor Communication

- I tell a good story or use a vivid example in every piece of outreach.
- I report to donors on their impact at least twice a year.
- I include the voices of donors in my outreach.
- I ask my donors for feedback.
- I respect donors' communication preferences.

Don't Forget

- Receipts and thank yous are two separate pieces of communication.
- If a message's goal is to thank, don't ask for another donation.
- This is only the first step to creating a positive relationship with a donor.

Need Some Help?

To learn how we can help you thank your donors and raise more money online, visit www.networkforgood.org/npo or call 888-284-7978, option 1.

About Network for Good

Network for Good powers more digital giving than any other platform. Since 2001, we've processed over \$1 billion in donations for more than 100,000 nonprofits. We are Level 1 Audited PCI Compliant and our Donor Advised Fund is accredited by the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, meeting all 20 of its standards for charity accountability.

We're a mission-minded organization, just like you, so we understand the challenges you face. We're here to help.

Our [innovative fundraising solutions](#) help nonprofits raise money and attract more donors online—plus we provide the coaching and support that will make you a fundraising superstar.

Here's what we offer:

1. [Online fundraising services](#): Get an easy-to-use, branded, and secure online donation page or set up your own project-based crowdfunding site. With built-in best practices and mobile-friendly giving options, our fundraising software will help you dramatically increase your fundraising results.
2. [Professional communications](#): Integrated email campaign and newsletter tools by Constant Contact for sending and tracking emails and telling you which messages work best.
3. [Fundraising coaching](#): Exclusive access to Network for Good's expert advice with personalized reviews, step-by-step tutorials, fundraising templates, and more.
4. [Online event management](#): Easily send invitation and accept donations, registrations, and ticket purchases online.

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