

<Toolkit>

How to write a strong fundraising appeal

INDIAN OCEAN
BENGKULU CITY

- £9,720 will cover the cost of employing four new tiger rangers for a year.
- £87 is needed for field equipment for each tiger ranger - uniforms, sleeping bags, rucksacks, compasses, boots etc. £348 will fully equip all 4 rangers.
- £25,000 is needed to buy a Toyota Landcruiser which will enable us to transport injured tigers to medical care and to move predatory tigers away from villages.
- £400 will buy an aluminium cage to carry injured tigers out of the forest.

Two new off road motorbikes are needed for teams both east and west of the National Park to get quickly to places where poaching is reported. Total cost is £2,126.

You can see the outline of the National park here, it covers an area the size of Northern Ireland and we can only patrol about half of it at present. To recruit and fund enough rangers for the whole park for a year is a considerable cost.

...tigers and we have to respond quickly and effectively if all the good work we have done is not to be undone.

Poaching here is almost invariably through use of snares. You will understand that this is a practice that is totally indiscriminate; anything that passes through a snare line is caught.

If it is of value to the hunter the animal will be shot or speared to death. You can imagine the fear and agony of a shy forest animal surrounded by a group of men with spears. You know it is not going to die immediately. That's not a quick death, it is a terrifying death. At least the tiger hunters are usually armed and will shoot the snared tiger, which is hopefully quicker.

Other animals that have no immediate economic value, like the endangered Malay tapir, are often just left to die a horrible, lingering death.

We have seen what has happened to wild tigers in so many areas of the South East Asian mainland as a result of these international trafficking syndicates who are powering the trade in wild tigers.

We cannot and must not let the same happen to the 166 Sumatran tigers in this park and other tigers surviving in other protected areas.

As it stands, and because of FFI supporters like you, we have one of the world's rare tiger success stories - tiger numbers have been increasing and, estimated 10,000 or more in the protected areas.

to hear that our team - a full - has succeeded in stabilising

an increase in tiger numbers in protect wildlife on a regular

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you about show how important tools they need to do an often

ff-road vehicle not just for lose as possible to a conflict

<Name Surname
Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Address Line 3
Address Line 4
AB1 2CD

95p of every £1 donated goes on direct conservation.
No one spends more.

<Date>

£<target> appeal for funds to help thwart a new and major push by international wildlife crime syndicates to poach more Sumatran tigers. They have just doubled the price they're willing to pay per pelt - and this is leading to a dangerously increased poaching threat in Kerinci Seblat National Park, Sumatra - one of the world's most important tiger reserves. More than 166 tigers in the reserve are under threat.

Dear <personalised>
I'm writing to ask you to please send a donation of £<ask1> to Debbie Martyr's appeal to help protect the tigers in Kerinci Seblat National Park, Sumatra against a worsening poaching situation. Specifically, donations are needed to support an extra four man anti-poaching unit and to buy a Toyota off-road vehicle, two motorcycles and other essential specialist field equipment.

...really alarmed to hear from Debbie that there's been a recent surge in black market demand for Sumatran tigers and pelts. One recent patrol - launched after an undercover investigation - found eight active snares, the highest number of tiger snares found in one area since 2004.

...found in a new patrol area where hunters had not yet been deterred by anti-poaching patrols.

...ranger and equipment budget she is asking for is absolutely essential to support our anti-poaching dedicated to safeguarding the 166 remaining tigers in Kerinci Seblat National Park and other tigers bordering the park.

...remely modest about the protection scheme she set up in 2000, many believe tigers in Kerinci now be virtu... threats often long

...at the reason... have spotted... know the rea... help now to... gers in this p...

£<target> Sumatran Tiger Appeal - deadline <DATE>. A doubling in the price of tiger pelts has seriously increased the threat of poaching at one of the world's most important tiger strongholds - Kerinci Seblat National Park in Sumatra.

I can contribute towards funding four new tiger rangers, an off-road vehicle and other essentials to protect the 166 tigers at Kerinci Seblat National Park and other tigers around the park.

£<ask1> could help buy field equipment for <> tiger rangers - uniform, sleeping bag, rucksack, compass, boots etc.

