This is a free preview of Week 3 of The Power of Appealing Year-End Fundraising Appeals E-course

Preview of Week Three: The Power of Appealing Year-End Appeals Page 1
Editing Your Appeal Letter

Appeal letter editing can be difficult. It’s hard to edit your own writing, and of course asking your board to do it is asking for trouble. Most people haven’t been trained to write or edit appeals.

Have you ever had the problem where your leadership wanted a 10 point font, one page appeal letter?

Or a nonprofit leader who insisted that “This is not how I talk, rewrite it!”

Oy vey. When it comes to editing your appeal, you want to make sure you know the standards that direct mail marketing companies have used for twenty years.

There IS a layout format that will help people read your letter instead of tossing it instantly.

There IS a way to get people to engage with your photographs.

There IS a way to draw people in through your story, typeface, headlines, and the wording you use throughout the letter.

Want to see what an appeal letter edit looks like?

The founder of H.O.P.E. Inc, Kenita Pierce-Lewis, asked me to have a look at her appeal letter, to see what I could do with it.

Below you’ll see her first draft of the appeal letter.
October 18, 2012

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW YOU
COULD HELP BREAK CYCLES OF POVERTY IN YOUR
COMMUNITY?

Dear <first_name>,

Imagine working two jobs, going to school full-time, and coming home to an eviction notice the same week your child is scheduled to have brain surgery. That is exactly what single mother Yvette faced last month. The medical bills were piling up, with no family nearby, and no other financial options, she turned to H.O.P.E. Inc. for help.

“I came across H.O.P.E. when I needed them the most, my daughter was about to have brain surgery and my rent was due right along with my car note.” - Yvette Pierce-Conner

We receive many different stories every day from hard working single parents like Yvette; going to school and striving to make ends meet. The fact of the matter is, today’s typical college undergraduate students are no longer 18-year-old recent high-school graduates who enroll full-time and have limited work and family obligations. More than one in eight students are single parents and more than a third are over the age of 25. Did you know that out of 1.2 million single parent families in the State of Georgia, 48% are low income?

Because you gave <amount> on <date>, we know that you believe in the power of education and the impact it can have on a single parent family. But do you realize just how much your donation affects their future and the future of their children? Consider this, the median wealth of single parent’s increases by $35,000 when they complete a college degree program.

YOUR GIFT MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF THESE FAMILIES!

Just ask Maria Barnett, who found herself a single parent after years of marriage. Having to adjust to the financial trials of being a single parent, working, and in school she found herself living on her friends couch without a place to turn. She wrote, “I do not foresee a light at the end of the tunnel and am hoping that through your program I can get some sort of relief.”

According to a Women Employed publication, “Single Mothers and College Success: Creating Paths Out of Poverty,” single mothers face especially daunting challenges in their efforts to obtain a degree. Compared to married parents, single parents are more likely to have low-incomes, have greater challenges paying tuition and arranging child care. For many of these single parents, completing a degree can take anywhere from six to 15 years.

Our President & Founder, Kenta Pierce-Lewis, founded H.O.P.E. Inc. based on the experience and struggles she suffered as a single parent laboring to finish her Bachelor’s degree over the course of ten years due to lack of resources and income. There are programs out there that serve single...
Notice that it is in a sans-serif font, 10 point font, and that there are large blocks of text.

Notice the stock photograph.

Notice there are statistics mixed in with the story, there are two stories, and that the letter tells the story of the founder in the third person.

Now look at my edited version. What have I done to improve the letter?
<Date>

Have you ever been caught in an impossible situation, where it seemed like there was no escape?

Dear <sal>,

Imagine you're working two jobs, with children to feed, as a single parent. Sometimes you have to choose between food and rent. Sometimes you can't even afford a doctor's visit for your child.

But you have dreams of a better life. You want to get a college degree, and learn, and earn more money someday. So you're also going to college full-time.

You work 8 hours at a job, 4 hours at school, and then you need to come home and be a mom too. You love your children and pray they will forgive you for having to be gone so much.

But now imagine this. You get to your front door after a long, long day, and you see the yellow envelope.

The eviction notice. This is the week your child is scheduled to have brain surgery. You're at the end of your rope. Where do you turn?

