



# Tips for Writing Effective Advocacy Fundraising Letters



Fundraising, or the act of soliciting contributions from donors, is an important tactic for any non-profit organization to help it achieve its goals. For nonprofits like Retired Educators Associations (REAs), fundraising can be done within your membership both annually and in relation to an important policy battle. A well-developed fundraising letter can sound the alarm on impending legislative action, activate your members to bring pressure to bear on key decision-makers, and help your organization acquire additional resources to wage an advocacy campaign.

## PREP WORK

- ✓ **DO** collect accurate contact information from your members, particularly email addresses and phone numbers for those without email. **DON'T** forget to keep these updated!
- ✓ **DO** establish and use Social Media platforms, like Facebook, to post your direct mail pieces and communicate with potential members. Get as many people to “Like” your Facebook page as possible and then use that communication channel to market your organization to potential members who may be “Friends” with your current members.
- ✓ **DO** target and segment. Although you will likely be fundraising within your own membership, it is important to further target and segment that membership as much as possible based on capacity to give. More plainly, you don't want to ask for \$5 from someone who can afford to donate \$500.

## WHEN WRITING

- ✓ **DON'T** worry about keeping your letter brief, depending on your audience. Some organizations (like AARP) find their members are information consumers and like longer letters, while others find their members like shorter but more emotionally packed letters.
- ✓ **DO** test your member's preference for the design of the letter. AARP members, for instance, prefer plain, cheap envelopes and letters with no color pictures. Some organizations on the other hand, use very visual, colorful mailings to get their point across.
- ✓ As you are writing the letter, **DO** have a clear sense of your organization's mission and purpose in mind. For help in crafting your organization's mission statement, please review the “Mission Statement” section in NRTA's [Image and Branding](#) fact sheet.

- ✓ **DO** consider that your letter can have a dual purpose of both asking for donations and asking your members to contact their legislators on a particular issue.
- ✓ **DO** build a case for support. Define what the problem is, how you can solve it together (with the donor) and how their actions and donations will help.
- ✓ **DO** develop and use two or three key talking points as the basis of your letter to educate your members about what is at stake and to frame the issue at hand.
  - ✓ In other words, **DO** clearly state what is at stake and how this will impact your members. What is the choice currently before the elected official over a piece of legislation? To keep a promise or to break one? To protect earned benefits? To protect vulnerable retirees on fixed incomes?
- ✓ **DO** convey a sense of urgency and appeal to the emotion(s) of your members. Emotions play a very large role in an individual's decision to engage in an advocacy fight and/or make a donation. For each problem your organization is seeking to solve by a donation, consider emphasizing a corresponding emotion.
- ✓ **DO** include a call to action! **DO** ask your members to call or write their elected official to express your preferred viewpoint. Make sure to ask them to engage and donate!\*
- ✓ **DO** include the phone number of your targeted legislators, committee or the legislative switchboard as a whole, depending on who you are targeting. **DO** try to make it as easy as possible for your members to take action. Give them all the information they need to reach out.
- ✓ **DO** include a mechanism for potential members to reach out to their elected official and to donate to your REA within the fundraising letter. Consider including something they can fill out and send to their elected officials and back to you with a self-addressed envelope. Research indicates that paying for postage on any return envelopes has NOT been proven to increase response rate.

- ✓ **DON'T** overlook the design of your envelope to your members. Your direct mail will be competing for their attention, so try to grab that attention right away.

## FOLLOW UP

- ✓ **DO** follow up. It's important to send an acknowledgement as soon as possible after receiving the gift. And while this may seem counter-intuitive, the acknowledgement should include a request for another donation.
- ✓ **DON'T** expect immediate results. Direct mail fundraising can be expensive so you should have a clear plan and a long-term commitment. It is typical to lose money recruiting new donors. The key is to keep the donors you do recruit and build a solid donor base/base of supporters.

## \*ESCALATING YOUR ASK

- ✓ When building an advocacy campaign and engaging your members around an issue, **DO** consider the need to effectively step up, or escalate, what you are asking your members to do along the way.
  - ✓ The first "ask" of your members could be something relatively easy, like signing a petition, complete a survey/questionnaire, or clicking on a web-based action alert that sends an email to their elected official.
  - ✓ You can then build up to more difficult asks, such as making phone calls to elected officials, writing a [letter to the editor](#) or making a donation, to name a few.

## ADDITIONAL HELP

- ✓ **DO** reach out to us! NRTA is here to help and we're happy to be a resource for you on all of your membership and advocacy-related endeavors!

## EXAMPLES

- ✓ An example of AARP's award-winning fundraising letter is [here](#).