£<ask2> would be a wonderful contribution towards the salary of <> tiger rangers.

£<ask3> could help us on the way to buying a long wheel base four-wheel drive vehicle, which can transport injured tigers to treatment and safety and get teams into the forest to prevent wildlife crime.

My choice of contribution is £ _____

£25,000 will buy the off road vehicle that is needed to transport patrol units to the forest and to move injured animals to safety. Significant contributions are sought to help us purchase this vehicle.

I enclose a cheque payable to Fauna & Flora International
OR Please debit my credit/debit card

Card type: Visa Amex Mastercard Maestro CAF

Card holder's name: _____

Card number: _____

Valid from: ____ / ____ / ____ Expiry date: ____ / ____ / ____

3 digit security number: ____ Issue number (Maestro only): ____

Signature(s): _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

95p of every £1 donated goes on direct conservation.
No one spends more.

<Name Surname
Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Address Line 3
Address Line 4
AB1 2CD>

mail address:
phone number: _____

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This toolkit provides a practical set of techniques and tips to help you get the most from your fundraising appeals – especially letters and emails with a call to action. These insights could help you gain higher response rates and average gifts from donors – and enable you to maximise the income from your appeals.

Introduction

The fundraising climate appears to be getting more challenging. Many charities are reporting diminishing returns from their appeals to supporters for one-off gifts (what we will call ‘cash appeals’). At ChangeStar however, we continue to see strong responses, and we wanted to share some of the insights that we think could help any charity to maintain or improve their results from cash appeals – and indeed, any other form of direct response fundraising appeal.

The aim of this toolkit is to give you some clear and practical ideas of how to put together a strong fundraising pack - with particular reference to copywriting. It provides 4 key principles of strong fundraising – authenticity, need, stories and call to action – as well as some further detailed practical insights to help you hone your craft.

Get in touch with us if you’d like to strengthen your fundraising appeals – contact Richard, our director, on richard@changestar.co.uk or on 01273 96418.

The knowledge base

Direct response fundraising is both an art and a science, and fundraisers have a vast knowledge base available to help them understand the principles of how to do their work most effectively.

This knowledge includes books such as [Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing](#) by Drayton Bird – the bible for direct response copywriting used by thousands of professionals over decades.

Our knowledge base also includes the insights from psychology and behavioural science as to how people think and behave, which remains a resource largely untapped by most charity fundraisers, but which should be the first port of call before trying to communicate with human beings effectively, in any form. A good introduction to this area for charities is [Change for Good](#) by Bernard Ross. Each of these books is highly recommended as a starting point.

1. Authenticity

The ChangeStar approach to direct fundraising from individuals is based on highly personalised mailings that are 'authentic' and therefore unlike other advertising that is sent through the post.

'Authentic' means that we try to produce mailings that are not like typical direct mail, which is a turn off to so many people. From our perspective, direct mail is not about advertising through the post but a genuine communication between one person and another person. So much direct mail is based around gimmicks and advertising concepts – for instance, coins attached to letters. But effective direct mail is not like billboard or TV advertising - it about a communication between two people.

When we personalise a communication, we help to increase its authenticity and sense of being a person-to-person communication. This in turn helps to both build better relationships and increase response levels.

There are a number of ways to personalise direct response communications, and the use of data and laser printed variable text can help to achieve this. For example:

- Personalising a paragraph in a main cover letter or email **to thank the supporter for their previous gifts**, but in a specific rather than generic way that shows the writer understands the ways in which they have supported the charity as an individual.
- Personalising the introduction to the main cover letter or email **to express why this particular ask or request will matter to the specific recipient**. This might relate to their source or fundraising history - for example, 'as someone who has given so much commitment and energy to fundraising for us in recent years, I thought you would be interested to hear about a way you could help us save lives for years to come'. Or it might reference a

topic that an individual has already responded to – for example, ‘I know this is something you care about greatly, as I recall you generously supported our cancer unit appeal last year’.

