

LEARNING TO SAY THANK YOU

THE ROLE OF DONOR
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research addresses four questions: how do fundraisers define acknowledgment programs? What purposes are served by acknowledgment programs? What are the biggest barriers that prevent fundraisers from designing and implementing a successful acknowledgment program? And how can we make acknowledgment programs more effective in fulfilling these purposes?

We discovered that fundraisers define acknowledgment programs by either the activities included in them or the purposes served by them. When defined by the included activities, every organization differs. But when defined by purposes served, they share the following common features:

Level 1: An acknowledgment communication may serve as a receipt of a gift.

Level 2: An acknowledgment communication may create a good feeling associated with any action a person takes for an organization.

Level 3: An acknowledgment communication may generate measurable behavioral benefits in increasing giving.

Level 4: An acknowledgment communication may generate measurable benefits in increasing the quality of a donor's relationship with an organization.

Level 5: An acknowledgment communication may appreciate the donors as people (not simply what they do for an organization).

Added benefit: Good thank-you's charge the fundraising team and build a stronger philanthropic culture.

We organized these purposes into ascending levels to signify the sentiment of our expert interviewees that "*If the donor does not feel adequately thanked, the acknowledgment has failed even though it may produce a second gift.*"

Also, we will use the term 'thank-you communications' instead of 'acknowledgment communications' to signify the shared attitude by our interviewees that any acknowledgment communication should be a thank-you message that can help an individual flourish in their journey of giving and their journey in life. As one of our interviewees said:

"It's not just thanking. It's kind of loving me."

The biggest barriers that prevent fundraisers from designing and implementing the best thank-you communications are:

- 1 The difficulty in convincing their organization to invest in thank-you's.
- 2 The lack of quantitative evidence in measuring Level 4 and Level 5 of the benefit. This difficulty is exaggerated by the fact that there are no immediately measurable behavioral outcomes that one can use to show the immediate return for such investment.

We therefore conducted a set of six tests to gather evidence that will help fundraisers document what benefits can be delivered by thank-you communications (if any). The first three tests were designed to show how fundraisers can best thank donors at a different stage of their relationship with an organization. We learned that:

- 1 After people take a first action for an organization but before they become a donor, short but interactive thank-you's that reaffirm their psychological well-being may double the degree to which they are willing to donate later on in comparison to thank-you's that reaffirm what they think is important for an organization to do. So, from the very first action that any donors take for an organization, thank-you's should focus on making donors' feel good about their action.

- 2 In a database where the average number of gifts made by donors is three, a thank-you letter reaffirming the difference that their donations made increased average gifts by 60% without reducing response rate in comparison to a control group of donors who did not receive this thank-you communication. The renewal letter was sent four weeks after the thank-you letter.
- 3 In a database where the average number of gifts made by donors is 16, a thank-you letter reaffirming the wonderful relationship the donors have with the organization's long-standing and beloved CEO is as effective as a thank-you letter reaffirming how wonderful the donor is as a person. These thank-you letters were more effective in comparison to a third group of donors who did not receive either communication. Both letters increased the response rate of the renewal letter sent four weeks after the thank-you by over 10% without reducing average gift size.
- 4 In all tests we collected further evidence that these communications made people feel better. We estimated that if these thank-you's are done in a consistent and lively manner, organizations have the potential to increase the good-feeling in their database by a minimum of 20% over five years.



The second set of three tests were designed to show how fundraisers can best balance the need to tell stories of individual beneficiaries of the organization's work while still conveying its wider impact on society. In short, we provide evidence for whether cases may be better than numbers, or vice versa. We learned that:

- 1** If the thank-you communications contain an individual story that evokes relatively little emotion, this will likely be the best approach to generating subsequent behavioral benefits and making donors feel better. This will be more impactful than sharing the numbers of people aided (or in need) or a sense of the "vastness of the mission."
- 2** When the individual story is highly emotional, thank-you communications are most effective in making donors feel better when they thank the person for the difference they make over a longer period (e.g. a year not a week).

- 3** This is because the vastness of an organization's mission accomplishment can only increase giving intentions and enhance people's good feeling when the vastness can be translated into connections with others the donor cares about and donors' passion for the cause served by the organization.

INTRODUCTION

Fundraising, especially successful fundraising, can be seen as a process of building a mutually beneficial relationship between a donor and an organization (MacQuillin and Sargeant, 2015). A simple gift acknowledgment or thank-you can play a critical role in this process, providing feedback to the donor in respect of how their gift will be used and affirming the individual for their generosity in having given freely to help others. The thank-you can acknowledge and celebrate that act of giving, expressing gratitude/appreciation and doing so in such a way that the donor feels good for having made the gift. All this is intuitive to most fundraisers, yet remarkably the thank-you has received very little scholarly interest or attention, with researchers preferring to focus on why people give in the first place and thus donor motivation.

In this project we attempt to plug something of that gap in knowledge, exploring what charities could (or perhaps should) do to optimize how good people feel when they are thanked for their gift or any other action that they may have undertaken on behalf of the organization. We hypothesize that if charities can acknowledge one gift well, they are significantly more likely to receive further gifts and build more mutually beneficial relationships with their donors.

To explore the issue of thanking donors, we adopted a multi-method approach. We gained insight in respect to what the sector is currently doing by interviewing leading practitioners and comparing this with what the literature suggests the sector could be doing. This allowed us to identify opportunities for testing and change. We then tested our hypotheses by conducting a series of experiments with multiple clients in the United States to see how acknowledgment programs might be modified to best meet the

needs of the donor, and to facilitate a genuine and mutually beneficial relationship.

In the report that follows we summarize our interview findings, our experimental findings, and the academic concepts that these tests are based on. We conclude with the implications for professional practice.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: EXPERT INTERVIEWS

We interviewed 15 experts in acknowledgment communications on the following four topics:

- 1 How do fundraisers define acknowledgment programs?
- 2 What purposes are served by acknowledgment programs?
- 3 What are the biggest barriers that prevent fundraisers from designing and implementing a successful acknowledgment program?
- 4 How can we make acknowledgment programs more effective in fulfilling these purposes?

We will summarize the findings here.

How do fundraisers define acknowledgment programs?

Our interviewees suggest that fundraisers define acknowledgment programs based on either the activities that they encompass, or by the purposes they serve. When defined by the former, there is no one-size-fits-all definition of what an acknowledgment program may mean for each organization. They may range from the writing and sending of thank-you notes, to exclusive communication programs based on donor value. The line between acknowledgment,

stewardship, and cultivation can sometimes be blurred.

“We work often in higher ed., healthcare, sometimes faith-based organizations, multi-affiliate organizations, so those that have a national chapter and then chapters among those chapters. The stewardship programs across the board look different. There’s the standard receipt of your gift and acknowledgment of that. So the thank-you acknowledgment there: a receipt and acknowledgment program that’s written. Some organizations have a thank-you call program, so after a gift of a certain amount, you reach out and thank the donor for those gifts. Some actually have a robust stewardship program, so you’re not only thanking, but you’re also giving outcome reports to the donors that have contributed. Some have gala events that they actually invite people as an appreciation and they’re not intending to make an ask. I feel like it looks different depending on the organization and how they are going about fundraising.

