

FRACTURED ATLAS

Guidebook

FUNDRAISING APPEALS

HOLIDAY/END OF YEAR APPEALS

FUNDRAISING BASICS

What is a fundraising appeal anyway?

A **fundraising appeal** (or donor appeal) is a direct, persuasive, and engaging email or letter that directly asks an individual to donate to your project. It also provides a deadline for the donor, a suggested donation amount, and specific instructions for how to give.

Why should I write an appeal?

Let's follow the first rule of appeal writing, and not bury the lede. **You need money.** And like artists everywhere, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art to your local community theater, you're going to need the support of individual donors to make art happen. Many donors are ready and willing to support artists and arts organizations, especially if they can get a tax receipt thanks to either your own nonprofit status or **your fiscal sponsor.**

***Fiscal Sponsorship** allows individual artists and arts organizations to leverage some of the benefits of another nonprofit's tax-exempt status to access discounted space, solicit tax-deductible donations, and apply for funding from corporations and foundations. To learn more about Fractured Atlas's program, head to [this page!](#) For a database of fiscal sponsors across the US, check out the [National Network of Fiscal Sponsors.](#)*

OK, that all sounds fine, but I was planning on just applying to a bunch of grants!

We get it. Many artists are understandably squeamish about asking individuals for money. However, individual donors are going to be **one of your most important sources of revenue, especially if you're just getting started**. In fact, many grant funders will want to see that you have a significant amount of seed funding from individuals before considering you as a competitive applicant.

***Helpful Hint:** This actually is why Fractured Atlas has a grant eligibility requirement in place, asking that projects raise at least \$1,000 before applying for grants. To learn more about why this is in your best interest as an applicant, check out [this article](#).*

However, don't be nervous! **Grant applications can be complicated, frustrating, and can require a great deal of work for a small award, but individual fundraising is often as easy as writing a well-worded email.** People like to support art they see as valuable. From the Renaissance to Patreon, people have enjoyed supporting artists whom they admire and want to see grow. Remember that you are **not** begging for money. You are inviting the donor to be a part of something exciting: your project!

Activity: Mapping Your Network

In one sentence why should donors give to your project?

Write down 3 people near and dear to you (such as your best friend, your mom, your mentor) who could become potential donors.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Write down 3 former or current collaborators who could become potential donors.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Write down 3 people who have engaged with your work, but whom you do not yet know well who could become potential donors.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now that I've mapped my network, how do I write a strong appeal letter?

Let's take a look at what separates the strong appeals from the ones that get archived after a 15 second skim.

7 Habits of Highly Effective Donor Appeals:

- Direct, clear, and concise
- Positive—an invitation to be a part of an exciting artistic endeavor
- Donor-focused
- Important sections are **boldfaced** or in *italics*
- When appropriate, uses bullets, numbers, or other ways of breaking up the copy
- Includes a specific ask amount and a suggested deadline for donations
- Easy-to-understand donation instructions

7 Habits of Appeals Headed for the Recycling:

- Beats around the bush, cagey about asking for money
- Overwritten or lengthy
- A cry for help that stresses financial hardship or catastrophe
- Highlights only the artist's vision, and does not mention the donor's impact
- A giant wall of text with no boldface or italics
- Does not include an ask amount or a donation deadline
- When, how, or how much to give is unclear

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

All of our donor appeal guides have three sections. Here's how to use them effectively:

1. **Before You Write:** This section will ask you questions about the **what, who, when, why, and how** of your appeal. Though this guide offers you customized templates, most successful pieces of writing do not come from simply plugging details into a pre-written formula. Ask any hiring manager who has thrown away countless generic cover letters!
2. **Real-World Examples:** Examples of strong appeals, written by real arts organizations and artists on our staff.
3. **Customized Templates:** Each topic will come with a customized template, which you can use to write your own appeal!

In each “**Before You Write**” section, you’ll be asked the following questions:

What?

What kind of appeal are you crafting? A Crowdfunding Launch announcement? A Gala invitation? Your annual new year’s ask letter?

Who?

This is maybe the most important factor. Who are you writing to? How well do you know them? Have they given to your project before? What is their **capacity**? Part of writing a **donor-focused** appeal is knowing your audience. The more you can personalize the appeal by emphasizing your donor’s role in your project, the more successful your appeal will be. Remember, you’re not writing a grant application, or pitching your new idea to a potential producer—you’re reaching out to an individual who wants to know how **they** fit into the picture.

Capacity is a donor's ability to give based on their connection to your cause, their philanthropic propensity (do they give to other nonprofits, or sit on the board of another group?), and their wealth markers (for example, how much is their house worth on Zillow?).

When?

