10 Creative Ways to Thank Donors
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ABOUT NETWORK FOR GOOD

Since 2001 Network for Good has been instrumental at helping tens of thousands of nonprofits raise more funds by engaging supporters and donors in a more meaningful and impactful way. Refreshingly easy to use Donor Management Software, Fundraising Pages, and Personal Fundraising Coaches provide nonprofits with a complete fundraising solution, reducing their need for disparate systems, saving them time and enabling them to raise more funds to support their mission.
Thank You!

Thankfulness strengthens relationships. Showing appreciation demonstrates that you value your donors and count them as an integral part of your team. It generates goodwill, makes donors even more enthusiastic about your organization, and often leads to increased support and additional gifts. Thanking your donors is arguably the most important part of donor stewardship.

A unique thank you shows your donors that they are paramount to you and your organization. With a little creativity, even small organizations can show appreciation with exceptional thank yous. In this guide, we’ll dig into what makes a thank you meaningful, what to avoid, when to say thank you, and 10 creative ideas to get you started.
5 Characteristics of Meaningful Donor Thank Yous

It’s easy to recognize a meaningful thank you when you see one. It stands out. It stirs emotion. But you may be unsure about the characteristics that actually set one apart from a standard thank you. There are five foundational characteristics of meaningful thank yous.

1) Aligns With the Donor’s Communication Preference

First, the approach your thank you takes should match the preferences of the donor. Some donors value public recognition while others wish to remain anonymous. If your donors appreciate physical objects to bring back memories in the years to come, include a photo of an event or your work in the community to serve as a token of appreciation. Tech-savvy donors may value custom videos or other digital formats. If your donors enjoy social connections, they would probably like to attend an event where they can meet other donors. Consider inviting major donors to see firsthand what your work is accomplishing.

Make it your mission to learn what each of your donors values when it comes to recognition. While this is less important for one-off, small donations (although even these deserve a well-thought-out thank you), it’s essential for regular supporters and major donors.

2) Focuses on Your Donor’s Passion

Your donors give to your organization primarily because they care deeply about a particular cause or community. Focusing on this common interest in your thank yous will remind them how much they care and stir them to continue being a part of the work. A specific focus on a project or program the donor is passionate about makes the thank you feel personal, rather than mass-produced.

3) Demonstrates How the Donor Helped

Thank yous should be inspirational. Although a nonprofit’s work is never done, donors should feel a sense of accomplishing a milestone on the journey. This feeling of success generates new energy and motivates donors to continue the partnership with you. Paint a picture of a specific problem that you solved together through an impact story or a testimonial from a community member.
4) Highlights What Was Achieved With the Donor’s Money
Thank yous aren’t just appropriate immediately following the giving of a gift. Part of donor stewardship is keeping donors apprised of what your organization is doing with their gifts. The thank you is a perfect vehicle to share what has been achieved with their investment. These thank yous can come after a certain milestone in a program, after the completion of a project, or at any number of different points. The idea is to keep the appreciation flowing while showing donors the good that their gifts are doing.

5) Communicates that You Value the Donor
Last but not least, a thank you should express just how much you value the donor—not just as a financial supporter, but as a partner who shares your vision and passion. Again, emphasize that the donor is part of your team and part of the community that is making the work possible. Let them know how much you value your relationship.
What to Avoid in a Thank You

Just as important as what to put into a thank you is what not to put in. Some messages will have the opposite effect of what you intend. Here are three things to avoid in your thank yous.

1) A Focus on Your Organization
While donors have deemed your organization a worthy partner, they’ll feel a deeper connection to you if you focus more on the mission you share and less on your organization itself. If your thank you is too centered on your organization, donors may feel like a postscript rather than an integral part of your work.

2) Delaying a Thank You After a Gift is Made
A delayed thank you communicates that you don’t really appreciate the donor as much as you say you do. While this, of course, is not true, and nonprofit teams always have unending to-do lists with many demands on their time, thank yous must be a priority. If donors receive their first thank you weeks after making a gift, they may come to believe that they (and their gifts) aren’t appreciated, and they may choose to give elsewhere next time.

3) Thanking Only Once
The initial thank you shouldn’t be the only thank you. As we mentioned earlier, sending thank yous periodically with updates on how the work is going will inspire donors and motivate them to continue their support. When should you send thank yous? Read on for several ideas.
When to Say Thank You

It’s almost impossible to say thank you too often. While the frequency will depend on the nature of the gift and the type of donor, here are several times that a thank you is especially appreciated.

- **Accompanying the Receipt**: Keep your donation receipts separate from your thank you letters and emails for better personalization. Take advantage of this opportunity to add a simple “Thank you for your donation!” to the beginning of your receipt. Use your donor management system (DMS) to add this simple sentence to your automated receipts. It’ll mean all the more when you follow up with your personalized thank you note.

- **Within a Week of Receiving the Gift**: Send a personalized thank you within one week of receiving the gift. Reference the project, program, or community that the donation is supporting, and include a call to share the mission with friends or take some other easy-to-complete action. Use the templates in your DMS to tailor your letters and emails to each individual donor group. This is an easy thing to do and makes a memorable impression on donors. Use your thank you message to further your relationship with your donor. For many donors, how their gift is acknowledged has a direct effect on if, when, and how they donate again. Don’t miss out on this opportunity. Set aside time each week to produce your thank yous in order to keep up-to-date with your donor acknowledgements. Use your DMS to create task reminders and track if an acknowledgement was sent so no donor ever falls through the cracks.