It’s a blurry line between acknowledgment and appreciation and stewardship, but at some point you’re going to come around to asking them to give again. Then it stops becoming acknowledgment and starts becoming stewardship for the next gift.”

When defined this way, people tend to focus on answering the following questions as a way

of improving their acknowledgment program: How can we shorten the cycle of asks? How can we increase the frequency of giving given the frequency of acknowledgment and stewardship? How can we increase the total value of the gifts given the number of asks? And how can we transform the way people experience the cycles of acknowledge-steward-asks and make the fundraising relationship more rewarding for donors? We will shed some light on most of these questions during our testing.

What purposes are served by acknowledgment programs?

Some of our interviewees prefer not to define acknowledgment programs by the activities that comprise them, but by the purposes served by them: to thank people.

“I’m not sure if the really good fundraisers think of it as a program which is part of maybe a core reason for their success. I think fundraisers think of it as you gave us a gift and we must thank-you. Actually, the word must is in there. It’s not good manners not to thank a donor for a gift.”

Our interviewees shared the following purposes served by thank-you communications.

Level 1: An acknowledgment communication may serve as a receipt of a gift

As a receipt of a gift it should be seamless and easy. This is a matter of hygiene in the design of the acknowledgment program. After people give, they should be thanked within 48 hours. Even if the organization has a really special thank-you pack that they want to send them in the following week, our interviewees indicated it is still necessary to do a prompt receipt of the gift.

Whenever affordable, most of our interviewees recommend personalized thank-you’s. However, a few did have anecdotal evidence that automated

thank-you’s can be efficient and effective with individual donors giving less than \$30.

“Some clients say e-receipts are the way to go, so they never have to touch a thing. The funny thing is, they’ve still retained their lower end donors. This is what I’m seeing.”

For donors giving above \$200, it is generally suggested that organizations should make the investment to personalize them. Whenever possible, a hand-written signature, or a personal message from the CEO of the organization or its equivalent is recommended. Some interviewees say that:

“Even if it’s a real basic transactional kind of relationship, I think our job is to see whom we can take from that transactional level to a more involved and engaged level.”

It is not only about meeting the social expectations of reciprocity, i.e. I give you a gift and you thank me. It is also about making people feel the best about what they have done so that they can be most motivated to do it again, or even to do something better.

Level 2: An acknowledgment communication may create a good feeling associated with any action a person takes for an organization.

Naturally, how to create this good feeling may be different for high value versus low value donors, but most of our interviewees indicated that any thank-you communication must create value beyond what is merely meeting normative expectations. For some this may be experienced as:

“Appreciated, acknowledged. Probably understood, because you want a conversation with them.”

“I think it makes donors feel appreciated and valued and like they’re making a difference in the world, and they’re having an impact and making a difference on something that they care about ... typically the donations that people are making, especially the ones that are more

significant to them financially, they're really giving to things that they feel passionately about, and that they want to see some kind of change or outcome.

Really appreciating the person for doing that, that just makes you feel good. We want to do more of the things that make us feel good, so if nonprofits' ultimate goals are to get people to be more engaged and more philanthropic and continue to give again and repeat this behavior, the better we can make people feel about it, the more likely they are to do it."

"The primary purpose of an acknowledgment is to thank people, make them feel valued and make them delighted that they gave to you in the first place. Give them that experience all over again that they experienced in giving to you in the first place and then that way you're encouraging them too, building a bond, and encouraging them to give to you again in the future."

"It's not just thanking. It's kind of loving me."

The degree to which each thank-you communication can make people feel good inevitably varies. Our interviewees suggested that fundraisers should try to make their thank-you's more "*memorable, worthwhile, and fun for that person*" because it is believed that if the thank-you's can achieve these goals in the donors, then they're far more likely to engage again. Here is an example shared by one of our

interviewees. This is how he *remembered* the thank-you:

"I'll give you an example from my own personal experience as a donor to this small-ish charity. They're not huge, but they do amazing work for their size. They work overseas with refugees. They're trying to tackle a sex traffic boom in the US. They take on big problems even though they are a pretty small group.

Just out of the blue, in January, I got a postcard from them. It was personalized and it had a picture. It had a picture of a woman. She was turned away from the camera so you couldn't tell who she was, but she was working with a horse, a beautiful horse. It was equine therapy for somebody who had been sex trafficked and now had been rescued and was trying to restore her life.

That was the photo and on the other side, the message was, "Dear Tom ..." It was all personalized. "I just want to thank-you. You are such a blessing."

The postcard is attached in Figure 1. What is interesting to note is that the postcard actually did not say "you are such a blessing", but that is how this card as a whole made our interviewee feel. That feeling is what Tom remembered. He remembered being thanked, and he remembered that he was a blessing to this individual who cannot bear to look him directly in the eye.

Figure1: Crisis Aid's Example:



One reason why this thank-you was remembered so fondly is because it was “out of the blue”. It was a surprise. It did not meet expectations, it exceeded them. Several interviewees shared the power of exceeding expectations:

“I feel there have been a few occasions where I get what feels like a surprise, an unexpected little communication in the mail from them that is just really sweet.”

“When you’re talking about granting a child’s heartfelt wish (by Make a Wish), those expectations are very high. We have to be really buttoned up and doing everything we can to deliver this exceptional experience. When it comes to wish granting, we do. And that is what we are aiming for in our fundraising communications too.”

Level 3: An acknowledgment communication may generate measurable behavioral benefits in increasing giving

Good thank-you’s should increase retention and donor life-time value. That was the consensus reached by our interviewees.

“The people who were the best at thanking were the people that were also the best at retaining donors and therefore increasing lifetime value.”

“Those who thank me really well are the people that I stick with as a donor. In fact, I even reach out to them every once in a while and say, “When is the last time I gave a gift to you?” It must be time again.”

Level 4: An acknowledgment communication may generate measurable benefits in increasing the quality of donors’ relationships with an organization

We organized the purposes served by thank-you communications into levels, primarily because of the distinction our interviewees made between the third and the fourth level. Level 4 is distinctive from the previous one because:

“If the donor does not feel adequately thanked, the acknowledgment has failed even though it may produce a second gift.”

Our interviewees think that thank-you communications should at the bare minimum increase the satisfaction, trust and commitment that donors experience in their relationship with an organization.

“I think you want them to feel valued and inspired, and confident and trusting, that they feel that they made the right decision in donating, and that they’re confident that their gift’s going to be used as they intended, and that it’s going to make a difference and have an impact.”

“Acknowledgement is kind of high. Gratitude is much more embracing and it is much more of a commitment on the side of the organization. If you call it acknowledgment, well I can have my assistant do that. If you call it gratitude, I have to jump in and be the one doing the hug. Yeah, go ahead, let’s do it!”