Timing is everything! **When are you sending out this appeal, given your current fundraising circumstances?** By when do you need this donor to give? Are you working with a tangible deadline, such as a crowdfunding campaign end date? What time of year is it, and what else could be going on in the donor's life? For example, summer tends to be a bad time to send fundraising appeals, as many donors are on vacation.

Why?

Obviously, you are writing because you want the donor to give. But appeals are not just about getting a quick buck—they are about **donor cultivation**. What type of relationship are you trying to create with this individual? Is there anything that you want from them besides a monetary donation, such as attendance at an event, volunteer labor, or noncash gifts such as food?

Donor cultivation is the process of creating and growing relationships with your supporters so that they become invested in the work that you create. Donor events, galas, monthly newsletters, and social media shout outs are all different ways to make your donors feel like they are a part of something. We also recommend taking individual donors out for coffee, hearing their thoughts on your work, and asking them for their

advice—this can often lead to them connecting you to even more potential supporters!

How?

How do you plan to send out this appeal? What does this method of delivery say about your relationship with the donor and the image of your project that you are trying to present?

Beating writer's block is as easy as 1-2-3...

1. Use these guiding questions to brainstorm the Who, What, When, Why, and How of your appeal.
2. Check out our real-world examples to get a sense of what yours should look like.
3. Use our customized template to get started on your own appeal.

HOLIDAY/END OF YEAR APPEALS: Before You Write

What?

Context, context, context. Know what you are writing before you sit down with your laptop.

- ❑ A **Holiday/End of Year Appeal** is a written “ask” sent by snail mail or email during the holidays, or near the end of the year. This is when many donors make charitable gifts and/or try to max out their yearly tax deductions. It’s a great time of year to capitalize on the desire to support charitable organizations, like your project!

- ❑ This is also a chance for you to share your accomplishments over the course of the year with your network. However, be sure to keep the appeal **donor-focused**. Instead of turning this into a resume or a grant application, write about how your supporters impacted your work, how your work has impacted them, and how they can make an impact in the coming year!

Who?

Identify your audience before you write.

- Is this **an email blast** or a **more personal appeal to a single donor**?
 - Email Blast
 - Personal Appeal

- If you are writing to one specific donor, how well do you know them?
Check all that apply!
 - Never met
 - Distant acquaintance
 - Friend-of-a-friend
 - Acquaintance

- Friend
- Collaborator or former collaborator
- Fellow artist
- Coworker or boss
- Close friend
- Family member
- Other _____

Helpful Hint: *It's generally best to send your holiday appeal out to people who have given to or engaged with your project in some way already. People tend to prioritize causes they're already familiar with during the holidays, so this isn't the best time to reach out to that friend of your aunt's who you've never spoken to.*

- Do you know which (if any) holidays they typically celebrate? Jot them down here, if so.

- Have they given to you before? If so, when was the last time they engaged with your organization? **Did they give last holiday season?**

- What is their socioeconomic background?
 - Working Class
 - Lower-Middle Class
 - Middle Class
 - Upper-Middle Class
 - Wealthy

When?

This is the key element for these appeals! Every nonprofit will be sending out holiday “asks” so be sure to time yours carefully.

- Do you want to send this out on **#GivingTuesday** (the Tuesday after Thanksgiving)? This can be a great way to boost donations, as many donors are primed to give on this day, but you’ll also be competing with every other nonprofit.
- Is there a particular holiday you are anticipating? When do Christmas and Hanukkah occur in relation to one another? Are you doing a pre-New Year’s Eve blast? An Alternative Black Friday campaign? Tailoring your appeal to a specific holiday could be strategic, depending on your project.

Helpful Hint: *Be aware that many folks will not be checking emails during the actual holidays. Start sending your appeals a few days to a few weeks before the actual holiday, as people may be less willing to give the day of.*

Why?

What do you want from this donor? Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- **How much** do you want them to give? Is this a smaller (\$25-\$100) donation? Does this donor have the capacity for a larger gift? Decide this before you craft the letter, and then add a **target ask amount**.

My **Holiday Fundraising Goal** is \$_____

The **number of donations** I expect to receive during is _____

Some hints about my donor's **capacity** (could include past gifts, home value, wealth markers) are _____

My ask amount is \$_____

Helpful Hint: *Including a specific ask amount in your appeal is a fundraising best practice. While you may feel nervous about doing so, this is a helpful guideline for your donor and a development norm! It's important to do research on your donor, and their capacity, in order to determine an appropriate ask.*

- What personal connection does this donor have to you and/or your project?

- Are there other ways that they can support, in addition to making a monetary gift?

➤ Are there any holiday events that your group is doing, that you would like to promote?

➤ What are **three of your biggest achievements** from the past calendar year?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

➤ How did your donors help you accomplish the above goals?

➤ What's next for your project in the coming year? Write down three things you're planning, even if they are in the early stages!

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How?

How does this appeal get from your laptop to the donor?