Yvette (<picture right>) faced this exact situation last month. The medical bills were piling up and she was about to be out on the street. With no family nearby, and no other financial options, she turned to H.O.P.E., Inc. for help.

“I came across H.O.P.E. when I needed them most. My daughter was about to have brain surgery and my rent was due right along with my car note.” - Yvette

Because you gave <amt> on <Date>, we know that you believe in the power of education and the impact it can have on single parents.
Here’s what I did.

1. **Enhancing readability**: I have changed the blocks of text by indenting and spacing every few sentences.

2. **Picture**: I took out the stock photograph and kept the picture of the real person she also enclosed.

3. **Providing stoppers like the word YOU, increasing scannability**, spaced the letter so that there were bigger spaces between the paragraphs and the header text.

4. **I changed the font** to a serif font, and made the font 13 point.

5. **I took out the grant-writing speak**, where sentences like “single mothers face especially daunting challenges in their efforts to obtain a degree. Compared to married parents, single parents are more likely to have low incomes, have greater challenges paying tuition and arranging childcare.” are common. I did this because nobody talks like this. Taking a page from David Oglivy, who said, “Write like you talk.”

6. **I rewrote and paced the story more slowly, building up the tension**, focusing lovingly on the details, helping the reader get into the shoes of the person in need.

7. **I focused on just one story**, problem to solution.

They care more if there is one story, one person’s problem that they can feel confident in solving. Statistics can help, but they are making the decision to give with their hearts, not the heads. The problem needs to seem solvable, and that happens best when you share one story. People feel empowered when they think about just ONE person they can help, rather than faceless thousands.

Here’s another appeal letter edit.
Before and After Appeal Letter Edit for Meals on Wheels

I recently did a series of webinars for National Meals on Wheels, and the latest one was on appeal letters.

Here’s a sample letter that someone sent me, asking me for feedback. I decided to re-write the whole letter.

Draft 1 of their letter, before I did anything:

Dear Friend of <our nonprofit>,

Aging is inevitable. We all think about it from time to time – when to retire, maybe moving to a warmer climate or downsizing to a condo, spending more time with grandchildren, enjoying a favorite hobby or pursing new interests. What we don’t we don’t always think about are the difficulties that can come with aging, the “other” side of aging. What happens when you are no longer able to drive, when jobs around the house become more difficult, when the ordinary tasks of daily living are just a little bit harder? Most seniors in these situations still want to remain independent and living in their own homes. With some help, they can.

For some seniors, receiving Meals-on-Wheels, transportation to their neighborhood senior center or a weekly grocery trip may be all the help they need to maintain their independence. Others find themselves in situations where they need more help and additional services. Often times that assistance comes from the social workers here at <our nonprofit>.

Many of our clients have financial issues that require intervention and on-going monitoring and management. Louise is one of those seniors. She lives alone in her own home. Her children live out of town. Her income is enough to cover her monthly expenses. But as she has aged, there were times when she would forget to pay her bills. She also began to hire people to do things around her house.
and was being overcharged for the work they did. There were days she went to the bank several times to withdraw money. It wasn’t long before she began having financial problems. Her checking account was overdrawn, and her property taxes were delinquent. The day she received a disconnect notice from the utility company, she panicked and asked her bank manager for help. He referred her to <our nonprofit>. Through our Representative Payee program, we have been able to help Louise. With a financial power of attorney, we are managing her finances. Her bills are being paid on time, she receives a small amount of spending money each month and money is even being added to her savings account. Her <our nonprofit> case manager is in regular contact with her adult children. Louise is doing well. With our help, she can remain independent and in her own home.

Clients like Louise are sometimes in extremely dire circumstances when they find their way to <our nonprofit>. They may have received an eviction notice or have had their utilities shut off for non-payment. The reasons vary: bills and expenses may exceed their income; overspending on unnecessary items; forgetting to pay bills; or writing the checks and then not mailing them. Late fees and overdraft charges exacerbate the problem. Unfortunately, for some of our clients, their financial problems are the result of financial exploitation by a relative, friend or someone they befriended who is now taking advantage of them. We have clients who have been exploited out of thousands of dollars. We take the steps necessary to end the exploitation. Many of these seniors have no family support, or have no contact with their family. They are in a state of crisis. This is when <our nonprofit> steps in to help.