Over time, thank-you communications shape how donors define or feel about their relationships with organizations. Does the relationship feel like “ask, ask, and ask” or does the relationship feel like “ask, thanks, updates, ask, thanks, updates” or does the relationship feel like “ask, thanks, thanks, thanks, thanks, when will the ask come? I cannot wait to give to them again!”. Creating the last feeling routinely may be perceived by some as a waste of donor resources. But creating this feeling by using out-of-the-blue, expectation-exceeding thank-you’s may just give a database a boost that it has never experienced before.

When considering whether doing so would be beneficial, our interviewees encourage fundraisers to reflect on the progression that donors experience as a donor to the organization.

“Sure. When a donor first joins you, getting that second gift is the biggest challenge. Making people feel like they’re a part of you because the first gift for a lot of people is really just to test, they’re kind of testing the waters with you. They may have heard about you for the first time, and so something in your original contact with them struck a chord so they gave. You’ve really got to bring them along, and it’s this combination of thanking them and educating them. The first thing we want to make sure that they get is a very prompt thank-you, and that thank-you needs to be a very warm, engaging, human letter that makes them feel really good about what they did and is very clear about what their gift is accomplishing.

That needs to be followed then by a welcome pack, and that welcome pack should be a combination of welcoming and (in an engaging, storytelling manner), telling them a bit more about your organization. There’s a number of things that it needs to do. It needs to build trust in your organization, so you need to have social proof, like whether or not you belong to certain organizations, whether you’ve won awards, whether you’ve been around for a long time. Maybe an endorsement... Don’t necessarily go with famous people, but a well-known person that has a lot of gravitas that supports you and can kind of give you a testimonial.

Things like that are trust builders, really important. Telling them that your financials are open to them at any time, giving them an idea of how their money is spent. There’s the trust builders and then there’s the whole emotional part. The storytelling of how their donation has helped. That and the welcome pack is really important, and also setting the tone for what they can expect from you going forward. You’re setting an expectation and then you’ve got to meet it. That would be the main difference between a new donor and an existing donor

Then if you have a good donor comms and acknowledgment program in place, that new donor can go forward into your regular comms stream fairly quickly, particularly if you have really good newsletters that are doing very good report backs three or four times a year, then you’ll keep that person engaged. I consider that the first thank-you letter’s obviously, “Welcome to our organization, we value you” and telling them what they did with it. Then the welcome pack following it just a couple of weeks later, it gives them more information, builds trust, and makes them feel really good again about the whole thing.”

Our interviewees warned against seeing the thank-you only as a necessary process. They told us it is not about using the same stale thank-you’s just to complete the task or attempting to be out-of-the-blue in quantity but not in quality. It is about sharing authentic and genuine gratitude.

Level 5: An acknowledgment communication may appreciate the donors as people (not simply what they do for an organization).

This level of appreciation is deeper than other levels because it is not just about making people feel like their donation is valuable, inspiring and important, and it is not just about deepening the relationship that people have with the organization. It is also about thanking the people for being the real gift:

“I think of acknowledgment programs as all the work that nonprofits do, all the communication that they do, that can raise appreciation of their donors and their donors’ contributions, and the impact of those contributions. For me, one of the important features is that you’re not just recognizing donations, that you’re really appreciating the donors as people, and that it’s not just about their gifts.”

“Now that I think about it, and I think about our style of thanking, ours is all about thanking the person. Like talking about what a wonderful thing they’ve done and your generosity and your heart and your graciousness. We thank the person, we mention the gift, but we thank the person.”

“Almost exactly what I would have said for acknowledgments meaning casting the doctor as the hero of the story, making the donor feel like they’re part of something and something important and that they’re part of a winning team, that they’re valued. That their role in ending childhood hunger or curing cancer or saving refugees is genuinely valued. Yeah, I think those are the key elements.”

Added benefit: Good thank-you’s charge the fundraising team and build a stronger philanthropic culture

When an organization develops an effective thank-you program, fundraisers feel better about their job:

“What I was really excited about, and it was just a simple thank-you card, it was solicitation, no ask. In those examples, I just want people to feel a deeper connection with the organization. I want it to feel like a more personalized touch. I think that’s why even having the volunteers come in and hand write these thank-you notes is really important.”

“Yes. If you find new and different ways to do it and something that’s true and unique, then it feels special and it’s more fun for us too.”

“Because we had a monthly private donor tour of our homeless center on Thursday mornings when the staff were in training and the center was closed down. We invited people all the time. What we found when we went out to visit them in person is that we walked into these little old ladies’ houses and they would have the invitation, because we made it look like a proper invitation, sitting up on their mantle. One said, “You know, I just don’t feel stable enough to come into City Century in a taxi anymore, but it’s so lovely to be invited.” That kind of stuff when you start factoring it in, that human element when you start factoring it into your fundraising, it can really guide your fundraising in a different direction. If you’re sitting back here looking at segments in a database and deciding what to do with them, it can end up being pretty cold.”

One of our interviewees said: “*organizational egotism, sometimes thought of as organizational narcissism is a very, very powerful force and it’s a very powerful negative force in eliminating authentic relationships with donors.*” Authentic relationships can charge fundraisers, not just donors.

“I don’t think it’s a semantic problem. I don’t know. I’d say it’s the orientation of nonprofits, at least of the ones that I work with most. I think it’s partially a resource issue, that it’s not prioritized. It’s not seen as important. I think people internally don’t recognize or understand the value in having a more sophisticated acknowledgment program. I think it’s partially a prioritization problem, and partially an education problem, that people don’t necessarily realize the value for all stakeholders in doing things differently.”



What are the biggest barriers to a successful acknowledgment program?

Our interviewees “*don’t see many organizations doing thank-you’s well.*”

The difficulty in convincing their organizations to invest in thank-you’s is the biggest barrier faced by fundraisers in order to design and implement successful thank-you programs.

“We don’t have the time, and it doesn’t make a difference.”

“Thank you’s weren’t worth the money to send.”

The severity of this difficulty is exaggerated by the lack of quantitative evidence available in measuring the fourth and the fifth level of the benefits delivered by thank-you communications. Very often these benefits cannot be measured without the organization incurring additional cost and very often, they cannot be measured as immediately as what one would observe when sending out a fundraising appeal. Our interviewees think collecting this quantitative evidence is important because it has the potential to help change some very deeply engrained attitudes that some organizations have about thank-you communications.

HOW CAN WE MAKE ACKNOWLEDGMENT PROGRAMS MORE EFFECTIVE?

We will explain our experimental tests in this section. Our findings confirmed what was suggested by the literature: that the value donors derive from a thank-you might vary depending on how developed their relationship is with an organization. At the beginning of the relationship for example, the thank-you would ideally reaffirm the difference that the donation (not the donor) had been able to make to the cause, reflecting what had been promised in the original solicitation. Later on in the relationship, the focus of the thank-you can shift to the quality of the mutually beneficial relationship the donor has developed with the organization or who the donor is, themselves. The thank-you at this stage can celebrate the individual's sense of who they are, their identity, the kind of person they are, their values and so forth.

With this potential difference in mind we focused our efforts with our research partners on donors at varying stages of relationship development. We begin with a sample of supporters who have yet to make a donation.

