DONOR-CENTRIC LETTER WRITING

NEMA CONFERENCE 2019
WHO WE ARE

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Development Coordinator,
Newport Restoration Foundation
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One year in role at NRF
Many years in development in both higher
education and traditional non-profit orgs
APPEAL LETTERS

• What are they?
  • To solicit donations
  • Engagement tools
  • Introduction for prospects

• Why do them?

• How to write them

• Timing – when to send them!
DONOR-CENTRIC LETTERS

• Focus is on the person receiving the letter
• Engagement
• Puts the attention on the audience, not the organization
• “You”, “Your gift”, “Your generosity”
• How their gift helps

• Segmentation
  • Event attendees
  • Board or committee members
  • Consecutive givers
  • Lapsed donors

• Hand-written notes
• Acknowledgement letters
APPLY TO MARKETING PIECES

• Newsletters
• Website
• Press Releases
• Annual Report narratives
• Social Media
• Donation station in museums
LETTER EXAMPLE

• Identify non-donor centric language
• How can this letter be improved
• What else do you notice?
November 2016

Mr. and Mrs. John Smith
123 Anywhere Street
Your City, RI 12334

Dear John and Mary,

In the past, you have learned of Newport Restoration Foundation through your inquiries and your participation at our programs, tours and annual preservation awards. Now, we are asking that you assist us in the creation of a new, bold and exciting venture: **The Research Center at the Newport Restoration Foundation**.

Education is essential to our mission and public programs are a key component of that mission. The Research Center will expand that mission by creating a program to advance scholarship and public knowledge in historic preservation, art history, architectural history and decorative arts.

You may have already participated in some of those efforts:
- The April 2016 *Keeping History Above Water* conference here in Newport expanded public understanding and solutions for this critical impending problem.
- The 2015 and 2016 Doris Duke Preservation Awards where funds were used to map out the Center’s strategic plans and get it under way.

Within the next year we will:
- Provide Fellowships
- Finalie the Center’s space analysis to create a home for the Center
- Present *Collecting Paradise*, a symposium on Doris Duke’s Islamic Art Collection
- Host *Rethinking Whitehorne*, an exploration of practices in the interpretation of our decorative arts collection
- Recruit a Director of the Research Center

This new venture cannot happen without external support from individuals like you who are committed to remembering the past and preparing for a sustainable future. And Newport is a perfect place to create the Center, as it is rich in institutions devoted to cultural and historic preservation. Please help us in this exciting venture by supporting us with a gift. Thank you!

Sincerely,

P.S. You are key to the Research Center’s future. Please support us today!
November 2016

Mr. and Mrs. John Smith
123 Anywhere Street
Your City, RI 12334

Dear John and Mary,

In the past, you have learned of Newport Restoration Foundation through your inquiries and your participation at our programs, tours and annual preservation awards. Now, we are asking that you assist us in the creation of a new, bold and exciting venture: The Research Center at the Newport Restoration Foundation. (impersonal statement; focus on organization, not the donor)

Education is essential to our mission and public programs are a key component of that mission. The Research Center will expand that mission by creating a program to advance scholarship and public knowledge in historic preservation, art history, architectural history and decorative arts.

You may have already participated in some of those efforts:

- The April 2016 Keeping History Above Water conference here in Newport expanded public understanding and solutions for this critical impending problem. (not relevant to theme)
- The 2015 and 2016 Doris Duke Preservation Awards where funds were used to map out the Center’s strategic plans and get it under way.

Within the next year we will:

- Provide Fellowships (Be specific)
- Finalize the Center’s space analysis to create a home for the Center
- Present Collecting Paradise, a symposium on Doris Duke’s Islamic Art Collection
- Host Rethinking Whitehorne, an exploration of practices in the interpretation of our decorative arts collection (two bullets not relevant to theme)
- Recruit a Director of the Research Center (inherent in starting a new Center. Not necessary to mention)

This new venture cannot happen without external support from individuals like you who are committed to remembering the past and preparing for a sustainable future. And Newport is a perfect place to create the Center, as it is rich in institutions devoted to cultural and historic preservation. Please help us in this exciting venture by supporting us with a gift. Thank you!

Sincerely,

P.S. You are key to the Research Center’s future. Please support us today!
November 2016

Mr. and Mrs. John Smith
123 Anywhere Street
Your City, RI 12334

Dear John and Mary,

Your past engagement and support of the Newport Restoration Foundation has perpetuated a culture of preservation in Newport, RI. Newport is rich in institutions devoted to cultural, architectural and historic preservation and it is our hope that, as a member of this community, you will participate in a new venture.

Join us in connecting with the community through educational programs in tradition, craft, art and Newport’s history with a Research Center at the Newport Restoration Foundation. The Research Center will expand NRF’s mission by creating public programs to advance scholarship and knowledge in historic preservation, architectural history and decorative arts.

You may have already supported efforts to create the Center by participating in the 2015 and 2016 Doris Duke Preservation Awards where initial funding was raised to map out the Center’s strategic plans. Thank you for your early support.

