



FRACTURED ATLAS

Guidebook

FUNDRAISING APPEALS

CROWDFUNDING 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 templates to get started on your own appeal.

CROWDFUNDING APPEALS: Before You Write

What?

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

- ❑ A **Crowdfunding Appeal** is any type of ask sent to donors during the duration of a crowdfunding campaign

*A **Crowdfunding Campaign** is a targeted fundraising sprint, often centered on a specific issue, goal, or venture, that centers on a set deadline and a finite goal amount. Crowdfunding has become ubiquitous due to the success of sites like Kickstarter, IndieGoGo, and more recently Facebook's fundraising tool. Fractured Atlas fiscally sponsored projects can run crowdfunding campaigns through our platform, Fundraising by Fractured Atlas, which was designed specifically to integrate with fiscal sponsorship. For more information about crowdfunding vs. general fundraising, you can check out [this article](#) on our blog!*

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, what is your relationship to them?

- Never met
- Distant acquaintance
- Friend-of-a-friend
- Acquaintance
- Friend
- Collaborator or former collaborator
- Fellow artist
- Coworker or boss
- Close friend
- Family member
- Other _____

➤ How much and how frequently have they given to your project in the past?

Number of times they've given: _____

Largest donation to date: \$_____

Total Amount Donated: \$_____

- How likely do you think they are to give to the campaign? Circle one!
- **Unlikely** (Someone you don't have any regular contact with, has little connection to your project, or does not often support the arts)
 - **Longshot** (This person could donate, but they likely don't have a strong connection to you or your project)
 - **Probable** (This person has a reasonable connection to your project or to you, and could donate)

- **Likely** (This person has a strong connection to you or your project and is likely to donate)
- **Sure thing** (Someone who is a part of your “nearest and dearest” or who has already confirmed that they will give!)

➤ What is their socioeconomic background?

- Working Class
- Lower-Middle Class
- Middle Class
- Upper-Middle Class
- Wealthy

When?

Timing matters! Here are some optimal times to send a donor appeal:

- ☐ At the **very beginning** or **very end** of your campaign; this is when most of your funds will likely be raised. Your outreach at this point is crucial to your campaign’s success. This is a great time to write individual appeals, as well as broader email blasts.
- ☐ As soon as you hit a **crowdfunding milestone** (such as your 50% mark). This is a good time to reach out to those who haven’t given yet, and update them on the achievement. People like to donate to campaigns that are doing well!
- ☐ When donations have **stagnated a bit**, most likely in the middle of the campaign. This is a good time to reach out to individual donors, especially those who might not be in your immediate network of close friends and family.

Why?

What do you want from this donor?

- **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 **Crowdfunding Goal** is \$_____

The **number of people** I plan out to reach out to is _____

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

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

My ask amount is \$_____

Helpful Hint: The average donation to a crowdfunding campaign, according to data collected by [Fundly](#) is \$88. [Network for Good](#) found that 1 in 4 individuals contacted typically give to crowdfunding campaigns. Keep this in mind as you're crafting your appeals and setting your goal!

- 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, such as sharing your campaign?

How?

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

- ☐ This appeal should be sent out **digitally**, preferably via email!
- ☐ Don't use snail mail for crowdfunding, given the time-sensitive and entirely online nature of the campaign. Snail mail appeals are best when the donor can include a check with their return message, and Fractured Atlas cannot process checks for Fundraising by Fractured Atlas campaigns.
- ☐ Generally, you should avoid text and Facebook messages. If you're close with the donor (for example, your best friend), a text could be an appropriate way to remind them to give, but if you think you may need to win them over, stick to email.

Other things to keep in mind:

- ☐ Many people don't think about making major gifts to a crowdfunding campaign—after all the communal, crowdsourced nature of the tool is part of what makes it so popular. However, if you have people in your network who have the capacity for larger gifts, don't let them go to waste! You may want to ask major donors to sponsor a **match day**, which can provide an excellent mid-campaign boost.

*A **Match Day** is a single day in your campaign, where a donor has agreed to match all donations made within that 24 hour period (sometimes up to a certain amount). This is a great way to engage smaller donors, cultivate major donors, and create a sense of energy and excitement around your campaign.*

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: CAMPAIGN LAUNCH EMAIL BLAST

The Context: Andrea's small theatre ensemble just got invited to attend a prestigious theatre festival in Scotland! They're not going to be able to go if they don't raise \$5000 for airfare and the festival deposit, so they decide to run a 30-day campaign through Fundraising by Fractured Atlas. This is the email that they sent to a large list of potential supporters on their formal launch day. They sent out a "soft launch" email to friends and family a few days earlier.

Hello everyone,

As you may know, my theater company, DarkHorse, has been invited to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this summer! Today, we are launching a crowdfunding campaign that will help us get there. This festival has been a lifelong dream for many of us, and in order to make it happen, we need your help.