Test 1: How do we thank first-time action takers?



Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence launched a campaign in May 2017 which asked people to sign a petition and to reject the "Arm Anyone" Bill that was about to pass through Congress. The Bill would have allowed anyone to carry a concealed weapon in every US state, regardless of individual state laws.

Those who signed the petition were then sent a thank-you email as part of Brady's Welcome Series (Figure 2). These were new supporters who were not on Brady's supporter database prior to this campaign. This is the first action that the supporters would have taken on behalf of Brady. This thank-you email detailed why it was important that they signed the petition and contained a link at the end to a survey so Brady

could find out more about why that person was interested in the gun control movement. When supporters clicked on the email link 'Take the

Survey!' they were taken to a page containing our survey questions.

Figure 2: Brady's Thank-You Email

Dear {First Name}

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!

Thank you for signing the Brady Campaign petition to oppose the "Arm Anyone" bill!

By signing the petition to oppose the Zimmerman bill to "Arm Anyone", you joined an army of hundreds of thousands of passionate people who care. You also stood up to say that you have had ENOUGH of the fact that more than 33,000 people die every year from gun violence. Together, we stand up to end gun violence.

Your support also made all of us here at Brady feel very, very good about what we do. Thank you.

In gratitude, we wonder if there is anything we could do for you. Would you answer three quick questions to help us understand you better?

Thank you.

[TAKE SURVEY](#)

Our focus in this test was on the wellbeing that a thank-you might engender. It is now well established that being properly thanked can contribute to an individual's sense of wellbeing, but only if that wellbeing is deliberately engineered through the careful selection of an appropriate form of words.

The emerging science of wellbeing tells us that human beings have a number of "higher order needs" that together comprise wellbeing (Ryff 1989; Ryan and Deci 2001). These needs include:

- 1** A need to feel competent. In the context of philanthropy this can be expressed as a need to feel competent in expressing their love for others.
- 2** A need for autonomy. We experience wellbeing when we feel we have "had a voice" or exercised some control over achieving the desired outcomes for the beneficiaries. The more autonomy people experience, the greater the degree of wellbeing obtained.
- 3** A need for connectedness with others that they care about. This could be beneficiaries, other donors, a charismatic leader, the organization, the brand or (in the context of faith giving) a God figure. We call this need 'relatedness'.
- 4** A need to experience growth as an individual. In the context of giving this may be a need to grow as a moral person through the articulation of personal philanthropy. Individuals can also experience growth by developing understanding and relationships.
- 5** A need to experience clarity in respect of one's purpose in life. The more clarity we experience the higher the level of personal wellbeing we experience.
- 6** A need to be accepting of the person that one is today and has been in the past. The more accepting we are of our former and current selves the greater the level of wellbeing we experience.

In one set of experimental testing it would be impossible to do justice to all these dimensions of wellbeing, so we elected to focus on competence, autonomy and relatedness; the same concepts that we will use throughout all of our tests in this report.

The survey we did with Brady had three components. One component asked questions about wellbeing. A second asked questions about other actions that the individual might be willing to take to help Brady in the future and a third focused on what the individual felt was most important aspect about Brady's work.

The questions were as follows:

Q1) How did signing the petition make you feel?

- It made me feel like I am very capable and effective
- It made me feel like I am free to be who I am
- It made me feel more strongly connected to those who need protection from gun violence
- It made me feel I can voice my beliefs
- It made me feel I can make a meaningful difference

Q2) In what ways would you consider helping Brady in the future? Please check all that apply.

- Signing another petition (Thank you again!)
- Liking us on Facebook
- Following us on Twitter
- Donating to help stop gun violence
- Joining a chapter
- Attending an event
- Telling others about Brady

Q3) Will you vote on which of these is most important? Please choose one.

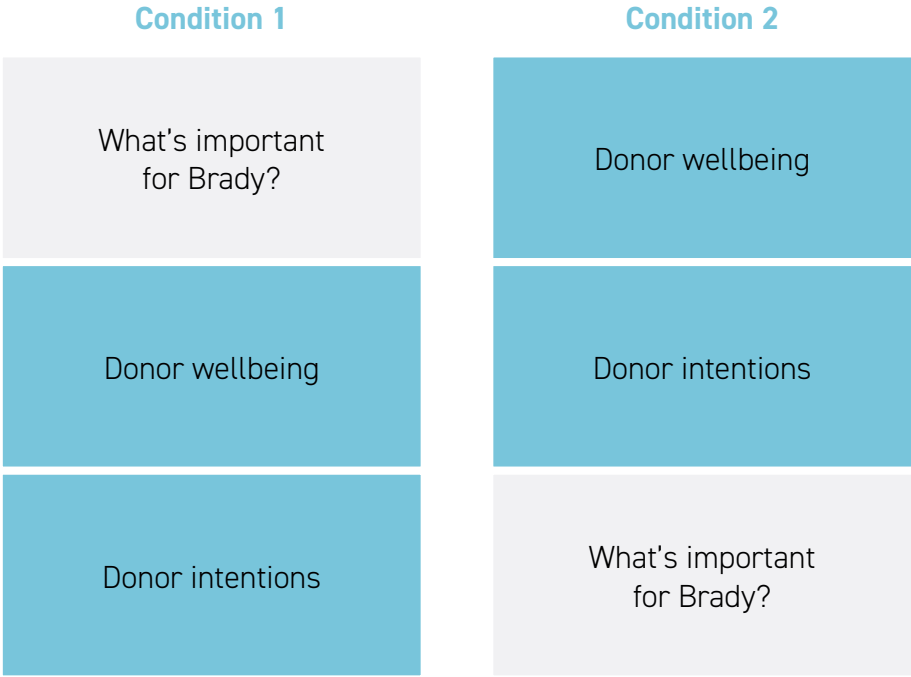
- Expanding Brady background checks to all gun sales
- Letting people know that a gun in the home makes their home less safe
- Closing down gun dealers that skirt the law and provide guns to criminals

In our experiment, participants were split into two conditions with the difference between

conditions being the order in which they were asked the questions.

One half of the sample were asked about autonomy, competence, and relatedness (*their wellbeing*) and their future support intentions *before* voting for what is important for Brady ('before condition'). The other half were asked about autonomy, competence, and relatedness (*their wellbeing*) and their future support intentions *after* voting for what is important for Brady ('after condition'). For clarity, the conditions are depicted in Figure 3

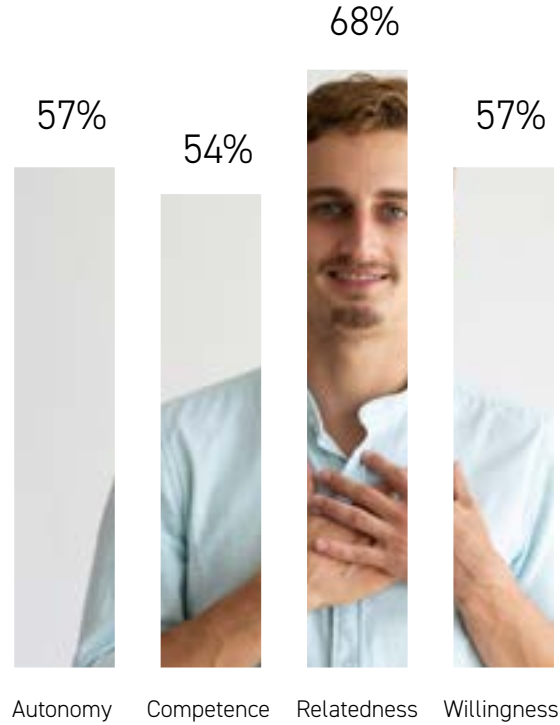
Figure 3: Testing Conditions for Brady



The testing revealed that people feel better about themselves when they are asked how they feel before (rather than after) they are asked what is important for Brady. Figure 4 shows that they experience higher competence, autonomy and relatedness with others in the before condition. Relatedness, for example, climbs by 68% if individuals are asked to reflect on it before thinking about the other questions in the survey.

