

Writing effective fundraising emails & letters

**A Firstgiving.com premium webinar
with David Karp**

April 22, 2009

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call **916-233-3087** code **435-244-682**



Before we start...

- Thank you for coming today!
- For sound:
 - Turn on your computer's speakers or plug in headphones (you don't need a microphone), or...
 - Dial **916-233-3087** then code **435-244-682** (may be a toll call)
- Slides, resources, Q&A and a recording of this session will be available in a few days at www.onlinefundraisingblog.com/letters
- Ask your questions any time using the question tool; we will answer as many as we can today, and post the rest

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Effective fundraising letters

- Get your story straight
- Know and segment your audience
- Writing tips on form, style & substance
- Critique
- Q&A

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Get your story straight

Before you write a single word, make sure you and your staff agree on...

- What's the organization's **mission**?
- What's the **purpose** of the letter?
- What will you do with the **funds**?
- What will be the **impact** of the funds?

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Know and segment your audience

Before you write a single word, make sure you and your staff know for sure...

- **Who** is this letter for?
- How well do they **know** you?
- What do you **know** about them?
- What are their communication **preferences**?

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Segmentation

- Divide people into groups, and send tailored messages to each **segment**
 - New members and old ones
 - Big donors and small ones
 - Volunteers and members
 - What else can you use?
- Combine with **testing** to make sure the messages have the right effect.



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A segmentation grid

Segment	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Big donors this year	Invite to recognition dinner	Remind about dinner	Thank for attending; ask for annual fund \$
Lapsed big donors	We've missed you; come visit (no ask)	Ask for annual fund drive contribution	Special newsletter – what we've been up to...
New members	Welcome! Visit our Facebook page and blog	Support annual appeal, get special premium	Ask five of your friends to consider joining
Facebook fans	Check out our Firstgiving page and FB app!	Special Facebook membership rate, limited time offer	Ask five of your friends to consider joining

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A segmentation forecast

Segment	N	Est. % and \$	Est \$\$
Big donors this year	250	10% @ \$500	\$ 12,500
Lapsed big donors	500	5% @ \$200	\$ 5,000
New members	1,000	2% @ \$25	\$ 500
Facebook fans	500	0.5% @ \$10	\$ 25

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Writing tips

1. Communication preferences
2. Addressing people & personalizing
3. Getting to the point
4. Making the ask & showing the value
5. Signing the letter
6. Paper tips
7. Email tips

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Communication preferences

- How often? Email or postal? Text or HTML? Phone or Facebook?
- If at all possible and technically feasible, **ask**, and **respect the answers** you get
- Don't make every communication an ask, and people will be more receptive when you do ask

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Addressing people & personalizing

- Carefully choose your salutation – getting it wrong really puts people off
- Personalize as much as technically possible and feasible
 - Not just name and title, but behavior
 - “your last gift of \$X on M/D/Y” etc.
 - Personalize by inserting information, and also by using different letters for different groups

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Getting to the point

- Lots of people have a hard time getting to the point, especially when they're asking for something
- Taking the long way around might not be the best way in all cases
- Some examples of two approaches...

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Direct vs indirect communication

INDIRECT

1. Millions of people don't have enough to eat
2. Our organization runs foodbanks and education programs
3. So you should donate money to us

DIRECT

1. Donate to our organization
2. Because we run foodbanks and education programs
3. Because millions of people don't have enough to eat

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The right style for the job

INDIRECT

- Audience is predisposed against your proposal
- News is unexpected and/or bad

DIRECT

- Audience is likely to favor your proposal
- Audience is short on time or attention

- It's not always an either-or choice between the two
- Cultural differences, especially internationally, have a big effect on preferences for communication style. **Know your audience!**

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Making the ask & showing the value

- Be upfront with the ask and the amount(s)
- Do not apologize for asking
- Support the ask with data or stories of how the funds have been and will be used
- Do not apologize for asking
- Make concrete benefit statements

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Signing the letter

- Who signs your letters?
- Whose voice is the letter written in?
- Choose a signer who is close to the target donor
- Sometimes that's not staff or even board
- Consider celebrities, junior staff, individual fundraisers and beneficiaries

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Paper tips

- Every little thing about the letter from the stamp to the type of paper, matters – so test variations to learn what works
- Project urgency – it's too easy to put a letter aside or recycle it
- Give a clear call to action and an easy way to respond (800 number, stamped reply envelope, web site...)