- **Ask amounts should be personalised according to a person’s previous giving history**, and based on a calculation so that they are appropriate for that individual, whilst asking them to optimise the amount they can donate. This means that each person gets an individual ask rather than a generic ask. Asks based on previous giving history bring higher average gifts than those without, and generic asks can often be wildly inaccurate and depress response. We pioneered this approach to personalised asks in the UK many years ago through another agency, TW CAT.

We have found that this personalised approach gives a dramatic uplift to income. Typically, we have seen our approach give an uplift in income of between 25% and 250% over a year.

Example – Fauna & Flora International – cash appeal



<Label name
Address1
Address2
Address3
Address4
Address5
AB1 2CD>

<Date>

URGENT FUNDING SHORTFALL – an important project has just lost some vital funding. The Marca’s marmoset and other rare species could suffer. Please donate £<Ask1> now to help protect them.

Dear <Salutation>,

I am afraid I have some worrying news. We have just lost some crucial funding for the Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP), a partnership of three organisations including Fauna & Flora International that supports vital conservation projects across the world. The programme helps to support the next generation of conservation leaders, enabling them to carry out groundbreaking projects saving habitats and protecting species.

Following decades of high impact work, CLP now faces a significant funding gap, which means that some of our most vital work with a wide range of highly threatened species is now in jeopardy.

As soon as I heard this news, my first thought was to get in touch with you to see if you could help. <As you have been such a committed supporter of our work, I am hoping you can join other supporters in making a gift of £<Ask1> or whatever you can afford today, that could help keep these vital projects going.> **Without your help, this recent development could spell disaster for some of the world’s rarest species and hold back the potential of the brightest prospects for the future of conservation.**

This extract from an appeal letter shows how the lasered variable text (in blue font) is used to personalise the message and ask levels for individual supporters. NB – the blue and magenta fonts are simply to identify lasered and variable text for the printer – the printed font is black.

2. Need and urgency

Showing a clear need for money is essential to any fundraising appeal. We need to highlight something (a project, piece of work or situation, such as a budget shortfall) that will matter to the donor - whether it's in helping the organisation they care about to survive, enabling a project that matters to them to go ahead or campaigning on an issue that they feel strongly about.

- **We need to get the reader to feel something strong inside** - a sense of injustice, fear, excitement - or any other strong feeling that will motivate them to take action.
- **Focus on the beneficiary** – probably the best way to activate this emotion is to focus your fundraising communication on the ultimate beneficiary of your work - e.g. cancer sufferers, abused animals.

A common mistake made in fundraising communications is to focus solely on the item that the charity is hoping to buy with the funds raised – for example, a new scanner for a hospital or new play equipment for children. It is important to mention the item, but it is even more important to focus on how the item will help the ultimate beneficiaries. What difference will the scanner make to patients' lives? How will the new play equipment help the children?

Example – Addenbrooke’s Charitable Trust – cash appeal



This appeal sought to raise money for a robot to help make surgery quicker and more efficient. Although we discussed the robot and its benefits in the appeal, we made sure the focus was on a person who would benefit from this need being met. The appeal smashed its target – and previous records for this charity.

- **Focus on single case studies** – a behavioural science principle that is quite well known but not always applied in fundraising is to focus on one key beneficiary case study rather than several. Readers are better able to empathise and connect with one person’s story than several, and adding more case studies increases the recipient’s cognitive effort and reduces their focus. Use one beneficiary to illustrate the need and the impact the donor’s help will make to their, and other people’s, lives.

Tangibility

The need not only needs to be urgent and obvious, but it needs to be made tangible for the potential donor - they need to see that the amount they

contribute can make a difference to the bigger picture. So, tangible and significant examples of how their gift can help beneficiaries are crucial. Include costs, pictures and examples where you can.

Urgency

Finding a sense of urgency is one of the biggest challenges in writing copy - giving the donor a sense that it not only matters that they give but that they do so now.

Make the donor the hero

You have presented something that urgently needs to happen in order for an important need to be met. You now need to make it clear that the donor is the person that can make the difference – they are the person that can make it happen. This gives them a sense of empowerment and agency, and that their donation will make a difference. It also suggests that the beneficiary depends on them to take action, and this can boost their motivation to do so.