We also found that when the wellbeing questions were posed first, individuals were significantly more likely to agree that they would be willing to take other actions on Brady's behalf in the future. As Figure 4 indicates the effect size is not small. Individuals are 57% more likely to agree to take the actions listed.

Figure 4: Enhanced Wellbeing and Willingness to Help



Test 2: How do we thank annual donors from a young database?

One interviewee shared with us a thank-you campaign by Food for the Poor in the US.

“It’s a faith-based charity. It’s a huge charity now although it started quite small. It’s now a billion dollars a year in food aid and other kinds of aid. They’ve expanded. That goes to South and Central America.

What the executive director there, a guy named Angel Aloma did was he sent an additional thank-you out in February. It wasn’t timed to anything particularly. I don’t think. It was just early in the year. He split his database into two halves and he sent that additional thank-you to one half and nothing to the other.

At the end of the year when they went through their data to see if anything had happened. What they discovered was that both halves of the list gave as many gifts or the percentage of giving was equal, but the half that got the extra thank-you gave more money. It’s significantly more. Like a half million dollars in additional revenue because they had invested in this one extra thing... It wasn’t a big fancy pants thing. It was just a nice extra thank-you out of the blue.

I think that’s where you see a culture of thanking or culture of gratitude.”

We worked with Planned Parenthood Southern New England (PPSNE) to replicate this finding. In particular, we wanted to help fundraisers set their parameters of thank-you’s by outlining the characteristics of the donors. This is a data base where the average number of gifts made by donors is about three. So most were early in their relationship with PPSNE. Most of them

gave about 11 months before they received our thank-you letter. All of them received a renewal letter four weeks after the thank-you letter and an email survey six weeks after the renewal.

We divided donors into two groups. A group that received no thank-you letter and a group that did receive a thank-you letter. Figure 5 shows you the thank-you letter we used:



Figure 5: Planned Parenthood's thank-you letter

Dear Ms. Eides.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I often write to you to ask for a gift, but not today.

Today, I want to tell you that you are the real gift.

Today, I want to thank you for changing lives.

Your past support of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) changed Lauren's life.

After suffering years of abuse, Lauren found renewed hope for safety: gifts like yours allowed her to get her first well-women exam. This meant the world to her — safe, non-judgmental care provided by informed and toughful health care providers.

She could not have done it without you making sure that our providers were there with hands for her to hold. So, **thank you.**

You also changed Stephany's life.

If it had not been for donors like you, Stephany's life would have been side-tracked by an unintended pregnancy.

Without you, we wouldn't have been able to help Stephany recognize her options and take steps to putting her life back on track.

So, **you are the true gift.** And I do not think I have said this enough to you.

Last year, when Jake lost his insurance coverage, donors like you allowed us to open our doors to him. We were right there when he walked through our door.

I am so grateful for you, truly — and proud of the values that we share. Proud that you took the stand with your donation to say:

“Everyone can receive the care they deserve, no matter their ability to pay.”

Right now, that is such an impactful stand to take. With every dollar you can donate, you change lives.

Because you are there, standing with us, we get through the really tough days when headline after headline showcase hateful policies against our patients and the communities we serve. **Without you, we could not have stood our ground for our patients.** Without you, we could not have kept our door wide open and held our chins up to say:

“Everyone deserves health care.”

So, thank you. Thank you for standing with Planned Parenthood.

With great appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Amanda Skinner

President & CEO

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

In addition, we also divided the renewal letter into two versions. In both versions, before donors choose how much they would like to give they could tick a box. The only difference between the two conditions was whether “for 80,000 patients each year” was mentioned. Figure 6 shows these conditions.

Figure 6: Two experimental conditions in the renewal letter



So in aggregate, the file was split into four conditions as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Four testing conditions for PPSNE

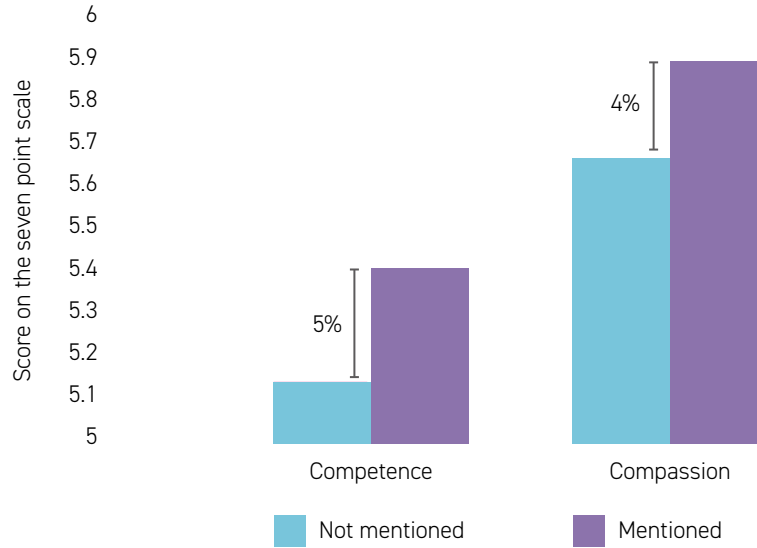
Thank-you Letter	"For 80,000 patients each year"	
	Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Sent	Condition 1	Condition 2
Not Sent	Condition 3	Condition 4

In addition, in order to measure how these four conditions made people feel, we sent out a survey to the same group of donors a few weeks after they made their gifts. We asked whether they remembered receiving a thank-you letter and how they felt about giving to PPSNE.

We found whether "80,000 patients" are mentioned in the renewal letter or not does not make a difference in donation behavior either in terms of response rate or average donation

amount. But we did find that those in the "80,000 patients" condition felt 5% more competent in making a difference and 4% more like a compassionate person (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Those who received the "80,000 patients" condition felt better about their giving



Whether a thank-you letter was sent did not change response rate to the renewal letter. The response rate to the renewal letter was 1.49% in donors who did not receive the thank-you letter and 1.43% in those who did receive the thank-you letter. A logit regression shows that whether donors received the thank-you letter or

the version of the renewal letter received did not significantly affect renewal rates.