Our show, *The Shadows*, had a sold-out run in Boston and got rave reviews [LINK REVIEW]. We were thrilled to be accepted into the Fringe Festival, because it means we'll get to present our work to audiences from all over the world. However, in order to get to Edinburgh, we will need to raise \$5000 to cover airfare, cast per diems, and our festival registration fee.

This is where you come in! No gift is too small or too large, though we will be giving out VIP tickets to our New York show in August, to all donors of \$150 or more. You can learn more and make a tax-deductible gift today on our campaign page [Insert Link]. If you're not able to give, please spread the word to others by sharing the link on social media.

Your support is what has helped us get to this point, and it is what will help us reach our goal!

Warmly,

Cheryl Flemming

Artistic Director of DarkHorse Theatre

Dark Horse is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization. Contributions for the charitable purposes of Dark Horse must be made payable to "Fractured Atlas" only and are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

*What is the "**standard text?**" All Fractured Atlas fiscally sponsored projects must include this text on their appeal materials, to ensure that donors understand the nature of the fiscal sponsorship relationship. To learn more about this policy, see our Knowledge Base article*

Real-World Example: Late in Campaign Individual Appeal

The Context: In the first few days of their campaign, DarkHorse has raised ½ of their goal. Then, donations slowed down. It is week 3, and they still need to raise \$1000. Here's the appeal that the artistic director sent to an old theatre professor.

Hi Randy,

It was lovely to see you at the show a few weeks back. The lighting design reminded me of the fantastic production of Arcadia that you directed. **I'm writing in hopes that you will support a crowdfunding campaign that my theater company, Dark Horse, is currently running.**

As you may have heard, we have been accepted into the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which is incredibly exciting! However, we need to raise **\$5000 by this Friday** in order to pay for airfare, the festival deposit, and cast per diems. We've already raised \$4000, so we're almost there. **Can you help us reach our goal, by making a contribution today?** If you make a \$100 gift, you'll receive two free tickets to our next New York run.

The show that we're taking to the festival is an immersive piece, set in the 1930s. We're so proud of what we've made, and it's only possible because of the support and mentorship we've received from members of the Wesleyan theatre community.

You can make a tax-deductible donation, and check out our pitch here [LINK]! If you're not able to donate, we'd appreciate you sharing our campaign on social media.

Thank you so much for supporting me as an artist. I'm grateful for all of the advice you've given me over the years, and hope that you'll be able to support this campaign.

Best,
Andrea

Template: Crowdfunding Launch Mass Email

Hello everyone,

I've got some exciting news to share! Today, **[Your Project Name]** is launching a crowdfunding campaign for **[Campaign Purpose, e.g. Our Spring Season]**. Our goal is to raise **[Goal Amount]** by **[End Date]**. In order to get there, we need your help.

[Include a brief description of your purpose. This should be an “elevator pitch” version of your main campaign pitch! Include how the funds will be used, and why you’re asking for them right now.]

This is where you come in! No gift is too small or too large. We have some great perks for our donors, including **[Insert information about Rewards/Featured Rewards here]**. You can learn more and make a tax-deductible gift today on our campaign page **[Insert Link]**. If you're not able to give, please spread the word to others by sharing the link on social media.

Your support is what has helped us get to this point, and it is what will help us reach our goal!

Best,

[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.

Template: Late in Campaign Individual Appeal

Dear [Donor Name],

[Start with a brief, personalized greeting, e.g. “It was great to see you at our most recent show.”] I’m writing in hopes that you will support a crowdfunding campaign that my **[Type of Project]**, **[Project Name]**, is currently running.

We’re running this campaign because **[give “elevator pitch”]**. In order to do this, we need to raise **[Goal Amount]** by **[End Date]**. We’ve already raised **[Amount Raised]**, so we’re well on our way. Do you think that you would be able to make a contribution of **[Specific Ask Amount]**, to help us meet our goal? In addition to helping us **[restate goal]**, we’re also offering our donors **[describe your campaign rewards]**. We’re trying to get to **[portion of your larger goal, e.g. \$2,500 if your goal is \$5,000]** by **[tomorrow, the end of the week, the end of the month, etc.]** Can you help us get there?

You can make a tax-deductible donation, and check out our pitch here **[Link Campaign Page]**! If you’re not able to donate, we’d appreciate you sharing the campaign on social media or sending it to anyone who might be interested.

Supporters like you are the reason why we’re able to **[recent accomplishment, e.g. “create award-winning multi-media performance pieces.”]** We hope that you’ll be able to contribute! **[If possible end on a personal note, e.g. “I hope that we can catch up at Natalie’s party next weekend!”]**

Best,

[Your full name]

[Your relationship to the project]

[Your project’s full name]

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](#).