



# SA-UK Trust Network

## Two Little Words

Two of the most neglected and, in the fundraising context, misunderstood words are: 'thank you'. Whether donors are individuals, the family members of someone who left a bequest, companies or trusts, expressing gratitude is often overlooked. And, as fundraisers know, 'thank you' is the start of the next 'ask'.

Alarming few organisations have a clear policy on thanking donors. Obviously, different donors (individuals or trusts, for instance) should be thanked differently. Also, a large amount from an individual will probably be considered a small gift from a trust. There should be a clear policy – written and not just in the minds of current staff or volunteers – on exactly how each amount, per source, is acknowledged.

As online giving platforms become more sophisticated and artificial intelligence (AI) is adopted apace to save time, there is a danger that the human touch will be lost. It's unusual today to find an online donor platform that does not generate an automated thank you email. Even short-term crowdfunding campaigns include automatic messages of thanks, within a minute or two of donations being made. The temptation not to follow these up with personalised communication can be enormous. There should be a strictly enforced policy defining **who** communicates with a donor for **what** amount and within **how** much time.

An example of a policy to thank individual donors might be:

Under £100 – email from fundraiser

£100 to £500 – email from CEO

£500 to £1000 – email from chairperson

£1000 to £10 000 – phone call from CEO

Over £10 000 – phone call from chairperson

A similar appropriate table should be developed to thank trusts, but with higher amounts.

Some donors, large and small, stipulate anonymity and this must be adhered to. Some expressly do not want to be thanked or even to receive a report. While these are in the minority, their wishes must be respected.

Always remember when thanking a donor that they don't give to an organisation. Rather, they entrust their money to an organisation to bring about change. Good 'thanks' spring from holding this front and centre of all donor communications.

### **Not:**

Thank you for your kind donation of £1,000. We deeply appreciate it. We know that you have so many requests for funding and are grateful that you chose our organisation to support.

**Rather:**

Thank you for your kind donation of £1,000. This will enable us to provide transport to school, uniforms, books and nutritious meals to two orphaned girls in South Africa for a year. An education is the only chance girls have of breaking the cycle of poverty. **You** have enabled this.

The first example is about the organisation. The second is about the beneficiaries – the very reason the organisation exists. It is vital to stay focused on this.

The most neglected donors are often individuals who have standing orders with their banks. Also called debit orders or automatic payment orders, these are set up by individual donors for monthly, quarterly or annual giving of the same amount. These donors are the lifeblood of an organisation but are often forgotten. Just receiving a newsletter or blog, as many of these have become, is not enough. An annual review or annual report is not sufficient either. Sadly, many organisations' staff only follow up and try to contact long-standing regular donors if they stop giving or if their standing order payments cease upon their death.

What about long-term donors' birthdays, particularly milestone ones? What is happening in lives of these donors? Why does no one in the organisation know? What, if anything, has anyone done to find out? Why do they support the organisation? What resonates with them about the work of the organisation? Have they simply forgotten that they set up a standing order? How often is the wording of thank you emails updated? What milestones can be celebrated? How much has a certain donor given over the years? What, if anything, is done to acknowledge or highlight their loyalty? What does the fundraising team do to get to know its donor partners? What are their stories? How can these be highlighted? As AI is understood and its speed of data analysis utilised to mine information on specific donors from their online activity, this type of information will be more readily available. But don't wait on AI as not all non-profit leaders are ensuring its valuable use at this stage.

It's important to remember that it is much harder to recruit a new donor than to retain one.