But the thank-you letter, massively increased the average donation amount. Figure 8 shows that donors who received the thank-you letter gave more, on average, to renew their annual gift than those who did not receive the thank-you letter.

Figure 8: Those who received the thank-you letter gave more on average than those who did not



To confirm whether this effect was statistically significant, we completed a regression analysis investigating whether receiving a thank-you letter a few weeks before renewal increased the gifts received at renewal. We controlled for the number of gifts donors gave in the past. Those who received the thank-you gave on average \$45.32 more than those who did not receive the thank-you. This difference is statistically significant ($B = 43.81, p = .05$).

This result is interesting, because we replicated what was reported by Food For the Poor precisely, i.e. the thank-you's increased the average amount donated but not response rate. It is also interesting because we found that donors who received the thank-you were no more likely to remember it than a donor who did not receive the letter ($B = -0.32, p = .324$). Due to a small sample size, we could not draw statistically significant results about how the thank-you letters made people feel.

It is possible that this difference in donation is not caused by a thank-you letter per se. One could argue that simply getting an additional communication, any communication, could have generated this effect. Given the limitation on our

sample size, these are the only two conditions we can have so we were not able to test this additional hypothesis.

Test 3: How do we thank annual donors from a mature database?



Following exactly the same three step testing strategy, we worked with Iowa Public Television (hereafter IPTV) to test the impact of a thank-you on subsequent giving behavior in a more mature database. IPTV donors had given an average of 16 donations to the station, and so most donors were at an advanced stage in their relationship.

Eleven months after donors gave their previous annual gift, we divided donors into three groups. A group that would receive no thank-you and two groups that would receive one of two thank-you letters. Table 2 shows how many people were in each condition.

Table 2: Number of people in each condition in IPTV

9946 received the CEO focused thank-you

9928 received the donor focused thank-you

5626 received no thank-you

The first thank-you was CEO centered (Figure 9). It was focused on how the donor's commitment had made the CEO feel. It talked about what the gift meant to her and how it made her feel. The second thank-you was donor centered, talking about the difference the donor had made and what they achieved for the community. Donors

were thanked for being "there" for the station and not letting go (Figure 10).

Figure 9. CEO centered thank-you letter

From the desk of Susan Moritz



Dear << Letter Salutation >>,

I am not going to ask you for money today. I have done a lot of it over the years, and you can bet I will do it again some time very soon, too.

But not today.

Over the years, I have told you over and over again how many wonderful programs your donation has created, how many needs, dreams and hopes that your donations have fulfilled for our community and how successful your investment in IPTV has been.

Though all still very true, I want to talk about none of that today.

So today, I want to thank you.

I want to tell you how much your commitment to IPTV means to me personally.

It means the world to me.

It makes me feel trusted and cared for.

It gives me a renewed sense of purpose and energy.

It allows me to wake up every morning wanting to make IPTV even better.

That is what I am thankful for.

And I do not think I have thanked you enough for it. Thank you for choosing us to be part of your life.

Thank you for not letting us go.

Thank you for being there for us year after year.

Thank you for being one of our most trusted friends.

Thank you.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan".

Susan Moritz

President, Friends of IPTV

susan.moritz@iptv.org

Figure 10. Donor centered thank-you letter

From the desk of Susan Moritz



Dear <<Letter Salutation>>,

You are wonderful. Really. You are.

I often write to you to ask you for a gift. I am not doing that today. I have done a lot of it over the years, and you can bet I will do it again some time very soon, too.

But not today.

Today, I want to tell you that you are the real gift.

You're a member of Friends of Iowa Public Television.

Why are you part of this?

No one said you had to be a member.

You know the TV programs are free to everyone. Free to you. Free to your neighbors and their families. Free to your schools.

You didn't beg off, though: "Hey, free's good. Thanks a lot!"

Instead, you made the principled decision to support Iowa Public Television. You gave Friends of Iowa Public Television your hard-earned money.

You know what really makes my hairs stand on end, though?

You gave us your trust.

No kidding.

You stood shoulder to shoulder with more than 55,000 others to say, "Yes! This is important. I want public television in my life. My community needs this kind of non-commercial programming. I'm going to help."

THANK YOU!!!

Money is swell. As you well know, television is expensive.

Honestly, we NEED your money... but your TRUST speaks even louder than dollar signs.

Your trust says Iowa Public Television matters. It matters today and it matters for the future of our communities.

Thanks to true believers like you, public television - and its equally important, easily-accessed online presence - remains deeply committed to delivering vibrant, meaningful and engaging programs - reflecting the relevant stories of our time hether they be enlightening, controversial or just plain entertaining.

You make it possible.

You have always been there.

Thank you so much.

I am profoundly grateful.

I don't know what we'd do without you.

Thank you for your kindness, compassion and generosity.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter... and thank you for sharing this special moment with me.

With love and deep appreciation,



Susan Moritz

President, Friends of IPTV

susan.moritz@iptv.org

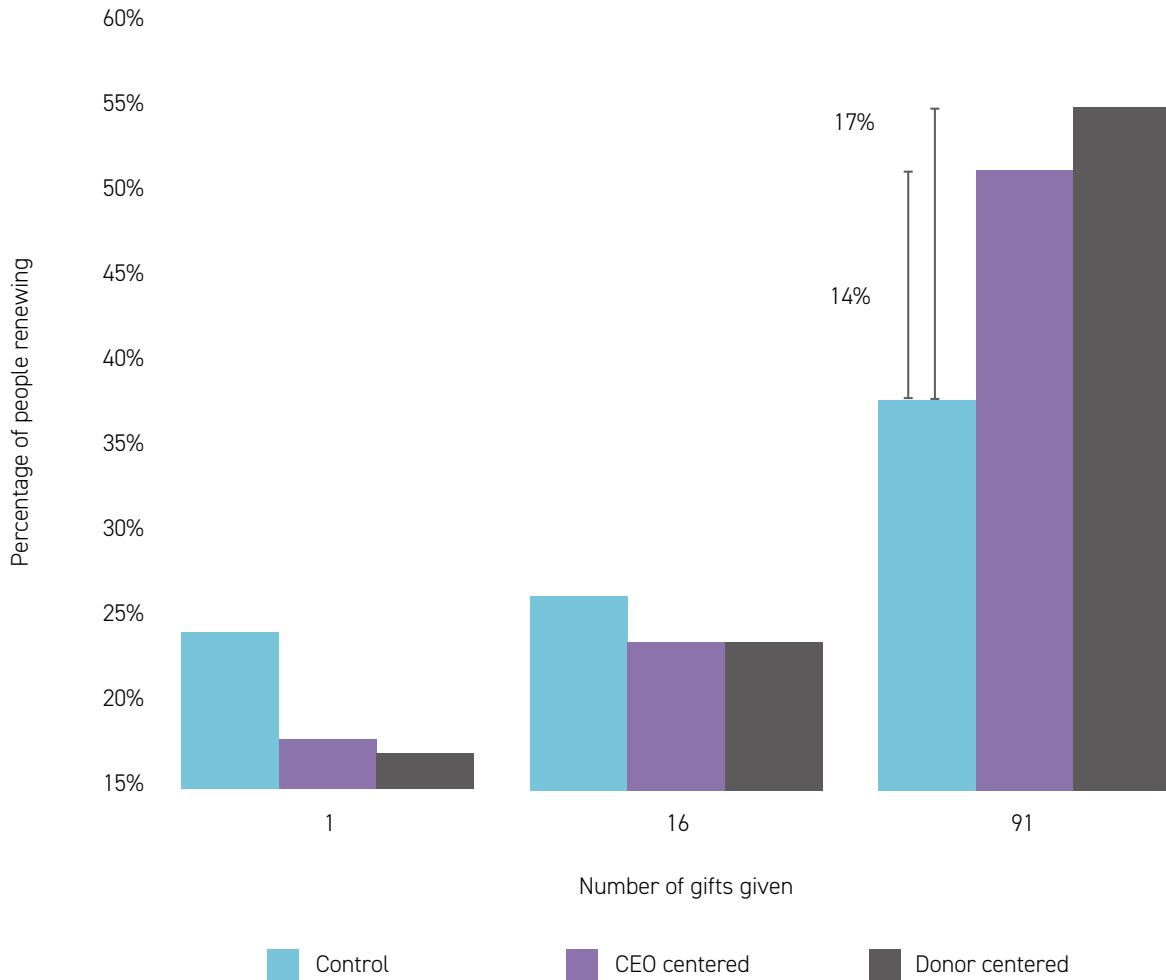
A few weeks after the thank-you letter was sent, a renewal letter was sent to the same donors. The three groups of donors received the same renewal letters. A follow-up survey was then sent to gather information about how donors felt about their giving and their relationship with IPTV. Out of the total number of donors, 14,514 donors did not have email addresses and therefore received the survey by post. The remaining 10,986 participants received the survey online.