Be honest

It's an obvious point but it needs stating. Not only do you have an obligation to be honest in your copy (to regulators, potential donors and as a member of an overtly value-led profession) but honesty also strengthens your copy, as it enables you to state things with greater strength and clarity. For example, when the 'important meeting' to decide budgets and work plans really is on the deadline that you mention in the letter, you can write with genuine conviction about the importance of this deadline.

3. Stories

We have already noted that the best way to build emotion and strengthen the need is to focus on the beneficiary. In turn, the best way to communicate both the need and its benefits to the beneficiary is to tell stories.

Stories are one of the oldest methods human beings have used to communicate with each other, and they are also one of the most effective. They enable us to distil all the detailed messages and ideas we want to get across into one simple tale, filtering them through the experiences of another human being. This then allows the natural empathy, compassion and fellow humanity of the readers to do all the work in interpreting this information, and activates their all-important emotional response to it. **And emotions are all important because they are what creates action in the recipient.**

So, tell a story in your fundraising appeal. Use a real story of a real person if you can to illustrate the need and how a donation could help this beneficiary, or someone like them. Use emotional language, and feel free to include relevant details that help to boost the emotion of the story.

Sourcing stories

As you can see from the above points, the supply of materials, stories and tangible examples of the need plays a crucial role in being able to put together a strong pack. Photographs can also bring a story – and a person - to life.

It is extremely difficult to produce a good pack with very little material, a weak need or a lack of case studies. Your fundraising team therefore needs to be geared up to source these materials on an ongoing basis so that there are enough to cover your fundraising communications for each year, and so that the case studies for each appeal are strong and relevant illustrations of both its theme and its ask. For example, in a regular giving conversion appeal on the theme of

ongoing cancer care, you need an example of someone who has experienced this care over a period of time, and to illustrate the idea that ongoing support is vital to help people like this.

An important operational recommendation is therefore to make sure you plan the themes of your fundraising communications in advance before the year begins, so that your team can begin the process of sourcing the best possible materials and case studies for each one. This early planning also helps you to build a narrative of stories and communications over the year that is focussed on the donor, and makes sense as a journey you are taking them on over the year.

Example – Blue Cross – cash appeal

Now she needs your help to have a happier future

Eleven is brought to us, emaciated and extremely underweight

Elena takes Eleven home and keeps an eye on her through the night

Eleven loses a lot of weight in 24 hours – it's touch and go

We rush Eleven to the vet and she is put on a drip

After two days, Eleven pulls through

We give Eleven medication for her poorly tummy

Thanks to special food, Eleven begins to put on weight

Now Eleven needs a place she can call home

You could help give kittens like Eleven the emergency care they need

This is an extract from a leaflet in a Blue Cross cash appeal that focussed on the story of Eleven – a cat who had been rescued and now needs a home. We told her story in a range throughout the pack, and used a timeline device to show its milestones, extending to the future with the hope of a safe, loving new home.

4. Call to action

Like all the topics covered in this toolkit, we could explore the art of the call to action in a great deal of detail here, but we only have the space to include a few examples. If you would like to take a deeper dive into this, and the other points in this toolkit, get in touch with us about our **training workshops**, including ‘**How to write a strong fundraising appeal**’, which builds on the principles in this toolkit. Contact us at richard@changestar.co.uk or on **01273 96418** for details.

As you may have noticed, the box above is an example of a call to action!

The call to action in a direct response communication refers to a range of factors that guide the prospective donor towards the response device(s) and then enable them to respond easily and quickly. It includes what you're actually asking the person to do, the ways you're giving them to respond and how you're presenting these. Every detail of this can (and should) be tested in order to optimise them and get the best results possible.

This is particularly important at this point of the prospective donor's decision process. Your fundraising communication may have built their emotions and motivated them to the brink of taking action, but if the call to action isn't presented correctly, you may lose someone who would have otherwise donated.

Below are some features of the call to action that you need to pay attention to. Some of these principles may sound basic but you'd be amazed at how many charities get this wrong.