The first thing we do is stabilize the situation. We work with landlords, utility companies and other creditors to arrange payment plans. We obtain legal power of attorney and begin the process of managing their finances. We will prepare a budget, eliminate or reduce expenses, manage their income, pay their bills on time and see that their needs are being met. Our staff will even shop for clients who cannot shop for themselves. Beyond that, we will ascertain what other services they need to help them stay in their
homes. It might be services <our nonprofit> can provide, such as Meals-on-Wheels or transportation. Or, they may need help with homemaking or personal care. Some have mental health, substance abuse or legal issues. <our nonprofit> refers these clients to the agencies and organizations that can provide the appropriate help. Our social workers will also serve as a liaison for the client’s family. Our goal is to keep our clients financially stable and independent for as long as possible.

What most seniors fear most is not being able to remain in their homes and being moved into a nursing home. Studies have shown that seniors do better, physically and emotionally, when they can stay at home. Often times, it may be help in just one area such as our Representative Payee financial management that makes staying at home possible. These services, much less expensive than institutional care, give the senior peace of mind of knowing they will not have to leave their home. They know they are not alone; help from is just a phone call away.

I am asking you to join with us in providing these vital services.

The reimbursement <our nonprofit> receives from our funding agencies does not cover the entire cost of our services.

Foundation grants and donations from those who support our mission make it possible for us to help the 2000 senior clients we serve each year. They depend on us. Many of these seniors live alone, with no family to help them. If it were not for <our nonprofit>, most of them would have no where to turn for help. Your contribution will make a difference in the life of a senior.

First of all, what’s wrong with this appeal letter?

1. **Passive voice, awkwardly phrased.** “Foundation grants and donations from those who support our mission make it possible for us to help the 2000 senior clients we serve each year.” Nobody talks like this.
2. **No stoppers.** Using the word WE instead of the word YOU. No headlines. No pictures.

3. **GIANT unbroken paragraphs.** Your eye starts skipping over them in self defense.

4. **Reads like a grant application.** Dry, dull. “For some seniors, receiving Meals-on-Wheels, transportation to their neighborhood senior center or a weekly grocery trip may be all the help they need to maintain their independence. Others find themselves in situations where they need more help and additional services.” Again, nobody talks like this.

5. **Completely impersonal.** Doesn’t share the story and picture of one senior who needs help in a compelling way. We hear about “louise” but she seems to be a cardboard cut-out. Then speaks of seniors generally in the abstract. Abstracting the problem doesn’t help you get money for your cause. Personalizing it does.

So how do we fix all of these problems?

**Draft 2 of their letter, after my preliminary round of edits:**

<Date>

First name, last name  
Address  
City, State Zip

**Do you ever think about what you’ll do when you get older?**

Dear <firstname>,

Do you ever dream about retiring, maybe moving to a warmer climate or downsizing to a condo, spending more time with grandchildren, enjoying a favorite hobby or pursing new interests?
But what about the “other” side of aging? What happens when you are no longer able to drive, when jobs around the house become more difficult, when the ordinary tasks of daily living are just a little bit harder?

Most older people still want to remain independent and living in their own homes. With your help, they can.

**With your generous donation of $50 today, the 2,000 seniors we serve can continue receiving Meals-on-Wheels, transportation to their neighborhood senior center or a weekly grocery trip to maintain their independence.**

But we don’t just stop there. We help seniors with so much more. Let me tell you about Louise. Louise lives alone in her own home. Her children live out of town. Her income is enough to cover her monthly expenses.

- But sometimes she forgets to pay her bills.
- She also hired people to do things around her house and they over-charged her.
- Sometimes she went to the bank several times a day to withdraw money.

It wasn’t long before she began having financial problems. Her checking account was overdrawn, and her property taxes were delinquent. The day she received a disconnect notice from the utility company, she panicked and asked her bank manager for help. He referred her to us.

Thanks to your generous support in the last year, we have been able to help Louise. Her bills are being paid on time, she receives a small amount of spending money each month and money is even being
added to her savings account. Louise is doing well. With your help, she can remain independent and in her own home.