We could find no difference in the average level of giving in these three groups. A number of variables were controlled for such as age, gender, marital status, total number of gifts, and total giving.

However, we found that receiving either the CEO centered letter or the donor centered letter increased the proportion of people who renewed their donation compared to the control group for those donors who gave more than 16 times in the past. No differences were found amongst those who gave less than 16 times.

For donors who had given most frequently, receiving the CEO centered letter increased the likelihood of them renewing by 14% compared to the control group, and receiving the donor centered letter increased the likelihood of them renewing by 17% compared to the control group (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. CEO and donor-centric letters increased response rate



Many are surprised by the effect that the CEO centred letter had because on the surface it seems contradictory to the “donor centered” teaching that we have exposed ourselves to for years. The reason why we think the CEO centered letter performed as well as the donor centered letter in this case is because of the unique community this letter was sent to.

In this public television viewers' community, the CEO has been one of the key contacts that most members of the community recognize and respect. She has a long standing reputation at the station, so her long-term relationship with the donors is a significant part of what the

donors' connection with the station means to them.

The reason why neither letter worked for donors who gave less than 16 times is because these letters focus on “thanking the donor” as a person, not “thanking the donation”. It is only after donors developed a genuine relationship and felt as if they had “earned” this level of thank-you that their responses were uplifted.

To be clear, this thank-you letter did not suppress any responses from donors who gave less than 16 times and we did not detect any detrimental effect on these donors' feelings in our follow-up



survey either. So, if segmentation is not possible, a letter of this kind can be sent to the whole database.

Our follow-up survey allowed us to investigate whether increased giving from either the CEO-centered or the donor-centered letter affected how donors felt about their giving. We found that the donations that people made after receiving these two letters (in comparison to the control condition) made them feel more connected with the organization (Beta = 0.10, $p = 0.05$), more competent (Beta = 0.06, $p = 0.16$), more

autonomous (Beta = 0.08, $p = 0.10$), and more related to others (Beta = 0.10, $p = .03$).

The building of these good feelings however takes time. Based on our test, we estimate that if non-profits thank people four times a year (through mail, email or phone), they can increase the four good feelings (connectedness to the non-profit, competence, autonomy and relatedness) by between 5% and 8%. So in five years, if these increases are additive they can be increased by between 25% and 40%.

SHOULD WE USE CASES OR NUMBERS/ VASTNESS?

Fundraisers are often puzzled by whether they should tell the story in their thank you of the vastness of what their organization can accomplish every year (e.g. for PPSNE, it is to help 80,000 patients a year. For IPTV, it is to provide the kind of program that can stretch people's mind and open up a new universe for them). Such approaches are in stark contrast with focusing on the story of a specific beneficiary.

Many fundraisers have been exposed to the "identifiable victim" phenomenon where the mention of one beneficiary outperforms the mention of thousands (Small, Lowenstein, & Slovic, 2007). The reason for this has been assumed to be that when thousands are mentioned, people may be overwhelmed by their inability to help and hence shut down their sympathy and stop giving.

As much as fundraisers would like to focus on the power of portraying one specific beneficiary in order to increase donations, they very often face the struggle of having their fundraising communications approved by their organization. The resistance they often face is the argument that: "But our organization helps millions a year, not just one! If we portray only one person, we are not telling the truth." The struggle, hence is to get the balance right.

A literature review suggests that when deciding on the language to use in thank-

you communications, fundraisers should be conscious that supporters thinking about their giving or the difference their giving makes can be from either a more abstract or a more concrete mind set (Sargeant and Shang, 2008). Construal Level theory (Lieberman and Trope, 2014) suggests that both ways of making a decision are possible. To test this we designed a set of tests (test's 4, 5 and 6) to explore how fundraisers might optimize the design of their thank-you message.

When reading about one specific beneficiary, the mindset is a "present" mindset and individuals think in terms of concrete information. When reading about thousands or the vastness of the mission, individuals are primed with a "future mindset" and think in terms of abstract information.

Test 4 investigates the difference between telling a donor the difference their actions have made to an individual (hence priming a concrete mind set) versus telling a donor the difference their actions have made to thousands of others in addition to themselves (i.e. hence priming an abstract mind set).

Test 5 investigates the difference between telling a donor the difference \$20 can make in a week (i.e. hence priming a concrete mind set) versus telling a donor the difference \$20 can make in a year (i.e. hence priming an abstract mind set).

We found that a concrete mind set works better in the first incidence, but abstract mind set works better in the second. So we conducted Test 6 to determine why this might be the case by priming the concept of vastness. Vastness is the feeling that one is in the presence of something that transcends ones understanding and is conceptually challenging (Stellar et al, 2018). When one has a perception of vastness, this elicits the subjective feeling of psychological wellbeing. This is because experiencing a sense of vastness helps individuals to gain perspective on the complexity of the world and their place within it. By definition, priming a sense of vastness promotes a more abstract mind set. By priming this mind set versus not priming it at the beginning of a survey, we will then be able to determine what psychological processes may have occurred for an abstract mind set to promote giving. We will draw the learning from these three tests together at the end.