We are asking you today to make an annual gift because you will help develop the Center.

Over the next year, your support will provide Fellowships to deserving graduate students who will help advance research and planning for the Center, as well as provide assistance to complete a space analysis to determine the best location to break ground on the Center.

This new venture is able to move forward because of individuals like you who are committed to remembering the past and preparing for a sustainable future.

Thank you for supporting this exciting venture with a gift!

Sincerely,

P.S. You are key to the Research Center’s future. Please make a gift today!
WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR LETTER

• Focus is on the person receiving the letter
• Engagement
• Puts the attention on the audience, not the organization
• “You”, “Your gift”, “Your generosity”

• How their gift helps
• Special audience
• Will the donor feel good about giving to your organization
QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES

**Penelope Burk**

Books:
- Donor-Centered Fundraising
- Donor-Centered Leadership

www.burksblog.com

**Anne Green**

Article:
- Can Your Organization Pass the Donor-Centered Test

anngreennonprofit.com
NEMA 2019: Donor-Centric Letter Writing Workshop

1. Who we are
   a. Heather Rockwood, Newport Historical Society, Development and Marketing Associate
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   b. Alicia Cipriano, Newport Restoration Foundation Development Coordinator
      acipriano@newportrestoration.org

2. Appeal Letters
   a. What are they?
      1. Letters non-profits write to constituents already engaged with the organization to solicit donations
      2. Engagement tools
         a. A way to “set the tone” for that years giving, to express what work is happening at the organization, to ask for money
      3. An introduction to the organization for prospects
         a. Shows prospects the organization actively solicits, the organization is professional and gives the prospect an easy way to engage with your organization
   b. Why do them - this is something each organization should think about
      1. A standard way to solicit donations, used by most non-profits
      2. Re-engage constituents who haven’t given in a few years.
   c. How to write them
      1. Typically signed by the Director or board member and in their voice
         a. Letters from Humane/Social orgs may have their letters written by a client
         b. Could also have another staff person write the letter, depending on the theme of your letter. (ex. Curator, Museum Director)
      2. Create a draft, have many people read it for punctuation, grammar, and common sense. If applicable, meet with your Director to craft the theme.
      3. Letters should typically be 1 page; Can be two pages – research supports two-page letters can also be successful. Depends on your message.
      4. General Format:
         a. Introduction paragraph to institution or theme of letter
         b. A paragraph expanding on theme, or introducing if not done on previous paragraph
c. A conclusion with an “ask”
   i. An “ask” is the point in the letter where the organization is asking the audience to give. “Continue this good work with a gift of $50 today.”

d. When should you mail them

   1. Standard is two-three times a year – depending on your organization
      a. Spring
      b. Fall
      c. End of Year
   2. Extra times
      a. Giving Tuesday
      b. At the launch of a campaign (This can run parallel to an Annual campaign such as a capital campaign or a campaign for a specific program.)
      c. For a special project
      d. Founder’s Day

3. Donor Centric Letter writing

   a. Letters that are focused on the person receiving them, rather than on the organization or the work of the organization

   b. Send to engaged constituents of an organization

   c. Why do them

      1. Donor-centric letter writing is not better nor worse than organization-focused letter writing
      2. Attention is on the audience
      3. It engages them by demonstrating what good work they do by giving
      4. It puts the onus on the audience

   d. How to write them

      1. Speak directly to the audience “you” and use a positive tone
      2. Use words that speak to their good nature and ownership “your generosity” “your gift” “donate today to make a difference in your community”
      3. Address to a real person, not “dear friend”
      4. Be specific in your cause, and how their gift will help
      5. Make that person feel good about donating to your organization
      6. Make your acknowledgement letters match the Appeal letter in theme and language
      7. Have your Director or board member, if appropriate, write a hand-written note on each letter
Segmenting

Make sure to segment your appeal letters
   a. LYBUNT (Last year but not this year) and SYBUNT (some year but not this year)
      i. Also commonly referred to as donors to renew and donors who have lapsed in their giving and need to renew
   b. Future donors (people on your mailing list who haven’t yet given to your organization)
   c. Major Donors – personalize your letter to them
   d. Special relationship (Board or committee members)
   e. Other special groups: Event attendees, Members, consecutive donors, etc.

8. Differentiate each segment by including one line in your letter that establishes a relationship with the organization – keep it simple. Not necessary to write a completely different letter for each group.
   a. In the past, you have supported…
   b. We are asking you to renew your gift…
   c. As an event attendee….

9. Do not over-segment your letters – try to stick with 5 segments. Too much segmenting can be a draw on staff time and may not be as effective in the end.

4. Other marketing pieces where donor-centric writing can be applied
   a. Newsletters (both electronic and physical)
   b. Websites
   c. Press Releases
   d. Annual Report (narratives)
   e. Social Media
   f. Updates on the theme of the letter
   g. Donation station in museum or property

5. Letter Example
   a. Review letter that is not donor centric
   b. Small changes to letters to make them donor centric

6. Exercise: Write your own donor-centric letter

7. Read and provide feedback

8. Questions and Resources