

\$25

101 Compelling Ways to Ask for Donations with Your Fundraising Letters.

Alan Sharpe

*The Professional
Fundraiser's Guide
to Mastering the Art
of Making the Ask.*



Handbook Number 6

H A N D S - O N F U N D R A I S I N G S E R I E S

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First, a Word or Two About Asks.

By Alan Sharpe

In the fundraising profession, the act of requesting funds from a donor is called “the ask.” When you are writing a fundraising letter and you arrive at the place where you must actually, ahem, request a donation, you have arrived at the ask. And the ask, as you probably know, is one of the toughest things to get right in fundraising.

Where in the letter should you mention money?

Early on in your letter you should let your reader know why you are writing. Somewhere “above the fold,” usually in the second or third paragraph, describe the reason for your letter. Here is an example:

“The people of Afghanistan have already suffered 20 years of conflict and three years without rain. One and a half million are dead. Two million are disabled. And now this: the UN is predicting that “the number of Afghans facing hunger and deprivation will soon reach 7.5 million.”

“Something has to give. Or someone has to give. That’s why I’m writing to you during this crisis. Will you give? You can save lives and avert disaster by sending a donation to Doctors Without Borders right now.”

How much should you ask for?

Ah, the perennial question. As fundraising letter expert Mal Warwick would say, “that depends.” How much money you request of each donor depends on many variables, including:

- size of the donor’s last gift
- size of the donor’s average gift
- amount that most organizations like yours ask for
- specific need that you are presenting to the donor
- size of your donor base
- donor’s capacity to give (assuming you know it)

- donor's affiliation with your organization (is the donor a brand new supporter or one of your board of directors?)
- length of time the donor has supported you (is it one year or ten?)

As you can see, the amount of money that you request in your direct mail fundraising letters depends on too many variables for me to give you an average figure to aim for in every appeal.

How many times should you request a donation?

Ask for a gift more than once in your letter. At a minimum, bring up the topic early on, and ask again for a donation in your conclusion. Another good place to request funds is in your postscript (your P.S.). Some of your asks can be hard asks ("Give today") and others can be soft asks ("Your gift will make a difference.")

What's the best way to actually ask for the gift?

Here we come to the topic of this Handbook. As you will discover, there are at least one-hundred and one ways to make your ask on paper. Some are forceful, others are subtle. Some are for capital campaigns, others for endowment campaigns and still others for year-end appeals. I recommend that you read all of the asks, putting a checkmark in the margin next to the ones that will work for your unique organization, your unique donors, your unique case for support and your unique writing style.

PART 1: Asks for Different Types of Needs.

Capital Campaigns

1. Your gift of \$25 buys 50 bricks. \$100 puts siding on one dormitory. And \$500 lays brand new carpet in a student bedroom. Please contribute today with your gift.
2. Your gift will help us renovate a special floor of the hospital for the new cardiac defibrillator lab. If you can, please send us a gift today for \$100 or more.
3. Please join us in showing our city's international students that there really is a home away from home right here in Manchester. Buy that bundle of roof shingles for only \$35. Or buy a front door for \$150. I'll leave that part up to you. Please send your gift right now, using the enclosed reply envelope. Think about it, your gift today means that soon another student will move into a simple, decent and affordable flat on campus.
4. This digital link will cost \$21,500 to put into operation (assuming free labour). I did the math, and that works out to just 39¢ a metre. So I'm inviting you to consider advancing the work of Literacy for Lithuania by funding a portion of this wireless link. Your donation of \$39 gets Anton and his team 100 metres closer to the people he is trying to reach. Your gift of \$390 advances the cause one kilometre. Would you please join with me in supporting this strategic initiative?

Endowments

5. The challenge we face is raising enough money to endow the Spencer Chair in Architecture at \$2,000,000. I invite you to consider our request and to use the

enclosed card and envelope to make a generous gift.

6. Your gift—whatever its size—will help us endow the Chair that will continue the high standard of academic excellence set by Professor Lindstrom.

Lapsed Donor Recovery

7. I am looking forward to your renewed support this year. Your help last year made a difference. Help us respond to provide the humanitarian, nutritional and medical assistance that Angolans so desperately need right now to survive. Your renewed commitment to our work means a lot to me. Please send your donation today.
8. Just as you did two years ago, with your gift of \$35, you play a vital part today in our goal of feeding 200,000 homeless men, distributing 3,000 winter coats and counselling 1,000 families by 2007. Every dollar makes a difference. We will receive your gift with gratitude—whatever its size. Please give today.
9. Please renew your commitment right now. I have not heard from you for over two years. Help us respond to provide the humanitarian, nutritional and medical assistance that South Africans so desperately need right now to survive. Send your donation today.

Matching Gifts

10. I need your support today to help us complete construction of our new oncology wing. Your donation of \$100, \$500 or more will be matched by a friend of the hospital who wishes to remain anonymous. Whatever you give will be doubled!
11. The James Wood Challenge will double the value of matching gifts—including yours.

So please respond today. Your continued support is essential to our success.

12. Will you participate with us in this exciting initiative? Your gift today will help Water Sense drill new village wells, train villagers in proper sanitation, and help to eradicate childhood blindness. Please send your gift using the enclosed envelope. And remember, whatever you give will be matched 100% by UNESCO. So please give, on the double!
13. Every dollar you send to CARE is matched by at least \$9 from the US Government and other agencies that cooperate with CARE. So your gift of \$100 actually supplies \$1,000 worth of food, technical assistance, health services and training to people in need. Please give today, generously, knowing the multiplied difference you'll make.

Membership Acquisition and Renewal

14. I invite you to join the Animal Action League today. Your membership will help us reduce animal-borne diseases.
15. I am writing you today to invite you to become an Honorary Member of the UK Disabled Curling Educational Foundation, the foundation that supports the UK Disabled Curling Association. Your membership will help us provide the coaching and training that our members need to win on the ice—and in life.
16. Please accept this Charter Membership in our Associates program and give us your support. Simply complete and return the enclosed form with your tax-deductible contribution to the hospital.
17. Please join me in making an investment in our profession. Send your tax-deductible check right now so our Association can continue and enhance its vital work on your behalf.