9 EMAIL TEMPLATES FOR YOUR NONPROFIT ANNUAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
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Introduction

When you only contact supporters during your major campaigns, you miss out on opportunities to cultivate them and deepen their connections to your cause. Strengthen your donor relationships by sending consistent, personalized, and most importantly, varied email communications all year long, even if these messages don't all include a hard ask.

To inform your annual email communications plan, we've created nine email templates for key moments when you should reach out to donors. Think of these stewardship emails as their own campaign since it requires you to plan ahead and outline each touchpoint throughout the year.

By engaging your supporters all year-round, your organization can improve donor retention long term. And remember, it costs up to five times as much to acquire a new donor than it does to retain one. ¹

Use these sample emails to create messages that will engage and delight donors in every season and foster lasting relationships.

¹ AFP Net, “Donor Retention: What Do We Know and What Can We Do About It?”, http://www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/Donor_Retention_What_Do_We_Know.pdf
1 | Progress Updates

Just as you should reach out to your donors with milestone emails during a fundraising campaign, you should also reach out with organizational updates and news throughout the year.

One major progress update will be the distribution of your annual report. The annual report is necessary because it has a four-fold impact on your donors:

- Showcase financial transparency
- Establish trust with supporters
- Show appreciation for donors
- Demonstrate your organization’s impact

While data plays an important role in educating constituents about your progress, your donors essentially want to know how their donation has helped your organization make strides in your mission. In addition to sharing data throughout the year, make sure to include success stories from the field. The emotional tie to a cause is what will keep donors coming back and remind them of why they’re invested in your success.
The email template below introduces an annual report, but its main elements should apply to all of your progress updates throughout the year. Include pertinent information, photos, and success stories to connect donors back to their impact on your mission.

Bruno Says Thanks for a Great Year!

With your help, Project Stay has saved more dogs than ever before! Last year alone, we rescued and found forever homes for 132 neglected pups—including this precious guy, Bruno, who has found his new family thanks to donors like you.

Due to the LA fires last November, our shelters were overwhelmed with displaced dogs, but with your support our dedicated volunteers and staff were able to find temporary housing and provide food (and treats!) for each furry friend that walked in the door. This truly wouldn’t have been possible without your support.

Read more about what we accomplished in our 2018 annual report.

Check Out Our Impact

Thank you for all of your help over the last year. Without supporters like you, dogs like Bruno would never have been connected with their new families.

Love,
Project Stay, Bruno, and his 131 friends
2 | Holidays

There are plenty of holidays aside from year-end festivities that you can leverage to engage donors. Beyond bigger occasions like Valentine’s Day or Fourth of July, holidays like President’s Day, for instance, might seem unrelated to your cause at first, but you could dovetail with a message about any legislative action your organization is working towards. Start your email with a neutral message—“Happy President’s Day!”—and then include a soft ask to read a blog post, sign a pledge, call their senators, or share your organization’s progress with their networks.

Cause Awareness Days

Cause-specific days like International Women’s Day or World Water Day are the times of the year when you definitely have to capitalize on timely momentum to rally your supporters. Find out the day, week, or month dedicated to your cause and plan outreach around the timely peg.

Keep in mind you can also leverage cause awareness days that are more tangentially related to your mission. For example, if you are an education-focused organization, take advantage of a topic like World Elephant Day (August 12) to share educational facts about elephants and their habitats, or a story of a beneficiary who wants to study and learn how to work with animals.
Remember that the goal of this email is a simple check-in with your donors, so keep it short and sweet.

Celebrate National Dog Day With Us!

Hi [Donor Name],

Did you know that National Dog Day is just a few days away? If you're anything like us, you have been brainstorming ways to pamper your pup and celebrate the love they bring to your life. Whether it's a trip to the dog beach or a cup of doggy ice cream, we want to see how you celebrate your fur-ever friend.

Snap a pic of you and your pup celebrating National Dog Day on August 26, and share it with us on social media. Simply tag us in your photo, @ProjectStay, and use the hashtag #ProjectStayDogsDay. We'll be re-sharing your photos on our accounts and running a contest to see who can get the most likes! Share with your family and friends, and you and your bundle of fluff will have a chance to win an official Duke's Dogs prize pack full of our favorite toys and all-natural treats.

We can't wait to see you and your pup!

Happy National Dog Day!

Donate
From glitzy summer galas to ever popular run/walks, many nonprofits have core events that make up a large part of their fundraising strategy. In addition to an appeal asking supporters to sign up or fundraise for the event, make sure you send several emails building excitement leading up to it and following up afterwards.

For example, a common event email cadence for a gala could look like this:

- **Save the date** (three to four months before event)
- **Tickets go on sale soon** (four to six weeks before tickets are on sale)
- **Tickets are on sale** (two to three months before event)
- **One month countdown to event** (one month before event)
- **Last chance to buy** (three days before ticket sales close)
- **Countdown to event** (7 to 10 days before event)
- **Thank you** (same night)
- **Post-event updates** (as soon as content—photos, money raised, etc.—is available)

Send a personalized email to last year’s attendees with a special invitation to join again.
Here's an example of a post-event email that shows appreciation, requests feedback, and completes the event experience with a personalized note about its results.