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Email tips

- The subject line is critical
- Avoid attachments and excessive graphics
- Do not copy and paste your paper letter
- If you don't have online giving, don't expect much response from emails
- Provide an offline method for those that prefer it

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Critique time

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Critique

- Thanks to all who submitted letters
- Not sure how many we'll be able to review
- Think:
 - How is this letter similar to one I've written
 - How is it different? Better? Worse?
 - What can I use?

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A sample of letters received

Words	Pages	Ask point	Signed by
302	1	20%	Fundraiser
305	1	65%	Founder
376	2	50%	Dir Community Relations
424	1	100%	Development Director
445	1	100%	Fundraiser
665	2	100%	Board President
702	2	50%	Executive Director
816	2	100%	Board President
820	2	65%	Executive Director
1,297	3	100%	Executive Director
Avg. 617	Avg. 1.7	Avg. 75%	30% ED, 20% Board, 20% Fundraiser

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Sample letter: Partners of Parks



Pages: 2
Words: 702

April 2009

Dear _____,

Like you, I am worried about these tough economic times. It is scary to think that so many people are out of work and families are struggling to make ends meet. In light of this, our appeal to you to support the parks and community recreation programs in Long Beach may seem trivial in comparison. And, it is true that in hard times it is difficult for us to compete...there are so many worthy and urgent requests from organizations that feed hungry children and provide housing for the homeless.

However, there **are** two sides to this equation. While one is reactive...solving society's existing ills...there is another proactive side that seeks to elevate our quality of life. And I believe that is important, too. Things like the arts, the libraries, and our parks give kids, adults, seniors, and families a way to connect, to create, and to experience beauty. And, perhaps most importantly in difficult times, to have hope that we **will** pull through this, and that people care about the fabric and future of their community.

Partners of Parks has been around for almost 25 years. During that time, we have provided funding for:

- **El Dorado Nature Center**—a 107-acre natural habitat with walking trails and learning center that welcomes almost half a million visitors each year **for free**.
- **Long Beach Municipal Band**—holds outdoor concerts in the parks for eight weeks during the summer that are enjoyed by thousands of residents every year **for free**.
- **Midnight Basketball**—an athletic, mentoring, and job coaching program for at-risk young adults **for free**.
- **Senior Centers**—exercise, cultural, and social activities at five park locations.
- **Youth Assistance**—pays for kids from families who cannot afford it to attend programs such as swimming, dance, music, arts & crafts, etc.

Partners of Parks does not receive any direct government funding (i.e. tax dollars) to support these programs. Ninety percent of our donations come from individuals just like you who care about Long Beach. **Here are just a few of the worthwhile things that your Partners of Parks' Membership will support:**

- \$1,000 can provide 3 months of program supplies for the Senior Center.
- \$500 can provide a drinking fountain along the bicycle path.
- \$250 can send 5 tots to Tiny Tumblers-Gymnastics.
- \$150 can provide 7 kids from low-income families with swimming lessons.

In addition to knowing that you are doing something really great for your community, as a Member you will receive the following:

- **Individual** (\$50)—Newsletter (two times per year), plus discount ticket pricing for Partners of Parks events.
- **Family** (\$75)—All Individual benefits, plus the Partners of Parks four-color Calendar.
- **Supporting Partner** (\$150)—All Family benefits, plus VIP seating for four at one of the Municipal Band concerts.
- **Business Partner** (\$1,000)—All Supporting benefits, plus two seats at the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce "State of the County" luncheon.
- **Patron of the Parks** (\$2,500)—All Business benefits, plus a signed, limited edition print and an invitation to the Patron of the Parks cocktail reception at the Sky Room.

As an added bonus, Partners of Parks has joined with American Forests, the nation's oldest nonprofit citizen's conservation organization (founded in 1875), which seeks to improve the local and global environment by planting and caring for trees. As you know, catastrophic wildfires in southern California in 2007 have created tremendous need for reforestation. With the increase in size and intensity of wildfires comes a more urgent need to rehabilitate damaged areas to prevent further degradation of our local forest ecosystems. **For every new membership with Partners of Parks, a tree will be planted to help restore our California forests** devastated by wildfires.

So as you go out and enjoy this spring and summer...a picnic with your family and friends under the trees, a Municipal Band concert, volleyball on the beach, or Movies in the Park...take a moment to think about everything that makes Long Beach such a wonderful place to be. And then make an investment in the future of our parks and community recreation programs here in Long Beach by becoming a member of Partners of Parks.

Thank you.

Signed by:
Exec. Director

Partners of Parks letter (1)

Dear

Like you, I am worried about these tough economic times. It is scary to think that so many people are out of work and families are struggling to make ends meet. In light of this, our appeal to you to support the parks and community recreation programs in Long Beach may seem trivial in comparison. And, it is true that in hard times it is difficult for us to compete...there are so many worthy and urgent requests from organizations that feed hungry children and provide housing for the homeless.