- Are you sending this appeal via **email or snail mail**?
 - Email
 - Mail
 - Other _____

Helpful Hint: This will depend on your donor! For a massive blast, email is preferable. If you're reaching out to a single donor, snail mail may be best. You know your donors best. If you are using snail mail, be sure to plan ahead and send the appeal early in the holiday season.

Other things to keep in mind:

- The holidays can be a complicated and loaded time. From people feeling isolated from their communities to rehashing potentially toxic dynamics at home, the November-January 1st stretch can be tough for a lot of people! Keep this in mind while crafting your appeals.
- Be aware of the way that systemic oppression plays into how we view the holidays. Be conscious of the oppressive history of Thanksgiving, the way that Christian hegemony causes us to deprioritize other religious holidays, and how consumerism shapes the way that we celebrate. **Obviously, you cannot possibly fix these structural problems in an appeal**, but it's good to keep them in mind as you ask your network for money.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: END OF YEAR APPEAL

Context: *You Sound Like a Girl*, a devised theatre project, is at the end of its first year of existence. Colleen, the director, is sending out a mass end of year appeal to everyone who donated to their big crowdfunding campaign over the summer.

Hello!

Thank you for supporting You Sound Like a Girl in 2018! Thanks to support like yours we were able to:


1. Spend a week as resident artists at the Dragon's Egg, developing and writing You Sound Like a Girl.
2. Devise, rehearse, and perform the original You Sound Like a Girl script to sold out audiences.
3. Bring the You Sound Like a Girl workshop and performance to 185 high school girls at the Albany Academy for girls.

Next year, we will be embarking on an NYC remount and further development of You Sound Like a Girl, as well as more school visits and partnerships. With your support, we will be able to compensate our artists, rent a Manhattan theater, build our set and add video projections, and bring You Sound Like a Girl to more women and girls across New York City.

With the holidays right around the corner, **I am asking you to add You Sound Like a Girl to your year end giving.** I am so thankful that you are a part of the You Sound Like a Girl community and hope that you'll give thanks with us this year by donating in support of You Sound Like a Girl.

You can donate now by:

1. Making a one-time credit card donation by [clicking here](#).

2. Making a monthly donation by [clicking here](#).
3. Donating by check by making the check out to Fractured Atlas with You Sound Like a Girl in the Memo Line and then sending the check to 

Don't let the holidays breeze by, make sure to donate today to support You Sound Like a Girl. I look forward to seeing you next year at a future performance or school visit, and hope you have a very happy holiday!

Sincerely,

Colleen E. Hughes

Director and Creator

You Sound Like a Girl

TEMPLATE: END OF YEAR APPEAL

Hello **[Donor Name]**!

Thank you for supporting **[your project]** in **[the last year, e.g. 2019]**! Last year, thanks to your help, we were able to:

1. **[List an accomplishment from the past year]**
2. **[List an accomplishment from the past year]**
3. **[List an accomplishment from the past year]**

Next year, we will be embarking on **[describe any upcoming projects and/or your goals for the coming year]**. With your support, we will be able to **[describe how you will use the funds, e.g. “we will pay our incredible artists,” or “we’ll complete our move to a bigger, better venue”]**

With the holidays right around the corner, I am asking you to add **[project name]** to your year-end giving. I am so thankful that you are a part of the **[project name]** community and hope that you’ll give thanks with us this year by donating in support of **[project name]**.

You can donate now by:

1. Visiting our website **[include the domain]** and making a credit card donation.
2. Sending us a check by mail at **[include address--if you are fiscally sponsored, this should be Fractured Atlas’s address!]** **[If you are fiscally sponsored]** Please make sure your check is made out to our fiscal sponsor, Fractured Atlas, with **[project name]** in the memo line!

This past year has gone by fast, and holidays will go by even faster! **[Donor name]** can we count on you to make a \$50 gift to **[Project Name]** today? ***[This is the crucial “ask” so you may want to bold it, underline it, highlight it--make it noticeable! Your donor may spend less than 30 seconds looking at your appeal, so make sure they at least see this!]***

I look forward to seeing you next year at the **[xyz event/project activities]**, and hope you have a very happy holiday!

Sincerely,

[Your full name]

[Your relationship to the project]

[Your project’s full name]

*Helpful Hint: **Bold will be your best friend!** Remember to put the most **important lines** (such as your “ask” and your donation deadline) in **boldface!** The donor will likely skim this letter, so you want them to see the most **crucial bits of information** first.*

What’s next?

Get out there, use this guide, share your vision, and find supporters. Your network is full of people who want to be a part of your work!

Thanks for supporting our Workbook series. [Fractured Atlas](#) helps individual artists and arts organizations at every level of the cultural ecosystem, in every creative medium, through several programs. Let us help you [raise funds](#), [find space](#), [sell tickets](#), and [track fans](#).