

14 Ways to Report Your Successes to Donors

by Kivi Leroux Miller

More than coffee mugs or certificates of appreciation, what donors to your nonprofit really want is to feel like they are changing the world with you. Here are 14 of my favorite ways to report back to donors on the good work that you've accomplished thanks to their generosity. I've included links to additional suggestions and examples.

1. Personal, friendly thank-you letters. This should always be your first response to a gift. Write your thank-you letters as one human to another—that's what you and your donors are after all, not 501c3s and ATMs! Good thank-you letters are part greeting card (friendly, sincere), part progress report (look at what we are doing with support from people like you) and part invitation (let's do even more together).

2. Photos in thank-you cards. Photos are incredibly powerful, especially close-ups. Tuck a positive photo or two (smiles are always good) into your thank-you letters for an extra dose of feel-good magic.

3. Donor-centered newsletters. Turn your ho-hum informational newsletter into a powerhouse of donor love by highlighting all the amazing work that your supporters make possible. Use the word "you" liberally, as in, "You saved the day."

4. Client or impact testimonials. Let the people who benefit most talk about your results. Donors love stories from the field, where they can see how their gift worked its magic through your organization to change the life of another real person. You can change the names or other identifying details to protect privacy if needed, but if you can use a real name and photo, all the better.

5. Dramatic stories. Tell us the emblematic story of your success. Human brains are wired for narrative. We all love a good story! Tell some stories that capture the drama and excitement of your work.

6. Time line or time lapse. Show big progress one step at a time. Much of the work nonprofits do day in and day out can get lost in the everyday shuffle. Take time to stop and map out just how much you've made happen.

7. Real-time dashboards. On the flip side, sometimes the pace of change is fast, and you can report back to donors in real-time (or close) with updated data on your website. If you have a results number that changes daily or weekly, add it to your homepage.

8. Before and afters. Nothing works better to show change than before and after photos and stories. But you need both! If you are good at documenting the need "before," be sure you document the success "after." If you are good at telling the happy conclusion of the story or project, be sure you also tell the story of how the work began.

9. Behind the scenes. Using video or great storytelling, take us behind the scenes where the real action is. Much of the work nonprofits do is in places that your average donor either can't go, or doesn't want to. But you can take them there virtually and help them understand the real impact of their gifts.

At a glance

Donors to your nonprofit want to feel that they are changing the world. Keep them posted on the impact they are helping you make with some of the following tools:

- **Thank-you** letters and photos that show specific impact
- Newsletters, testimonials, and dramatic stories that highlight the amazing differences supporters make in the world
- **Time lines**, "dashboards," and before/after shots that show, step-by-step or via real-time data, the impact being made
- Executive updates, improved, brief annual reports, and video annual reports that quickly tell your story
- Infographics and evaluation results that make data on impact and outcomes accessible

In this article, author and marketing consultant Kivi Leroux Miller describes these techniques and shares links to great examples.

10. Executive director updates. Invite your donors to “exclusive” conference calls with leadership. Treat them like the important, special partners they are.

11. Infographics. Find a talented graphic designer to turn your statistics into a visual that can be understood at a glance.

12. Results documented by outside evaluators. If your organization is evaluated by outside consultants or regulators, let your supporters know that you passed with flying colors. While they don't need to know the minutiae of these evaluations, donors do want to know they are supporting credible, well-run nonprofits.

13. “New and improved” annual reports. Go for a strong message in a short format. Instead of the traditional long, magazine style annual report, try a two or four-pager, or even an oversized postcard!

14. Video annual reports. Video is one of the most effective ways to share your story and your success with donors, because it allows you to speak with emotion in a way that text alone doesn't.

By sharing results and success stories with donors in plain English (no jargon) and by showing rather than just telling (with graphics, video or other visuals), you can reinforce that your supporters made the right choice by investing their time and money in you.



Kivi Leroux Miller is president of NonprofitMarketingGuide.com and author of *The Nonprofit Marketing Guide: High-Impact, Low-Cost Ways to Build Support for Your Good Cause*.

Links (for print readers)

Thank-you letters:

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources/articles/favorite-topics/nonprofit-thank-you-letters/>

Photos in thank-you cards:

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2012/02/23/now-thats-how-its-done-an-awesome-thank-you/>

Examples of dramatic success stories:

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources/category/storytelling/>

Example of great infographics:

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2012/05/29/infographics-data-visualization-not-your-grandmothers-pie-chart-part-1/>

Examples of nonprofit annual reports:

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources/articles/favorite-topics/nonprofit-annual-reports/>

Examples of nonprofit annual reports in video form:

<http://nonprofitannualreports.wikispaces.com/Video+Annual+Report>

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