However, there **are** two sides to this equation. While one is reactive...solving society's existing ills...there is another proactive side that seeks to elevate our quality of life. And I believe that is important, too. Things like the arts, the libraries, and our parks give kids, adults, seniors, and families a way to connect, to create, and to experience beauty. And, perhaps most importantly in difficult times, to have hope that we **will** pull through this, and that people care about the fabric and future of their community.

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Partners of Parks letter (2)

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Partners of Parks letter (3)

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Partners of Parks letter (4)

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So as you go out and enjoy this spring and summer....a picnic with your family and friends under the trees, a Municipal Band concert, volleyball on the beach, or Movies in the Park.....take a moment to think about everything that makes Long Beach such a wonderful place to be. And then make an investment in the future of our parks and community recreation programs here in Long Beach by becoming a member of Partners of Parks.

Thank you.

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Partners of Parks letter

GOOD

- Concrete examples of outcomes
- Specific ask amounts
- Starts with first-person “I”





NOT SO GOOD

- Brings up other causes as more important right away
- Long
- Gets impersonal after the start



Sample letter: AL Blues Project

Pages: 1
Words: 260

General : Addressee - Formal General : Address Block December 1, 2008	
Dear General: Salutation - Formal,	
<p>The Alabama Blues Project invites you to join us in presenting our award-winning After-school and Summertime Blues Camps that have impacted hundreds of children in our community and beyond. We are spreading the word about Alabama blues while bringing it to a new generation – and you can help!</p> <p>Our blues camps are in their 11th year and continue to expand in the number of students who have the opportunity to learn harmonica, vocals, guitar and percussion from some of the state's best blues musicians. We make a special effort to reach out to at-risk children who greatly benefit from the ability to express creativity through music.</p> <p>We are also on the road and have taken the blues into many underserved schools in Alabama. Other projects include an internship program with the University of Alabama working to create an online database of Alabama blues artists and historical marker campaigns for blues greats Dinah Washington and Johnny Shines.</p> <p>If everyone on our mailing list became an official Friend of the Alabama Blues Project, even at the lowest level, we would have two years of After-school and Summertime Blues Camps fully funded – imagine the children who will benefit!</p> <p>As a non-profit organization, we depend on individuals like you. Your tax-deductible gift makes a huge difference to us, our community and to the children we serve. Thank you!</p> <p>Sincerely yours,</p> <p> Debbie Bond Executive Director</p>	
	
712 25th Avenue, Northport, AL 35476 Phone (205) 752-6263 www.alabamablues.org	

Signed by:
Exec. Director



AL Blues Project letter (1)

Dear General : Salutation - Formal,

The Alabama Blues Project **invites you to join us** in presenting our award-winning After-school and Summertime Blues Camps that have impacted hundreds of children in our community and beyond. We are spreading the word about Alabama blues while bringing it to a new generation – **and you can help!**

Our blues camps are in their 11th year and **continue to expand** in the number of students who have the opportunity to learn harmonica, vocals, guitar and percussion from some of the state's best blues musicians. We make a special effort to reach out to **at-risk children** who greatly benefit from the ability to express creativity through music.

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AL Blues Project letter (2)

We are also on the road and have taken the blues into many underserved schools in Alabama. Other projects include an internship program with the University of Alabama working to create an **online database of Alabama blues artists** and **historical marker campaigns for blues greats Dinah Washington and Johnny Shines**.

If everyone on our mailing list became an official Friend of the Alabama Blues Project, even at the lowest level, we would have two years of After-school and Summertime Blues Camps fully funded – imagine the children who will benefit!

As a non-profit organization, we depend on individuals like you. Your tax-deductible gift makes a huge difference to us, our community and to the children we serve. Thank you!