<Firstname>, won’t you help us ensure that our 2,000 other seniors can continue to live independently and age with dignity? Please give today.

Thanks to your support, we can do even more for seniors. But we need your help. Our grants cannot cover the expenses that we incur, and there are THOUSANDS of people like Louise who desperately need our services. Could you please give <double the amt they gave last year $50> today to help us continue to help seniors?

What most seniors fear most is not being able to remain in their homes and being moved into a nursing home. Studies have shown (<WHAT STUDIES? Citation needed>) that seniors do better, physically and emotionally, when they can stay at home.

Please donate $50 today and help us continue providing these vital services. The reimbursement <our nonprofit> receives from our funding agencies does not cover the our costs, and our 2,000 seniors need us, desperately, to help keep them aging with dignity. And someday, our services may be important to you.

What if <our nonprofit> didn’t help? Our 2,000 senior clients would not get food, health checks or simple financial checkups to ensure they are not getting taken advantage of. Many of these seniors live alone, with no family to help them.

If it were not for your generous donation to <our nonprofit> today, most of them would have nowhere to turn for help. Please, use the enclosed envelope and give <double the donation they gave last year.>

Sincerely,
Do you see how I rewrote this letter?

Short paragraphs

Longer copy

Tell the story like we’re sitting in a coffee shop together.

Put in headers & personalization to break up the text.

Make sure you’ve got that PS!

This is just the tip of the iceberg on how you can write a better year-end appeal.

There is so much more that I’d love to share with you from this course.

This is the end of your free preview of Week 3 of The Power of Appealing Year-End Fundraising Appeals E-course

If you order this e-course you will get 5 weeks of priceless instruction, PLUS all of these bonus materials!
Tons of sample appeal letters

Bonus Webinar Recording #2

Tons of money in the mail

Presenter: Mazarine Teyz, Author
The Wild Woman's Guide to Fundraising

AND MORE!

What are people saying about these webinars?

Preview of Week Three: The Power of Appealing Year-End Appeals Page 15
"Your How to Write Stunning Appeal Letters webinar was sooooo good! Thanks so much for the best training in years. Clear. Concise. Real world examples. Great pace. Loved it!" -Julie Nations, Executive Director, The Ellie Fund, Boston, MA

"Your Tons of Money In the Mail webinar gave me many fresh ideas that I would like to incorporate into my upcoming mailings. I plan to review my notes and the supplemental materials provided in order to create an "action plan" for the lessons learned. Thank you!" -Amanda Parker, Grants and Development Manager, OPERA America

"I've been trying for years to figure out how to write about our non-profit in a way that moves folks to action. After just one session of your Make Tons of Money in the Mail seminar that I finally got how to do that! Because of the shift in copy inspired by Tons of Money in the Mail, Nourish America is being featured in a special report on Hunger that will be in the Chicago Sun Times along with heavy weights - Feeding America and Meals on Wheels! The editor specifically told me that she was particularly excited about how visceral my copy was and that she'd never seen hunger described like that before!" -Mary Morgan, Nourish America, Ojai, California

"Tons of Money in the Mail gave me TONS of ideas for making our year-end direct mailing more effective. The opportunity for questions and answers was also extremely valuable! Thanks!" -- T.J. Holsen, Development Director, Parents as Teachers of Lake County, Inc. Indiana

"This has been one of the best webinars I've attended. Incredible amount of information that I can't wait to implement at work. Thank you so much!" -Jen Hiebert, Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute, Moscow, Idaho

In this e-course, I’ve taken everything from my webinars, and put in Preview of Week Three: The Power of Appealing Year-End Appeals Page 16
things I didn’t have time to put in the webinars, PLUS I’m getting the expert help of Claire Axelrad, J.D., CFRE. Claire has helped large nonprofits raise more with their appeal letters for many years. Named Outstanding Fundraising Professional of the Year by the Association of Fundraising Professionals in 2010, Claire teaches the CFRE course that certifies professional fundraisers.

This 5 week course can take your appeal letter from zero to hero. So what are you waiting for? Click here to learn more about this appeal letter e-course

Join us, and make this year the best fundraising year you’ve had yet for your year-end appeal!

See you on the inside,

Mazarine Treyz
Author, The Wild Woman’s Guide to Fundraising