

4 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

OF

EFFECTIVE DONOR MAIL

LTR

BRE

RD

OE





Overview

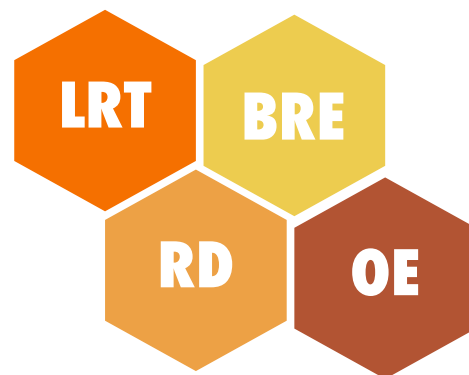
Pulling off a successful donor mailing can be a challenge. It's tempting to send emails rather than fuss with donor mail design, list formatting, postage rates and printer pricing. But that would be a rookie mistake.

Research on average response rates shows that the best-performing fundraising campaigns integrate print mail with digital tactics like email, web and social media.

- 0.06% email
- 5.35% donor mail
- 27% integrated campaign

These are just averages. Response rates for donor mail often go higher when there's good data hygiene and a nonprofit mails only its active donors. But what's clear is that if you have to choose just one tactic, it's donor mail that gets the biggest reaction.

Every fundraising mailing you do should have at least 4 elements: the letter (LTR), response device (RD), business reply envelope (BRE) and outer envelope (OE).



The Letter



Your letter should always be from one person involved with your organization to one donor or their family.

People of all ages still view and read letters that come to their mailboxes, as if they were written by a friend. And you are their friend. Speak to them in that voice.

best practices

- ✓ Tell donors and prospects about your program
- ✓ Tell them about problems you can solve together
- ✓ Add urgency
- ✓ Always have someone proofread your letter
- ✓ How long? As long as it takes to make a compelling case



Pro Tip: If you're not an experienced fundraising writer, hire someone to write it for you. You'll know right away if they know what they're doing if they include a P.S. or postscript.

The P.S. is usually what people read first.



Response Device

The response device is a coupon that your donor uses to return their donation. RDs are usually pre-personalized, both with a donor's full address, as well as a few other items that will help you with the appeal.

best practices

Never send donor mail without a tracking code. This helps you know exactly what tactic the donor responded to. A tracking code also tells you what worked, what didn't and what you can do better next year.

The best mail codes follow a pattern that is easy for you to understand such as:

D918B

- D = existing donor
- N = non-donor
- 9 = September (mailing month)
- 18 = 2018 (mailing year)
- A = First letter version
- B = Second letter version

Use as many letters of the alphabet as you have versions and tests. You can also use this part of the code to differentiate newsletter mailings, monthly appeals, end-of-year campaign materials and more!



Pro Tip

A good response device takes away “stoppers.” That’s the moment that stops a donor from writing a check or reaching for their credit card. Instead, they say “I’ll do all this later.”

- Minimize anything that the donor has to handwrite.
- Encourage online giving with a simple web address.

Business Reply Envelope



Don't make a donor look for their own envelope – and think about paying for their postage, too. A BRE has the “postage will be paid by addressee” artwork and your organization's address.

The post office provides artwork that complies with their standards. If donors stamp over this pre-paid information, you can receive credit back from the post office.

How to set up a pre-paid BRE account:

- ✓ [Apply for a USPS permit](#)
- ✓ Establish & fund a Postage Due Account
- ✓ Require the post office deduct 1st-class postage
- ✓ Pay a small USPS processing fee

Know Your Terms

CRE is an envelope that is pre-addressed to your organization, but doesn't have pre-paid postage.



Pro Tip

Put a tracking code on your BRE or CRE, and make sure this inner envelope fits neatly inside the outer envelope. People often return checks or cash without a response device. In order to know how many people responded, you need to have a code that ties these gifts back to the appeal.



The Outer Envelope

The outer envelope is arguably the most critical part of an appeal. Professional fundraisers constantly think of new ways to get people to open the envelope, instead of setting it aside or recycling it immediately.

best practices

Your envelope doesn't have to be fancy, colorful or even pretty. But it does need to be compelling. A good way to do this is to use a "teaser."

Check inside for an amazing story!

Matching gift opportunity enclosed!

This girl is smiling because of you!



Pro Tip: What you wrote in the P.S. of your letter is good content to think about re-purposing for your outer envelope teaser.

Donor mail doesn't have to be challenging. With these 4 elements in mind, you can tackle your next mailing with confidence – and build donor relationships that last a lifetime.



Sources:

Data & Marketing Association: <https://thedma.org>

M+R Benchmarks Report: <https://mrbenchmarks.com/#!/key-findings>

Mobile Cause: <https://www.mobilecause.com/direct-mail-fundraising/>

USPS: <https://pe.usps.com/MailpieceDesign/Index?ViewName=BRMPermitNumber>