

Fundraising Letters

Below are a few guidelines for writing effective fundraising letters for cash or material (in-kind) donations.

1. Writing Style:

- a. Keep it simple.** Use short sentences and simple language (avoid academic and movement-specific language).
- b. Avoid jargon and catch phrases.** A well-written and concise letter will allow the recipient to form their own opinion.
- c. Tell compelling stories** that will help the recipient identify with your work and that will appeal to them emotionally. Avoid boring details (specific aspects about the budget, dates, unnecessary information, etc.).
- d. Make your letter easy to read** by using wide margins, a simple font, and short paragraphs (3-4 sentences).
- e. Keep in mind the person you are writing to.** Try to write to people you have a personal relationship with.
- f. Speak to the recipient:** The recipient will be reading your letter on their own time; address it to them and make it interesting and personal. If you succeed, they will donate their own money to your cause. Make sure you acknowledge their previous donations/contributions and refer to their past support often.
- g. Judge your use of informal language** depending on the relationship with the recipient. As a general rule of thumb, informal language is better. However, when writing to a professor, politician, or other professional, use your best judgment.
- h. Don't overuse exclamation points!** Your content should speak loudly enough.

2. Structure:

The average reader of a fundraising letter will read the opening, closing, and postscript of the letter. Make sure these parts stand-alone and that the rest of your letter makes sense if it were to be skimmed by a reader (which it most likely will be). Use bold font as necessary.

- a. Opening Paragraph:** Begin with a story or anecdote that will set the tone and introduce a problem or a problem/solution. Make it personal and/or about real people.

b. Body: Elaborate as much as possible with stories about the work that YAYA has done. The more content, the more evidence of YAYA's continued efforts. Stress the need for funds to achieve your specific goal.

Use bullet points to make information clear and concise, while also filling up space. Remember you want to show that YAYA has done a lot.

Think about your recipient and what information they may wish to learn from the letter. Constantly involve the recipient (mention past contributions, topical issues, shared values, etc.).

c. Closing: The closing should be straightforward and to the point. *"Please don't delay in sending your tax-deductible contribution. We are relying on your support to continue our solidarity work with farm workers. Thank you,"*

d. Postscript: Remember that most people will definitely read the PS. Include a pertinent story that solidifies the urgency of your ask. *"The holidays can be the hardest time for many immigrant farm workers who are working far away from their families. Don't forget about their sacrifice; help us reach our goal by Christmas!"*

You may also choose to include some type of incentive like, *"Send us your contribution before June 19th and we will send you two complimentary tickets to YAYA's Annual End of Summer Raffle."*

e. Reply Card: A small reply card with suggested donation amounts and YAYA's contact information should always be included. It could say something like, *"Count me in!"* or *"I want to help. Please accept my donation of ___\$20 ___\$35 ___\$50 ___\$100 ___\$250 ___\$500"*



3. Proofreading:

Always have someone proofread your document for spelling and typos. Grammar should be considered only when it affects the readability of the letter. Try to find someone outside of YAYA who can proofread the letter and offer feedback about the content. If available, students can take advantage of their university's writing center.

If proofreading your own letter or the letter of a fellow YAYA member, ask yourself the following questions to filter out unnecessary content:

a. So What?

Why is your message important? Does the content of the letter convey an imperative or a concrete need? If so, does it speak to the recipient's own needs? Is the message relevant compared to what's happening in the recipient's life? How does YAYA's message correlate to the struggles happening in your recipient's community? The current political environment? The state of world affairs? These concerns affect everyone to different degrees. Your message will compete or cooperate with other needs/causes. Your message must be urgent and relative.

b. Now What?

What has YAYA done, or is planning to do, to address these needs? How has the recipient helped in the past and how can they help now? Good fundraising letters should ping-pong between posing problems and proposing solutions/offering more information/creating confidence in YAYA. Include past projects of YAYA and past support from the recipient.

4. Other Tips

- If someone in your group knows the recipient personally, have them write a personal note above the formal letter.
- Avoid brightly colored paper.
- Fold your letter so that the opening paragraph is visible from the outside.
- Consider your timing. November/December is always a good time because people are in a "giving mood." Some studies suggest that Tuesday arrivals provide the best results.