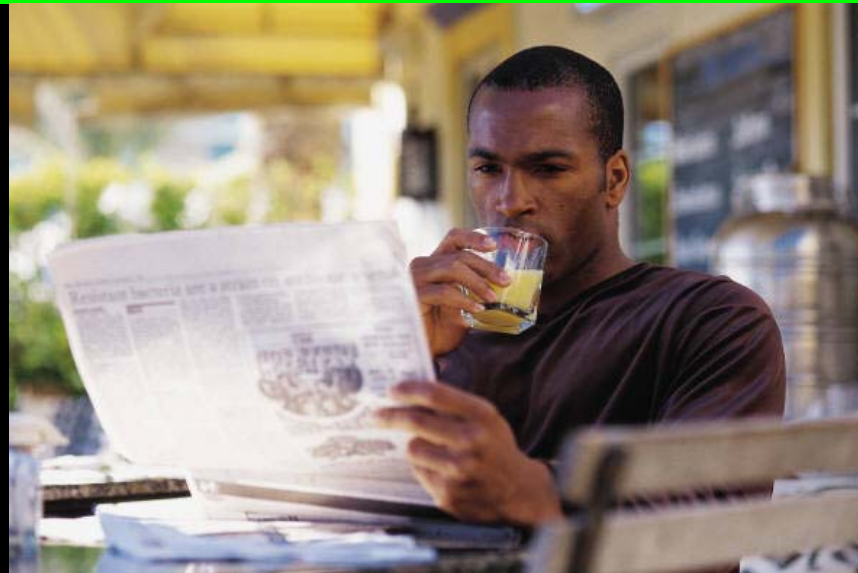


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# Increase Your Income and Boost Donor Loyalty with Donor-Centered Newsletter Stories.

Alan Sharpe

*Reap the long-term  
benefits of putting  
donors first in your  
donor newsletters.*



Handbook Number 15

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# Putting the Donor Back into Donor Newsletters

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By Alan Sharpe

**Y**our donors read your donor newsletter to discover news about themselves. Like you, they read what interests them. They donate money to causes that interest them. They read about people that interest them. That's why they support your organization—because you interest *them*. They read your donor newsletter to learn what kind of difference *they* are making in the world, through your organization.

This means the newsletters that generate the highest readership among donors and members and attract the most gifts are the ones that focus on the needs of donors and members and not on the organization. A donor-centered newsletter inspires donors to act. It motivates them to give. And it encourages them to remain loyal.

This doesn't mean every story you write has to be about the donor. It simply means that you must make the donor the hero of every story possible. Here are some practical ways to do that.

## Write stories that show recent gifts hard at work

Donors give to make a difference. They want their financial contributions to right a wrong, change attitudes, eliminate a problem that keeps them awake nights, and help the downtrodden and underprivileged. When your donors pick up your newsletter, they are looking for stories that demonstrate that their gift is accomplishing their goals.

So make sure your donor newsletter contains plenty of news stories that show donations at work. Show the link—explicitly or implicitly—between the donor support you received and the good you are accomplishing because of it. Here are two examples:

### Implicit

*In Guinea, the refugees are no longer in danger. We are now giving these refugees basic healthcare, water and sanitation facilities. Expatriate staff are also teaching and training local staff.*

### Explicit

*In Guinea, the refugees are no longer in danger. Thanks to the gifts we received in March from our generous supporters, we are now giving these refugees basic healthcare, water and sanitation facilities. Expatriate staff are also teaching and training local staff.*

## **Describe recent successes**

Whenever possible, publish news stories that describe accomplishments that interest your donors. Some accomplishments (staff promotions, for example) will interest your staff or your board of directors more than they interest your supporters.

The closer the accomplishment is to the heart of your mission, the more likely your donors are to find the story appealing. Your challenge with each newsletter issue is to uncover these accomplishments. And if you can't find any obvious ones, you need to turn mundane accomplishments into donor-centered accomplishments.

Here's an example of what I mean.

Let's say you mailed a special appeal letter six months ago, asking for funds to build a wheelchair-accessible ramp at your summer camp for kids. The money came in, the ramp is complete, and the project was a success.

You could run a story in your newsletter with the headline, "New Wheelchair Access Ramp Completed," accompanied by a photo of the ramp with this caption: "New wheelchair access ramp is now complete." That would be boring. The focus of the story is the ramp, not the donor.

Instead, you could take a photo of a camper ascending the ramp all by herself in her motorized wheelchair. Surrounding the ramp are the volunteers who donated their time, and a representative sampling of donors who gave their gifts. They are all waving and applauding as the girl makes her way to the top of the ramp, a pair of scissors in hand, ready to cut the inaugural ribbon that stretches across the top of the ramp.

The headline reads: "New Wheelchair Ramp Gives One Camper—and Many Donors—a Big Lift."

The photo caption reads: "INCLINED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Dozens of Camp Wikiming volunteers and donors celebrate as 13-year-old Kirsten Jacobs enjoys the fruit of their love, labour and generosity—the new wheelchair access ramp to Lansing Hall."

## **Inspire readers with your vision for the future**

Would you vote for a political party that had no platform? Or invest your life savings in a public company that had no strategic five-year plan for improving profitability or increasing market share? Or send your children

to a college that hadn't changed its curriculum since the Internet was invented?

Informed donors want to support museums, universities, hospitals, women's shelters and other non-profit organizations that are thriving today and have a plan for thriving tomorrow.

In other words, donors continue giving to organizations that sustain the donor's interest over time. A donor that first supported you financially five years and gave again this week will likely mail you another donation in the future if you continue to show that your mission and vision are still relevant to that donor's philanthropic interests.

Your donor newsletter, provided that you publish at least four times a year, is a cost-effective way to keep your supporters and members inspired to give. Keep your donors excited about your work by publishing newsletter articles that show where you are headed as an organization.

Remember to keep your vision donor-centered. If you recently went through an internal exercise at head office where you crafted a mission statement or vision statement that gives your organization some focus, don't publish this event in your donor newsletter unless you are confident that your donors will find it newsworthy and compelling. Perhaps this story is better suited to your internal newsletter, the one aimed at staff, volunteers and board members.

So what should you tell your donors about the future to inspire them and keep them loyal? Here are some questions to ask yourself each time you publish your newsletter so see if you have a story that will communicate to your donors that your vision for the future is exciting—and involves them.

1. Are you investing in a new building or expanding your current facility so that you can help more people?
2. To meet a growing need for your services, have you created one or more new positions, and are you now hiring talented folks for those positions?
3. Are you launching a new program to meet a need that you have not met before?
4. Are you planning to serve a type of client that needs your services but whom you have been unable to serve so far?
5. Are you planning on serving more clients this year?