Sincerely yours,

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AL Blues Project letter

GOOD

- Brief and pretty direct
- Pictures illustrate the benefits
- Partner logos show community support

NOT SO GOOD

- No clear ask in letter
- Could spend some time talking about the awards in “award-winning”
- “If everyone on our mailing list...” seems hard to achieve

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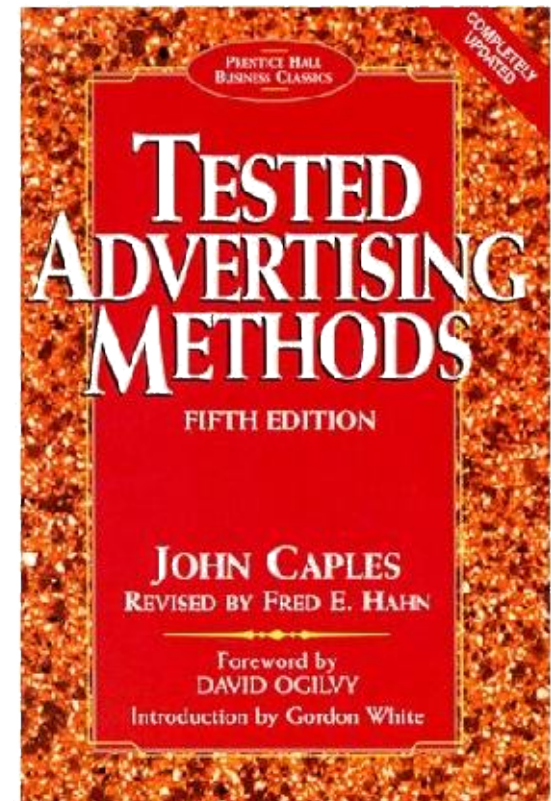
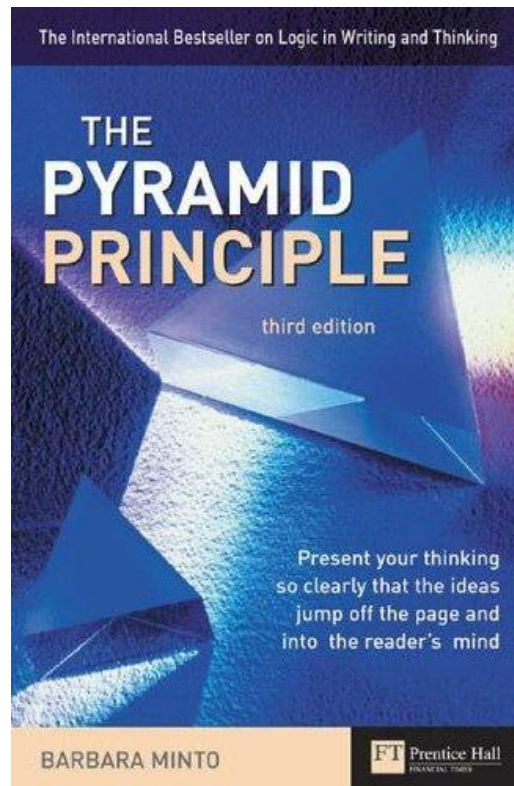
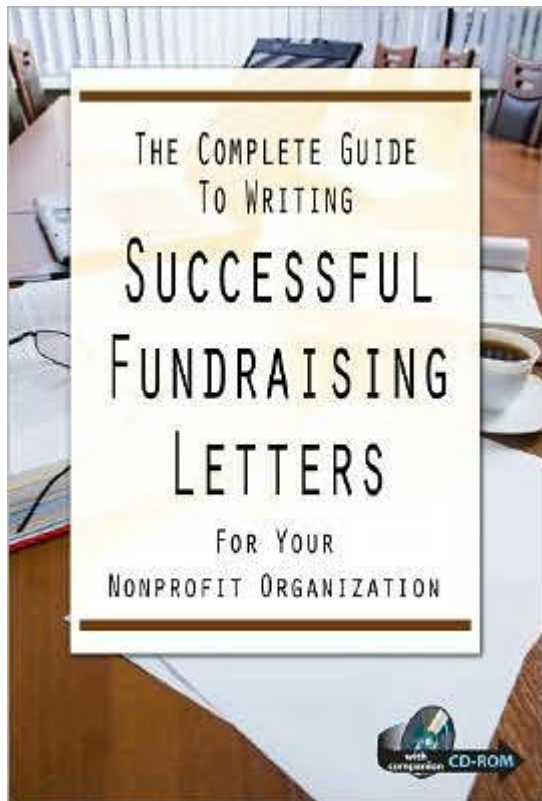
Keys to success

- Get your story straight first
- Be direct when possible
- Personalize as much as you can
- Make a clear ask and back it up
- Question and test everything

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Suggested resources



Also visit the **Direct Marketing Association**, www.thedma.org

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Thank you and Q&A

Ask your questions using the question tool in the toolbar and we'll answer as many as we can

Slides, recording and all questions will posted to www.onlinefundraisingblog.com/letters next week and a note will be emailed out. Look for our satisfaction survey, too!

Next webinar: [Search Engine Optimization for NPOs](#)
Wednesday, May 13, 3:30pm ET

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