The ask (what you're asking the person to do) needs to be:

- **Appropriate** - for the audience, and ideally for the individual. This includes personalising the ask for each person based on what they've given in the past so that we ask them for the optimum amount.
- **Clear** - it needs to be obvious what you want people to do. Be clear and

- specific - 'Please send us a donation of £25 today'. Not 'we'd love it if you could help'.
- Focused - don't give them too many options, as this can dilute the response you'd get to each ask. Be focussed and single-minded in what you're asking for – e.g. a one-off donation. Not 'one off donation or regular gift'.


The response method (the means by which you're asking them to respond - website, donation form etc.) needs to be:

- Appropriate - for example, if your audience is old, you might want to give them more options than just replying via SMS.
- Clear - it needs to be obvious how people should respond - via donation form etc. It also needs to be obvious where the response mechanism is.
- Easy – don't make them hunt around for an envelope and a stamp!

The response mechanism (the actual item you're providing them to respond) needs to be:

- Appropriate - e.g. larger text on a donation form for an older audience.
- Clear - show them step-by-step what they need to fill in and make it clear, simple and obvious. Design can really help with this.
- Easy - make it easy for them to take the action - from filling in a pledge form to making a donation. Ask for the minimum level of information in order to make online donation forms quick and easy to complete.

Example – Education Support – legacy appeal



<Label Name
Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Address Line 3
Address Line 4
Postcode>

<Supporter Number>
<Source code>

Will you leave a legacy of learning to create an inspiring future for teachers and children? Please let us know your plans.

We don't know what the future will bring, but we do know that teachers and support staff will always need practical help to overcome the enormous pressures of their profession. By knowing we have funds in place, we can be ready to support education staff wherever the need is greatest. That's why it's vital that we know your thoughts about leaving a gift in your will to Education Support.

Please tell us your plans below. We'd also love to hear what drives your passion for education and what you'd like to see in the future of the sector. Please use the back of this sheet if you'd like to share your thoughts.

Yes, I'm thinking about leaving a gift in my will to Education Support.
We're so grateful that you're thinking of supporting us in this way. Would you like any more information about the difference you could make?

Please send me some more information about leaving a gift in my will to Education Support..

Please call me to discuss gifts in wills. My number is: _____

I have already decided to leave a gift in my will to Education Support but have not yet completed the paperwork.


I have already left a gift in my will to Education Support.

I'm not thinking of including Education Support in my will at the moment.

**Please return your completed form in the enclosed envelope to: Freepost Plus
RRZY-HEJU-EGJA, Education Support Partnership, 40A Drayton Park, London N5 1EW.**

Let's keep in touch!
If you would like to change how we contact you, please email fundraising@edsupport.org.uk or call Laura Larrett on 020 7697 2766. We promise never to sell or swap your details. You can find out how we collect and manage personal information at www.educationsupport.org.uk/privacy-policy

Education Support is a registered charity no. 104436

 Registered with
FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR

This is a pledge form for a legacy mailing for Education Support. Note how simple the form is and how your attention is drawn to the highlighted box, with our preferred course of action. Each aspect of the call to action is highlighted or in bold, including the return address and the need to put the form in the enclosed postage paid return envelope.

Some other principles

In this section are a number of other practical principles that are highly effective in building response rates and average gifts.

Main covering letter

- **Letter length** - in tests, we have found that longer letters (say of 4 pages) tend to do better than shorter ones (say of 2 pages) but this is not necessarily a rule to apply every time. Sometimes it may be more appropriate to use a short letter - such as in an urgent shortfall appeal. So, the rule here (and in everything else relating to creative development) is to do what's most appropriate for the topic, need and target audience in each case.
- **Early ask and statement of need** - setting up the ask early (often in the main headline) gets to the point immediately, so that the donor is aware from the start what is going to be asked of them.
- **Repetition of ask and need** - the ask is then repeated throughout the letter to keep the donor focussed on the point of the letter, so that they cannot avoid the 'call to action' (i.e. to fill out the donation form) at the end.

The ask is not repeated in isolation however - each time it is repeated, the need is repeated, so that this is also becomes imprinted on the donor's mind by the end of the letter. The need can be articulated in different ways throughout the letter so that it builds a case for this overall need - so, at one point it might say '£x will help us buy leaflets to seek new members' as an example of the need and a later point might note '£x will help us lobby the government on climate change' - both of which build the overall need for funds for a project to build the organisation's infrastructure.

