



Heritage
Consulting Inc.

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Advice for direct mail letters for year end appeals

- Your first direct mail letter will get lost in the holiday mail if it is sent after Thanksgiving, make sure you mail it the week before.
- Plan ahead and talk to your local postmaster about timing for mail bulk from your post office. Develop your calendar dates back from that.
- Ask your postmaster about business reply mail for your response envelope, and make sure your indicia is correct according to post office standards
- Talk to your printer and mailing house ASAP about timing and costs.
- You MUST include a self-addressed return envelope in your direct mail appeal, make it green or another holiday color. In the stamp area, say something like, "your postage helps more .downtown work happen."
- Return envelopes with tear off return sections can be effective, but are expensive to print, ask your printer for advice.
- You may want to call these solicitations "end of year appeal" or "annual fund," but do not call them membership or renewal. End of year gifts are over and above regular membership.
- Use the back of the letter too, do not waste this space, include photos or an infographic about downtown.
- Merged letters on letterhead are effective, rather than addressing the letter Dear Friend.
- A more effective letter is hand signed, with a personalized note from someone who knows the letter recipient, asking them to consider a gift. A note from a volunteer who does not know the donor, can work if it is hand signed.
- Hand typed envelopes (or ones that look like it) are better than ones from a mail house.
- Color helps—photos, reply form, the envelope in color or the letter itself with photos and graphs.
- You MUST be able to accept credit card donations.
- Asking for small pledges—monthly, quarterly—can be very effective—but you have to have the mechanics to process the gift. Network for Good, PayPal and others have this functionality.



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Outline for direct mail letters

- This is a two page letter using both sides of your letterhead. Use photos and infographics to highlight your accomplishments this year.
- Ask yourself why donors should care, and then write those stories in your letters to them.
- Ask them to contribute in the first line of the second paragraph.
- Show your donors, through words and photos/graphics why your work in downtown is relevant and important to them.
- Tell them what your plans are for the coming year.
- Show how their gifts to you make a difference. Use a photo and a caption if you can.
- Tell your supporters that the tax deductibility deadline is near and ask them again to make a gift in the last paragraph.
- Do not tell donors that you need to “end the year in the black,” because it is just not a compelling reason to give a gift.
- Explain that their gift goes toward general operating expenses is unappealing to donors.
- Focus on specific but general programs that are helping you meet your mission, such as event programming, watering flower baskets, keeping downtown clean, installing colorful banners, or hosting your monthly downtown event, the Farmers market or other much-loved seasonal events.
- Seek unrestricted gifts if possible rather than gifts aimed at projects. This will be hard for some to justify, but end of year gifts are meant to support the organization in general.
- A great blog post about why even LONGER letters (4 pages or more) work well was posted on [www.Guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com) see http://www.guidestar.org/rxa/news/articles/2012/why-long-fundraising-letters-outpull-shorter-ones.aspx?hq_e=el&hq_m=1858226&hq_l=16&hq_v=bed1c6047b