

13. Solicitation letters

What to keep in mind when writing solicitation letters to your donors?

DOs

- You should always introduce yourself and the charity.
- Always use official letter-headed paper and refer to your official charity registration number. Show you are serious and credible.
- Include as many personalized features as possible: ideally the name of the target person and the writer's signature are hand written. Even if you are using a computer package to do a large mail out, personalize as much as you can. Do your research as to who to address. Mention it in the letter if someone referred you/gave you their name.
- Quantify your activities and especially your impact and/or give a real story of a beneficiary.
- Create a sense of necessity and urgency ('without your help with service may not continue...' or similar).
- Break up the text and highlight important things, such as
 - Your ask;
 - What your 'theory of change' is in brief – in other words : Describe the problem your charity addresses AND Explain how it solves/ addresses the problem;
 - A personal story or a quote from a past beneficiary about how this helped them;
 - You can use bold letters, colors, a header, a text box, images, a PS (research shows that a lot of readers start with the PS!), anything to break up the block of text... if you can afford it you can even have information outside of the envelope;
 - Use images if possible. There are ethical debates in the fundraising profession about whether to show happy beneficiaries or show the suffering, and some approached work better in some cultures than others, you decide, but think carefully about it.
- Include all contact details to facilitate their preferred method, email, phone, social media, etc.
- Make it easy to donate (if this is an email, use a link to the donation page).

In thank you and follow-up letters the same principles apply: be personal, show the impact of the donation, always refer to their previous donations and be very grateful. If you have materials you can include such as newsletter or thank you gifts, do so, but there are debates as to whether or not to spend money on this, most donors don't like to see you spend too much on things like this.

How to adapt this template for email

- In email you need to keep it shorter.
- Research shows that the positive answers are usually less for fundraising emails than for real letters, partly because there is an assumption that you just wrote to hundreds of people without any special care and attention (however lower costs are an advantage).
- Be clever about the title of your message, it needs to be intriguing and eye catching so that they open it. It is important that your title stands out and that you personalize how you address the person at the start of the email.
- You can take advantage of being online and include links to your webpage or to videos that showcase your work. If you use images and graphics, test that the email looks OK on mobile as well as computers on arrival.

DON'Ts

- Go over a page in length.
- Be too general in your ask, or let it get lost in amongst the rest of the text.
- Be impersonal in how you address people.
- Exaggerate or make people feel overly guilty if they can't help. Yes you want to make them feel they ought to help, but be reasonable and ethical about it.
- Have an ask that is very high with no alternative. If your ask is very ambitious, unless you know from research that the target donor will be able to respond to it, give an option for something more modest.
- Neglect your thank you-s and follow up letters, they are essential and also be a subtle, effective way to ask.

What to be aware of when writing to a business?

Of course you need to be polite, clear and open in any such letter asking for donations, but be especially mindful of:

- Not wasting the reader's time: be concise.
- Not making them feel that you are hiding something or pretending: be very clear and upfront about your asks. Sometimes your ask might be just for a meeting, but it is advisable to provide some idea of the sort of collaboration you will suggest. They don't have time to waste and they don't want to feel committed to something they aren't sure they are able or willing to provide.
- Don't write generic letters or emails that show you have not done any research on the SMEs you are targeting. The more you can show you understand their company and how there might be a synergy with your NGO, the better. If possible, go as far as describing potential benefits for them in getting involved. Try your best to relate the ask or the charity's cause to their business or their known interests.

Resources

See the examples of letters on the following pages.

There are a lot of websites advising nonprofits on letter writing, here are just a couple of blogs you could check:

<https://anngreennonprofit.com/letter/https://www.qgiv.com/blog/>
<https://www.causevox.com/blog/>

Example 1 – Letter asking for food supplies for an event from a local supermarket

Use official letter headed paper

Charity Name

Address

Dear XX Local Food Store Manager,

We are a youth charity based around the corner on Dominick St.

