



# FRACTURED ATLAS

Guidebook

## **FUNDRAISING APPEALS**

**Donation Renewal Appeals**

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## 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 ton 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.



## DONATION RENEWAL APPEALS: Before You Write

### What?

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

- ❑ A **Donation Renewal Appeal** is a letter or email sent to someone who has previously given to your project, asking them to give again. You may be asking them to up the ante or you may be asking for the same amount, but regardless, you are reminding them of their previous gift and asking for a renewal of support.
- ❑ Just because this individual has given in the past, it does not mean that they will give again! **Don't assume, persuade.** People give once to a cause out of impulse, spontaneity, or guilt. People give consistently because they feel like they are a part of something. Sending renewal appeals is a great way to **cultivate consistent supporters.**

### Who?

*Identify your audience before you write.*

- For renewal appeals, it's important to gather all of the data you can before drafting the appeal. Let's do a deep dive on your prospective donor:

**Donor Name:**

**Date of last donation:**

**Amount of last donation: \$\_\_\_\_\_**

**Donation frequency (# of times they have given):**

**Lifetime Total Donations: \$\_\_\_\_\_**

**Highest Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Lowest Donation: \$\_\_\_\_\_**

**Most recent donation method:**

- ☐ Check
- ☐ Credit Card
- ☐ ACH
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- What is your relationship to this 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 \_\_\_\_\_
- Has your donor recently attended any of your events? If so, you may want to mention it in the appeal.

## When?

*When it comes to renewal appeals, timing is everything! There are a few ways to determine the right time to send this message to your donor.*

- ☐ Did this donor give around the holidays, or to a consistently recurring event, such as your collective's annual fall exhibition? If so, you will likely want to wait to reach out until that time of year. Then, you can jog the donor's memory about their role in your success last year, and ask them to give again.
- ☐ Did this donor give to a crowdfunding campaign? If so, you will want to wait until a bit of time has passed since your campaign's end date, when you have demonstrable results of your project's success. For example, if your crowdfunding campaign was funding your 2019 season, you'll want to wait until after the season is over to reach out to your donors. That way, you can ask for their thoughts on the shows that they (hopefully) attended, and even include some glowing reviews, as you ask for a renewal!
- ☐ Is this just a general fundraising donor? Not sure exactly why they gave, other than loving your project? First off, congratulations. For these types of donors, you should wait to send a renewal appeal until you have new information or exciting updates about your project. Even better, if the update can be linked personally to this donor. Your jazz quartet just booked a tour in the Pacific Northwest, where this donor happens to live? Perfect! Invite them to the show, acknowledge how their gift helped you get to this place, and ask them for a renewal gift to help cover those travel expenses.

## Why?

*What do you want from this donor?*

- How much do you want them to give? First, let's take two things into consideration:

**1. How much did your donor give last time around?**

\$\_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is their overall capacity? Answer the questions below:**

How strong is the donor's *connection to your cause*?

- ☐ Strong
- ☐ Medium
- ☐ Weak

Do they have any significant *wealth markers*, such as an expensive home? List these below:

Do they give to other nonprofits or arts organizations? If so, which ones?

*If you feel that this donor has the **capacity** for a larger gift this time around, you may want to increase your ask.*

**My Ask Amount: \$\_\_\_\_\_**

### **How?**

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

- Are you sending this appeal via email or snail mail?
  - Email
  - Snail Mail
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- How have you communicated with them in the past?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- If you are sending an appeal via mail, are you certain you have their up-to-date address? Write it below!

## REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: Renewal Appeal

***The Context:** Micah is the artistic director of String Me Along, a classical string quartet that performs new works by LGBTQ+ composers. Karen is one of their oldest and most reliable donors, who gave in advance of their most recent tour. Now, the quartet has returned and Micah is sitting down to send out renewal appeals.*

Dear Karen,

After a fantastic three months on the road, String Me Along has finally returned home! Our tour was an incredible experience, and I would personally like to thank you, Karen, for making this happen. **You've been with us since the beginning, and without your \$200 gift last fall, we would not be where we are now—exhausted, exhilarated, and ready to keep exposing audiences to new music from the queer community.** I'm so grateful that you came to see our St. Louis show. Seeing you in the front show, made my night! **Today, I'm writing to ask for your continued support of String Me Along.**

Along with ensuring that our instruments survived the temperamental weather and our group was fed, clothed, and lodged for the duration of the trip, your contribution also helped commission a composer for our next world premiere. It'll be a piece inspired by Walt Whitman's lesser-known (queer) poetry. We'll be sending out an announcement about that soon, but we wanted to let you know first!

In order to make this project happen over the summer, **I'm asking you to consider making a gift of \$400 this week to help us put on this exciting world premiere.** Our overall production budget is \$8,000, and this will cover

artist fees, venue costs, and compensation for our new composer in residence.

Here's how you can give:

**Online:** You can make a quick credit card donation via our Fractured Atlas Donation Page [LINK].

**Check Donations:** All checks should be made out to our fiscal sponsor, Fractured Atlas, with String Me Along in the memo line and mailed to:

Micah Gonzales  
850 Sterling Place, Apt 2B  
Brooklyn, NY 11216

Once again, we could not do it without you. Thank you so much for being a part of the String Me Along family!

Sincerely,  
Micah Gonzales  
Artistic Director  
String Me Along

## Template: Donation Renewal

Dear **[Donor Name]**,

Thank you for supporting **[Project Name]** **[last time that they donated]!**  
**[Share a short personal anecdote here, if possible, such as “It was so great to see you at our show last month!”]** Your generous support over the past **[year, month, etc.--time that they have been donating]** allowed our project to accomplish the following:

**[Share the success of specific event/project]**

**[Share a specific impact you’ve had on your audience]**

**[Share fundraising goal that was met]**

We are so excited to announce that **[project name]** will be **[give a short pitch for your newest upcoming endeavor]**. In order to make this happen, I’m asking you to consider making a gift of **[ask amount]** by **[donation deadline]** to help us **[insert project purpose, e.g. bring this workshop to schools in our community!]**

Here’s how you can give today:

- Online: You can make a quick credit card donation by clicking here!  
**[Hyperlink donation page]**
- Check Donations: Making a check payable to **[relevant payee--for fiscally sponsored projects, this should be Fractured Atlas!]** and mailing it to:

**[Address]**

**[City, State]**



Once again, **[project name]** could not continue to **[insert accomplishment/impact]** if it wasn't for you, **[donor name]**. We look forward to seeing you at our **[upcoming event, if relevant!]**

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.*

## 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!

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