- **Upon the Anniversary of the Gift**: The anniversary of a gift is the perfect time to send a thank you. After a year’s time, donors’ attention may be directed elsewhere, so sending a thank you will get them refocused on the cause that they gave to and may motivate them to make another gift.

- **Upon Completion of the Project or Campaign**: We mentioned this opportunity earlier, but it’s worth repeating. Sending a thank you at a milestone or after a project or campaign is finished will serve to express your gratitude and also to update the donor on how their gift was used. Both messages will be meaningful to the donor.

- **On a Holiday that’s Meaningful to the Donor**: Noting which holidays your donors celebrate and sending thank yous on these holidays is especially effective. These personal touches communicate just how much you value your donors—and how much you know about them. Track this information in the donor’s profile in your DMS and create reminder tasks to send your thank yous. You can even assign the task to yourself or a team member.

- **Year-End**: The end of the year is when the most donations are given. It’s an ideal time to say thank you because donors are usually in the giving spirit and are making decisions about charitable gifts. Reminding donors about the wonderful experience they had partnering with you in the past may reignite their desire to continue the relationship.
10 Creative Ideas for Saying Thank You

A meaningful thank you can take many forms—from a traditional letter to a special event. No matter what size your nonprofit is, you can communicate your gratitude in unique and personal ways. Use these ten ideas to brainstorm new ways you can share a memorable thank you with your donors.

1) A Welcome Packet
If you’re looking for a way to make your first thank you unique, a welcome packet may be the answer. A welcome packet is a versatile way to show appreciation, since it can include any number of meaningful items. In addition to a thank you letter, you may want to add photos of your work or the community you serve, an impact story, or (depending on the size of the donation) small gifts such as an item made by someone in your community. Welcome packets are a great way to not only express thanks, but to also share more inspirational information about what your organization is doing with the help of donors.

2) Birthday Cards
People feel good when someone acknowledges their birthday. It communicates that someone made the effort to remember and took the time to send a cheerful note. Sending birthday cards along with well-wishes for the upcoming year shows donors that your organization values them. You’ll have greater success with this format if you stay focused on celebration and well-wishes, rather than making requests.

3) Donation Anniversary Cards
Send a card on the anniversary of a particularly large donation or on the anniversary of when the individual first became a donor. These cards generate a sense of family and partnership, showing donors that you value the relationship you share. Anniversary and birthday cards are especially appreciated by those who prefer more private acknowledgement for their support.
4) Social Media Shout-Outs
For donors who like public recognition, there’s nothing better than a social media shout-out. Post a special message and tag your donor. Shout-outs are fun, generate a sense of excitement, and encourage others to join in. Peer-to-peer sharing is also likely, since friends and family of the person being honored will want to spread the word. Share what motivated the donor to give and what they care about most. Learning more about your donors through this social media interaction will also inspire other donors and your fellow team members!

5) Donor Profiles in Newsletters
Donor profiles go even deeper than social media posts. In your organization’s newsletter, you have room to include more detail and use a variety of formats. Honor your donors by telling their story and sharing their journey that led them to your nonprofit. Include details on your donors’ personal interests that bring their stories to life.

6) Personal Thank You Videos
While videos intended for mass viewing are an excellent fundraising tool, personal one-to-one thank you videos are a great way to make donors feel special. You don’t need expensive equipment to create personal thank you videos. Many smartphones can record quality video and have built-in video editing tools available. If your organization has access to a Mac computer, iMovie allows your creativity to soar, making video editing with various effects easy.
7) **Handwritten Notes From Those You Serve**
Few types of thank yous are as effective as handwritten notes from people in the community you serve. These notes show genuine appreciation and create impact. A donor is more likely to keep a handwritten note, and reading about the impact of their gift can stir continued support.

8) **Thank You Party**
While formal galas tend to be very expensive, an informal thank you party can be just as effective. Choose a theme, plan activities, and purchase creative, affordable food that matches the theme. Parties are the perfect way for donors to meet one another, share their enthusiasm for the work you’re doing together, and make new friends.

9) **Meet-the-Team Event**
Relationships grow stronger when people meet face-to-face. Many of your donors will welcome the opportunity to meet your team, get to know them, and enjoy a fun time together. Whether it’s an informal luncheon or coffee, a picnic, or simply a tour of your office, the possibilities for meet-the-team events are endless. While it would be impossible to invite all donors to an event like this simply due to logistics, you can use them as a fantastic way to thank long-term regular donors, major donors, or program-specific donors.

10) **Project Photo Book**
Everyone loves photographs. Project photo books don’t have to be professionally-produced, either. Creating a photo album is easier than ever through online sites like Shutterfly, or even making an electronic one on social media. In your photo book, include images of the project from beginning through completion. Share photos of the people or animals who have been helped by the project. These books should be compelling, inspiring donors to continue their partnership with you.
Thank Yous Improve Donor Relations

Your thank yous will make donors feel valued as an important part of your team. They strengthen the relationship and provide motivation to continue working together toward your common vision. Keeping your focus on the donor and what they care about will help grow one-time donors into a community of passionate, loyal supporters that you can depend on.

Make organizing and sending thank yous easier with Network for Good's tools, resources, and coaching. With our suite of tools, you'll have everything you need to create meaningful and timely thank yous.

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