Hi [Name],

Thank you for attending the sixth annual Project Stay Fur-ever Gala this past weekend! This cornerstone event and your participation allow us to plan funding for the year's efforts.

While donations are still coming in, we've raised $100,000 thanks to your support! This will allow us to rescue, nurse to health, and find homes for at least 200 stray, neglected, or abused dogs over the next year.

We had a great time (the make-your-own-doggie-bag station was a fan favorite in the house), but more importantly, we want to know what you thought. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey and let us know what you loved, what you didn't, and what you'd like to see next year.
Thank you again for attending the event and, as always, for supporting Project Stay. Check out the photo gallery from the event, and we look forward to hearing your feedback!

Fur-Ever Gala Photo Gallery
A simple way to show appreciation for your supporters is to send a thank you email, just because. You can send these on a holiday (“This Valentine's Day, we love YOU!”) or on a regular Tuesday.

Share a funny video or heartwarming story to express gratitude for donors and their impact on your cause. As always, it’s important to showcase the people you’ve served to stir donors’ emotions and remind them of the difference they are making. Since these messages of appreciation are unexpected, they’re that much more meaningful and can keep your community happy and donor retention rates high.

Remember, these sporadic thank you emails throughout the year don’t ask for anything from your community, other than a few moments of their attention. This helps promote your brand and deepen your donors’ connection with your organization.
Hi [Name],

We know Mondays can be rough, and even adorable pups aren't immune.

But we want to help you start your week off on a high note, so here's a quick story about one of our very favorite rescues, Duke, who found his new home thanks to donors like you.

Duke came to Project Stay after he was found by the side of the road with his five brothers and sisters. At only two weeks old, this litter of puppies needed around-the-clock attention and with faces like these, we were only too happy to give it to them!
As five of the puppies grew healthy and strong, Duke developed some health issues that made it difficult to find him a home. Watch the rest of the story:

Your support makes it possible for us to nurse, shelter, and feed dogs like Duke, and for that we are so grateful. So this Monday morning, let Duke's playful attitude and sloppy kisses remind you that there is always something to be thankful for—and today we are thankful for donors like you!

Share Duke's Story
In 2017, $300 million was raised online on Giving Tuesday around the world. Since Giving Tuesday is the single biggest giving day of the year, we created several in-depth resources to help you elevate your Giving Tuesday communications strategy. Check out our Giving Tuesday Social Media Templates and 10 Giving Tuesday Email Templates for step-by-step social media and email plans.

For a quick summary, here’s a general overview of a Giving Tuesday email cadence and then an example of an email to send the day before.

- **Announcement email** (10 days prior)
- **Countdown email** (seven days prior)
- **Cyber Monday** (one day prior)
- **Day-of email series**
  - **Early morning**: Remind donors that it’s Giving Tuesday and to get involved
  - **Midday**: Send out a progress update and appeal to supporters who haven’t yet donated
  - **Evening**: Increase urgency by sending an ask to all supporters who haven’t made donations
  - **Day After**: Announce how much your organization raised and the impact it will have on your beneficiaries

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2 #GivingTuesday, [https://www.givingtuesday.org](https://www.givingtuesday.org)
Early Morning on Giving Tuesday

Today Is Giving Tuesday!

This Giving Tuesday, Project Stay has a goal to raise $15,000 to give our canine friends the care they deserve. Every donation is appreciated, but if you make a contribution **before noon today**, our corporate partners at Pups ‘R’ Us will match all funds up to $10,000! That means if you donate $100, it will be equal to a $200 donation. And if we raise $10,000 by noon, it will really be a $20,000 fund!

Donate Now

How you can help: Donate to our Giving Tuesday campaign, share our campaign page with your network, and encourage others to donate.

Keep an eye on our social media for more updates, and we'll send out another email to remind you when we have two hours left in the matching campaign.

Donate Now
The year-end fundraising season of September through December generates the highest annual donation volume for organizations across the sector. And since 10 percent of annual giving occurs on the last three days of the year, it's crucial to stay top of mind all the way through December 31.  

As you craft your email strategy for your year-end fundraising campaign, make sure you leave room in your cadence for time-sensitive information like matching campaigns, progress updates, newsworthy shares, or opportunities to win prizes when your nonprofit reaches different benchmarks of fundraising goals.

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Here’s a template for an email that you can send on Thanksgiving. It hits on a few topics we’ve already discussed as it reaches out to say thank you in correlation with the holiday, and shares impact data to stay top of mind leading up to Giving Tuesday.

We’re Thankful for You

Before we start cooking and enjoying time with friends and family, we want to take a moment to say thank you. Thank you for your support of Project Stay and your commitment to providing care for neglected and abused dogs.