On Saturday 24th June 2017, we are hosting the “**PRIDE Breakfast**” for 300 LGBT young people from all over Ireland coming to march in the PRIDE Parade. For most of them, it is their first time. As part of our on-going LGBT support program, we give them a group to march with, confidence in who they are, and a sense of togetherness. This is what it looked like last year!



We are looking for help with the breakfast itself please. We would be very grateful for anything you can help us with, such as: pastries, bread rolls, eggs, breakfast bars, yogurt, fruit, water bottles, smoothies/juice, tea/ coffee... We will credit your donation (unless you ask us not to) at the event and on our event communications, social media, website etc.

I hope you will be able to help us. Please don't hesitate if you have any questions before you decide.

Thank you,

XX

Fundraising Officer

Office – XX Mobile - XX

Email - XX

Example 2 – general template for a request for support from a local SME

Use headed paper with logo and charity registration number

Charity Name
Address Line 1
Address Line 2

December 18th, 2018

Dear XX (use the person's name – writing it by hand is best)

I am writing from XX (insert the specific charity name – mention the most local office/project if there is one). You are probably already aware of us, **we have been supporting young people in the local community since XX** (insert year of creation).

In 2018 we supported XX young people (insert number, either for the whole charity or for the local project, or both) **aged XX-XX**.

Many young people do not have a safe place to go where they feel they belong, where they can have a positive relationship with adults, and where people believe in them. We offer young people from all backgrounds a place to go, a listening ear, and support if it's needed. **The services are run by local people, including XX volunteers** (insert number of your volunteers) and the programs are run based on the needs of the local community. We are known both locally and nationally for our high standards in child protection, volunteering, youth work practice and program delivery.

(adapt this paragraph so as to describe you own charity's work – describe both the need your address, and the solution you provide)

To continue delivering this level of service in 2019, we need help: *if you are looking for goods/equipment/free services, state clearly what you need and why you need it. If you need cash, state your ideal donation amount, which again needs to be linked to why it is needed: say how many young people this will help, to do what, for how long – always quantify and justify your ask!*

We would be extremely grateful for any support you can give us and it would **make a real and lasting difference to the more vulnerable young people in our community**.

To make a donation, or if you would like to know more about what we do, please contact me any time on XX (insert your own direct tel number, ideally mobile, and email address).

Yours sincerely,

XX (sign by hand)
Job title if staff, or role if volunteer

Example 3 – Thank you to company that donated cash after nomination by staff member

Use official letter headed paper

Director's name

Business name

Address

December 21st, 2016

Dear Mr XX,

On behalf of Youth Work Ireland, I would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to you and to all in XX (*business name*) for your recent donation of €500, following nomination by one of your staff, Mrs XX.

The support you provided this past week will help us continue to provide a range of vital supports, programs and activities to young people all over Ireland. We provide weekly services to 116,060 young people and their families across 22 regions, with the support of 6721 volunteers.

We would be delighted to work with you again in the future and I would very much welcome the opportunity to meet you to thank you in person. If you would like any additional information on our work with young people, please contact me at any stage on *email add or mobile number*

Again, on behalf of everyone in Youth Work Ireland, thank you, and our best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Development Manager

XX Organization

Example 4 – Thank you letter for hosting a pilot fundraising event

Use letter headed paper

Contact name

Address

February 14th, 2017

Dear XX,

On behalf of Youth Work Ireland, I would like to thank you very much for hosting one of our pilot fundraising parties a couple of weeks ago.

It was very kind of you to not only facilitate raising funds for the charity's work, but also to support us in our research for this innovative type of fundraising event.

I enclose a receipt for your donation of €285, as well as the Revenue Tax-efficient Giving Certificate we talked about. By filling this certificate and returning it to us, you enable us to increase your donation by 45% at no added cost to you.

Again, on behalf of everyone in Youth Work Ireland, especially the 116,000 young people who benefit from our services and supports nationwide, thank you.

Yours sincerely,

XX

Fundraising & Marketing Officer

Office -

Mobile –

Email -