

Making “the Ask” for Large Donations: Sample Letters to Get You Started

In our last issue of *News Update* we discussed the fundamentals of making “the ask” for large donations from potential donors. This is an important part of a large fund raising effort because those who give the large donations set the tone (and the success) for meeting your fund raising goal. Writing a letter to potential donors is the first step in the asking process and it’s an important one.

As mentioned in the last issue, making the ask involves determining who your potential large donors are, how much they might be able and willing to give, writing an initial contact letter, following up with a phone call to set up an appointment, and finally, visiting the potential donor to go in detail about the campaign and the goal and making the “ask.”

After you have identified those in the community who have the likelihood and means to make a large donation, and once you've determined how much this potential donor might give, you need to make initial contact with them. This contact is generally done by letter unless the person you plan to contact is a close personal friend or relative (then you can go straight to the phone call or visit).

The best person to write this initial contact letter is someone whom the recipient will know or know of. The letter should be direct, short, and personal. It should explain that you are volunteering to raise money for an important capital campaign, what the campaign is for, and that you yourself have already made a pledge in support of the campaign (because, of course, you have!).

What follows are sample letters to your potential donor -- one for a public library campaign and one for an academic campaign. Both letters are available in the Friends Zone as Word documents. You can download the files and edit to meet your needs. The original article, which appeared in the May 2007 issue of *News Update*, will be available in the Friends Zone as well for our new members who did not receive that issue.

Dear Linda,

I am writing to let you know that the Smith Library at DSU has a wonderful opportunity to expand its nationally renowned Barrymore Collection. Until recently, the private letters that Tracy Barrymore wrote to her mentor and confidante, Lucille Edwards, have been in private hands.

We’ve received word that the owner is willing to sell this collection to us. As a consequence, the Smith Library Foundation is embarking on a campaign to raise \$150,000 for its purchase. I’m sure I don’t have to tell you how important these letters are and how they will permanently enrich our existing collection. As the recognized repository for the Barrymore papers, the Smith Library simply cannot afford to let this collection go to another library or worse, to go to another collector.

Because I know how much our research collection matters to our institution now and for the future, I have volunteered to work on this campaign and I have already made a personal pledge to this fundraising effort. You’ve always been a leader in championing both DSU and the Smith Library, so I am confident that you will want to be involved as well.

I would like to have the opportunity to discuss the details of this acquisition with you in person and to solicit your support as a leadership donor. I will call you in the next week or two to see if we can schedule a time to meet. It’s not often one has an opportunity to help in acquiring such a unique collection of letters that will add infinitely to the quality and cache of the Barrymore Collection. I look forward to discussing the details with you.

Sincerely yours,

Joe Wilson

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Dear Phil,

I am very excited to let you know that the Smithville Library Foundation is embarking on a large scale fundraising campaign to help support a new addition to our library. Our city government has challenged us to raise \$1,000,000 or approximately 10% of the total cost for a new addition to our library. An ambitious goal but one that we believe is achievable.

As you may know, the library was built in 1977 and has been well loved and used by our community. Though many changes have been made over the last 30 years to accommodate a growing collection, various (and constantly changing) audio/visual formats, and vital computer technology; the present facility can no longer adequately address this continuing growth in use and materials. It’s time for an addition to this beloved facility.

That’s where you come in! I know how much you support the quality of life in our community. You have shown yourself to be a generous contributor for a variety of worthy projects and I believe you’ll want to be supportive of this one as well. I am so convinced that our library is the very center of Smithville’s cultural and intellectual well being that I have not only made my own pledge to this effort, I have offered to volunteer my time as well.

I would like to meet with you sometime in the near future at your convenience to go over the details of this important campaign and to ask you for your support with a leadership gift. I’ll give you a call in the next week or two to set a time. Maybe we could go to lunch?

I appreciate in advance your willingness to meet with me and, again, I am confident that you’ll want to be a part of this exciting effort.

All the best,

Susan Smith

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