Your support makes it possible for us to spend our days rescuing, rehabilitating, and finding homes for the many innocent dogs in need in Southern California. Thank you for your time, energy, and support, and for making a difference in the lives of these animals. We wish you and your loved ones a very Happy Thanksgiving.

With gratitude,

Sarah Jones
Founder of Project Stay
Your supporters may be motivated to contribute in different ways. For some people, a monetary donation is ideal, while others desire a more hands-on experience. In order to offer options for all supporters to get involved, regularly send out volunteer opportunities alongside your donation appeals.

2/3 of volunteers also donate to the organization they volunteer for. And volunteers reported donating 10x more.

This diversification will not only grow your pool of volunteers, which is in itself a valuable contribution, but can also lead to more donations. Research shows that two thirds of volunteers also donate to the organization they volunteer for, and that volunteers have reported donating 10 times more to charities than non-volunteers. 4

Hi [Name],

We know you love dogs, but just how much do you love dogs? Do you follow more than one canine social media star that you don’t know in real life? Do you call all dogs, no matter how old, “puppies”? Do you find yourself suppressing the urge to stop and talk to every dog you see on the street?

If you said yes to any of the above, we’ve got weekend plans for you!

Project Stay is looking for volunteers to help out on weekends at our Orange County location. We are open to working with schedules, but we need volunteers who can commit to at least two weekends a month.

Sign Up to Volunteer
Volunteers help with everything from exercising and playing with our dogs, to cleaning cages, to communicating with amazing supporters like YOU!

MEET A VOLUNTEER

Meet Mary. She started volunteering at Project Stay three years ago and since then she hasn’t been able to stay away! Since she started she has been a part of the journey home for 42 dogs and she can recite the names of each and every one of them.

"I love being a part of Project Stay because it combines my love of animals with my passion for being involved in something bigger than myself. I’ve met so many wonderful people through Project Stay, and the dogs aren’t too bad either!"
8 | Organization Anniversary

Your organization’s anniversary is a fun milestone to celebrate with your dedicated community. In addition to thanking your donors, you should take a stroll down memory lane and note how much progress your nonprofit has made in its mission since its inception.

We’re Officially a Pre-Teen Nonprofit

Can you believe it’s been 11 years since we first opened the doors of Project Stay?

Neither can we. But in the last 11 years we’ve helped 1,578 dogs find forever homes, and it’s all thanks to generous supporters like YOU!

To celebrate this exciting milestone we’re holding a special adoption event on Saturday, September 22. In addition to a few adorable pups who need homes, we’ll have games, our favorite local vendors will supply snacks and refreshments, and of course, there will be an area for our furry friends to play.
Admission is free, but donations are always welcome! Please check the event page for more information and to RSVP. We can't wait to celebrate 11 years of Project Stay with you!

Now, let's take a walk down memory lane and visit some of our favorite rescue stories and moments from the last 11 years.
9 | Pro Tips for Email Communication

Keep in mind that for the purposes of this guide, we provided templates for email communication outside of your campaigns. Make sure that any emails tied to a major campaign are branded to that specific campaign, separate from the more general emails presented here.

**Time your emails strategically.** If you have your largest campaign or event in June, save check-in emails that are not tied to any specific date for a time when you don't have as much going on. Make sure to prioritize the appeals in your calendar.

**Follow a consistent cadence.** Be predictable with your frequency in outreach so that supporters know what to expect and can even look forward to your updates.

**Look at donor profiles.** Tailor your communications for different segments of donors.

**Don’t be afraid to include a donate button.** The main CTA is to inform and connect with your community of donors, but always include an opportunity to donate somewhere in your communications. Many opt to include it in an inline link or a donate button near the footer.
Leverage visual assets. Remind your donors of their emotional tie to your cause by sharing videos, photos, and other graphics that speak more than words will.

Keep your content digestible. Length will vary depending on the purpose of your email, but for the most part, keep it short and sweet. When you need to tell a longer story or include data points, make sure to break up blocks of text with photos or graphics.

Use consistent branding. Make sure that recipients can immediately see the difference between a campaign email and one of these types of stewardship emails by using a consistent layout or format. For instance, emails tied to a specific campaign would be branded with campaign-specific colors, headers, logo, or other branding elements, whereas these general emails could use your organization’s general brand colors, logo, and header.

Put beneficiaries front and center by telling their stories. The emotional tie to a cause is what keeps donors coming back year after year, so use the human stories behind your cause to remind donors of why they’re invested in your success.
Conclusion

Consistent communication will improve donor retention, so we hope that you use these templates to inform your annual email plan and strike a balance with the content you send to donors. A variety of strategies and occasions to connect with your donor base all year long will help strengthen their emotional connections to your organization. The more supporters feel connected with your nonprofit, the more they’ll be willing to donate when the time comes.
Download the Guide

Turn New Donors Into Lifelong Supporters

Learn how to build trust, improve involvement, and give donors exactly what they want with the Donor Retention Handbook.