

The We/You Test for More Effective Fundraising Letters

As much a proponent as I am of face-to-face asking, much of our work involves writing fundraising letters for our direct mail program. When I was the head of a small office (a one person office!), I didn't have professional copywriters built into our budget. So I do the writing myself.



Back when I wrote my blog post [Fundraising Secret #21](#) on "is this about me or about you?", I received emails asking for a more specific example of what I mean. Apparently [Jeff Brook's fundraising letter template](#) was a bit too general. :)8

I decided to showcase two real-life fundraising letters I drafted for selling ads in our organization's annual gala program. The first is from 2006; the second is from two years later. I then offer some analysis. I've also set up a four week email course on how to write fundraising letters. You can find that form in the middle of this page or by [clicking here](#).

Here's the fundraising letter from 2006

September 18, 2006

Name

Company

Street

City, ST ZIP

Dear Name,

The String Ensemble and Acadia Brass from the Bangor Symphony Orchestra will present a special evening of musical entertainment as the Inland Foundation hosts a Fall Pops Concert at the Waterville Opera House on Friday, November 10, 2006. Proceeds from the event will go toward the modernization and expansion of the Emergency Department at Inland Hospital and I am writing to ask you to support this effort by advertising in our commemorative program.

The Emergency Department at Inland is a vital community resource – we care for more than 14,000 emergency patients a

year in space that was originally designed for only 10,000 annual visits. The project will involve renovation of existing space and new construction of 2300 square feet that will provide up-to-date, private treatment rooms, new waiting, triage and registration areas and expanded support space for physicians, nurses and other providers. The main goal is to offer emergency care in a more timely manner, while respecting and protecting the privacy and dignity of patients and their families.

Please help make a difference in our community by contributing to the success of this superb cultural event. Your advertisement will be seen by every guest at the concert and your support will be acknowledged in the Morning Sentinel.

For your convenience, I have enclosed the details about program advertising. If you have questions, or would like to make arrangements for your ad, please call the Inland Foundation Office at 861-3377.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,

*John Doe, Chair
Inland Foundation Board*

P.S. Thank you for considering an ad. We'll call you in a few days to follow up.

Enclosure: advertisement information

Notice how dense the first two paragraphs are? Yikes. At least I told them I was asking for their money in the first paragraph! But it's us, us, us, we, we, we.

Not really good.

Here's a sample of the fundraising letter we sent a couple years later

July 7, 2008

Name
Company
Street
City, St ZIP

Dear Name,

I'm pleased to announce that the third annual Fall Pops benefit concert will be held on Saturday, October 25. Since this event can offer great exposure for your business, I wanted to give you an early opportunity for your organization to get involved.

Fall Pops is the Inland Foundation's biggest fundraising event. This year the concert's proceeds will benefit Inland's cardiac rehabilitation program. Participating in a cardiac rehab program after a heart attack or stroke is proven to be the single most important health prevention tool available. Your involvement will help the program be open to even more people that need it.

This year's Fall Pops will feature some of the top musicians from the Bangor Symphony Orchestra. Once again, we're honored to have the BSO's Music Director, Xiao-Lu Li, conducting these musicians as well as performing on the violin. We'll follow the concert up with the very popular "Meet the Musicians," gourmet dessert reception!

The two main ways to get involved are:

- by joining more than a dozen of us as a sponsor, or*
- by advertising in the Fall Pops program.*

Both options allow you to get your company in front of hundreds of people the night of the concert. And all sponsorship levels give you two complimentary tickets both to the concert and the "Meet the Musicians" gourmet dessert reception. Some levels also give your organization exposure before the event.

Please call Marc Pitman if you'd like to participate. His direct line is 861-xxxx and his email is mpitman@ourorg.org.

Thank you for considering supporting this year's event,

*John Doe, Chair
Inland Foundation Board of Trustees*

P.S. Act soon, a few of these opportunities are on a first-come first-served basis.

Morphing the 2006 sample fundraising letter to something that answered the reader's legitimate "what's in it for me?" was *very* challenging. I'm basically unlearning over a decade of bad letter writing habits.

This year, I tried put their values right up front. There are still some dense paragraphs, but I *did* include a couple bullet points to make it easier to read. (And to catch their attention as they skim the letter).

Here's an interesting breakdown of the uses of "you" and "your":

- 2006 - 9 uses
- 2008 - 10 uses

I didn't really add more "you's" in the newer fundraising letter. But look at *how* they're used. In the first letter, they're concentrated in the bottom half of the letter and used regarding "logistics." And any of you that did [sentence diagrams](#) in fourth grade will notice that most glaringly, "I" and "we" are still the subject of most of the sentences with "you" in them.

In 2008, four of the "you's" are right up at the top of the letter. And more often, "you" are the subject of the sentence, not "I".

One of the top ways to improve the effectiveness of your fundraising letters is to make them more centered on the donor and less centered on the nonprofit. I'm not saying these fundraising letters above are perfect. But they show you how you can change your own fundraising letters to make them raise more money.

Further Tools for Writing Fundraising Letters

As you can imagine, I blog about fundraising letters alot. Here are some of the more popular posts:

- [Throw Statistics Out of Your Fundraising Letters](#)
- [A 2-Step Fundraising Letter Audit](#)
- [Want to Drive Online Giving? Send a Fundraising Letter](#)
- [3 more contrarian tips for writing successful fundraising letters](#)