The very minimum you want a reader to take from a letter is that there is an urgent need for funding for something, what that thing is, and that you are asking them personally for money. Repetition aims to ensure that these points are the key things the donor remembers - even if they remember nothing else.

- **Underlining and bolding** - this can break up text and guide people's eyes to key messages, such as the ask itself.
- **Deadline** - a deadline reinforces the urgency of the ask and turns this into a real issue for the recipient, rather than an abstract ask: 'we need money by x date'. It also makes them more likely to respond straight away rather than put the letter aside to reply to later (which often gets forgotten, despite people's best intentions). A deadline works especially well if there is a good, relevant reason for the deadline, such as a forthcoming meeting where you'll be deciding on plans for the next year.
- **PS** – this should be used to reinforce the need, ask and urgency outlined in the letter.

Supporting materials and lift letters

Supporting materials (including lift letters and booklets) can play an important role in reinforcing the need and ask made by the main letter. Again, the type of supporting materials to use would depend on the circumstances of the appeal. It is often useful however to have reinforcement of the ask/need from different spokespeople - e.g. an expert on the topic under discussion, someone representing the audience (such as a businessman if you are writing to a HV cold list), and other people - whatever is relevant and appropriate to the appeal topic, need and audience.

Response form

Your potential donor has made it to the donation form, so they want to respond. Don't lose them at this stage by making it hard to respond - make it as clear and as easy as possible for them to do so. Make the donation options obvious. Don't give too many options. Make the form clear and simple.

Also, reinforce the ask and need and use personalisation to remind the reader you are asking them directly.

Reply envelope

This is another element that helps to make it as easy as possible for people to respond. You need to get the recipient to open the letter in the first place, so it needs to look like something worth opening.

People receive a lot of mail from organisations and charities, and we all vet our post into 'junk' and 'need to open' piles. Just because your logo is on the front or you've printed the word 'urgent' on it, it doesn't automatically mean they will want to open it - if it looks like a circular, they are more likely to bin it.

As a general rule we've therefore found blank envelopes with live stamps to be more successful than other approaches, because they look less like junk mail and more like personal mail and as a result are more likely to be opened. There are other ways you can enhance this personal feel - for example, by using a lasered handwriting font for the name and address on the outer.

The evidence

The ideas above are a mix of generally available direct marketing knowledge, behavioural science and evidence we have collected over 30 years of testing and success in fundraising. One of the advantages of this form of fundraising is that one can test the minutiae of packs to ensure that one gets the best results - for example, testing a pack with a blank, hand stamped outer envelope against one with a printed PPI on it.

Here's a quick example of the success of our approach. For one charity we took part in a year-long split test with another agency. The client split their donor base into two randomly distributed halves, and one half of their donors received our mailings, whilst the other half received mailings from the other agency.

After a year, the donors ChangeStar had mailed had given **more than twice** the amount of money than those who had received mailings from the other agency.

Summary

A quick recap on the 4 key insights:

1. Authenticity
2. Need
3. Stories
4. Call to action

More information and next steps

We hope you have found this toolkit useful. If you have, please feel free to share it with your colleagues and networks - both online and in person.

ChangeStar provides creative, consultancy, training and coaching to help good causes achieve greater impact. We have particular pedigree in Individual Giving and can build creative for appeals that get great results, or help you strengthen your team's skills to get better results from in-house fundraising appeals. To find out more, contact Richard, our director, on richard@changestar.co.uk or on **01273 96418**.

If you have any questions, want to find out more or want to see how ChangeStar can help you with any aspect of your fundraising, please contact Richard, our director, on richard@changestar.co.uk or on 01273 96418. We'd be pleased to arrange an initial meeting with you free of charge, to discuss where you're at.

Finally, you'll find lots of videos and articles giving advice on all areas of fundraising and seeking change – from writing strategies to developing successful appeals – on our website at www.changestar.co.uk. While you're there you can sign up to our occasional newsletter to receive news of our other free resources, including our regular free online workshops.