Test 4: Thank-you communications make shoppers feel better about their purchases and about their round up donations

Donors tested in this study are Goodwill shoppers who were members of their rewards club. These shoppers received three thank-you emails over a few weeks and their purchasing behavior during those and subsequent weeks was recorded. Four months after the shoppers received their first thank-you email they were sent a survey via email.

For each of the three thank-you emails sent there were three versions (see table 3).

- 1 THE CONTROL CONDITION.** Shoppers were showed the impact of their actions on a beneficiary.
- 2 THE SHOPPER CONDITION.** The role of the shopper in helping the beneficiary was emphasized to make the shoppers feel better about themselves compared to those in the control condition.
- 3 THE COMMUNITY CONDITION.** The impact of the shopper's actions on the Goodwill community was added to the shopper condition.

Table 3. The contents of the three thank-you email conditions

	The control condition	The shopper condition	The community condition
The impact shoppers' actions have on a beneficiary	Yes	Yes	Yes
The role of the shopper in making this impact		Yes	Yes
The impact shoppers' actions have on the Goodwill community			Yes



The shoppers received three emails of the same condition. The email subject headings were the same in all conditions. The length of the emails increased from the control condition, to the shopper condition and to the community condition. See Figure 12 for an example of the three email conditions.

The survey measured how important being a supporter of Goodwill is to a shopper's identity, how shoppers feel about Goodwill, how connected they feel to Goodwill, and how good they feel as a result of their support.

The thank-you emails and the survey were sent to 91,691 shoppers. Altogether 13,881 of them made a purchase after receiving the thank-you emails. This is a purchase rate of 15.14%. On average, the total number of purchases made by the 13,881 people before they received thank-you email one was 38.

We have complete purchase behavior and survey responses for 1,532 shoppers. Of these, 80% were female, 59% were married, 56% were Caucasian, 33% had a college degree and the most frequent income bracket was \$50,001 - \$75,000 (16%). The average age was 54 years old.

Our experiment results showed the **shopper condition** increased the number of purchases compared to the control condition by about 5.8%. Approximately, this is a \$1.37 per person increase in amount purchased. **The shopper condition** decreased the number of round-up donations made through these purchases in comparison to the control condition by about 0.2%. Approximately, this is a \$0.001 per person decrease in donation given. Hence, the financial benefit delivered by the shopper condition in purchase is about 1380 times bigger than the cost it created by reducing round up donations.

Figure 12: Goodwill testing emails

Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3
<p>Hello Goodwill Supporter,</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>We know that you're used to getting emails about sales and retail events from Goodwill. But this email is meant to just share our thanks.</p> <p>Thank you for every dollar you spend.</p> <p>Thank you for making Round Up donations whenever possible.</p> <p>By shopping at Goodwill, you create opportunities for Goodwill graduates like Shawntay. This year, she earned her high school diploma from the Goodwill Excel Center and graduated from our Hospitality Training Program. Now, she is a hotel front desk attendant and plans to earn her Associate Degree in Hospitality Management.</p> <p>She could not have done it without you.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>	<p>Hello Goodwill Supporter,</p> <p>We know that you're used to getting emails about sales and retail events from Goodwill. But this email is meant to just share our thanks.</p> <p>Thank you for every dollar you spend.</p> <p>Thank you for making Round Up donations whenever possible.</p> <p>By shopping at Goodwill, you create opportunities for Goodwill graduates like Shawntay. This year, she earned her high school diploma from the Goodwill Excel Center and graduated from our Hospitality Training Program. Now, she is a hotel front desk attendant and plans to earn her Associate Degree in Hospitality Management.</p> <p><u>Thanks to you, Shawntay has a new career in hospitality.</u></p> <p><u>But more than that, thanks to you Shawntay has a new chance.</u></p> <p><u>You have given Shawntay a chance to support herself, a chance to feel proud, and a chance to be the best version of herself that she can be.</u></p> <p>She could not have done it without you.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>	<p>Hello Goodwill Supporter,</p> <p>We know that you're used to getting emails about sales and retail events from Goodwill. But this email is meant to just share our thanks.</p> <p><u>Thank you for making a difference in thousands of lives in our Goodwill community.</u></p> <p>Thank you for every dollar you spend.</p> <p>Thank you for making Round Up donations whenever possible.</p> <p><u>Everything you do with Goodwill helps to change thousands of lives.</u></p> <p>By shopping at Goodwill, you create opportunities for Goodwill graduates like Shawntay. This year, she earned her high school diploma from the Goodwill Excel Center and graduated from our Hospitality Training Program. Now, she is a hotel front desk attendant and plans to earn her Associate Degree in Hospitality Management.</p> <p>Thanks to you, Shawntay has a new career in hospitality.</p> <p>But more than that, thanks to you Shawntay has a new chance.</p> <p>You have given Shawntay a chance to support herself, a chance to feel proud, and a chance to be the best version of herself that she can be.</p> <p>She could not have done it without you.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>

Our survey results show that *before* people receive the thank-you emails in any condition, the correlation between the number of purchases they make and how good they feel is negative, i.e. the more they shop the worse they feel.

After people receive the thank-you emails the correlation becomes positive, i.e. the more they shop the better they feel.

Receiving thank-you emails in any condition also significantly increases the correlation between the total amount given in round ups and how good people feel. In other words, having been thanked for their shopping in the past, the same level of donation can make people feel even better.

We think this is because the thank-you letters subtly switched the reason why people purchase from accruing benefit only to themselves to including the benefit to others. Our survey showed that making each additional purchase can make people feel that they are more satisfied with their shopping experiences: they trust Goodwill more, they are more committed to Goodwill's mission, they feel more connected to Goodwill, they feel more competent in making

a meaningful difference and they feel more connected with other like-minded people.

If Goodwill consistently uses this practice for each set of three thank-you emails it sends out to a sample of 91,691 shoppers, they should expect an increase in purchase of about \$19,155.78.

In comparison to the benefit that the shopper personally delivered to one beneficiary in the shopper condition, adding the benefit in the thousands in the community condition did not increase purchase or good feeling.

Test 5: Thank-you communications make donors feel better in a long-term mind set than in a short-term mind set

Donors from PPSNE received a survey six weeks after their renewal notice. At the start of the survey donors were presented with a paragraph thanking them for their support. This paragraph had the mission of PPSNE emphasized throughout. This thank-you used either long-term ('this year') or short-term ('this week') phrasing to thank donors for the impact of their support (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: A concrete (week) versus an abstract (year) mind set thank-you

THE LONG-TERM CONDITION

This year, Juliana walked bravely past the protestors spreading hate at our doors. She walked past the hate so that she could receive the care that she needs.

You helped provide that care for 80,000 patients like Juliana. Thank you.

Thanks to your donation, this year we did not have to turn away a single patient. We were there to hold every hand every time we were needed. We were there to respect, not judge, every patient until the last moment they needed us. We were there to protect, not harm, every person until their need was met.

In the coming year, we do not want a single person like Juliana to feel let down. Even if Juliana were the last patient to come to us, we would still want her to feel the same respect, protection, and care - not an ounce less.

THE SHORT-TERM CONDITION

This week, Juliana walked bravely past the protestors spreading hate at our doors. She walked past the hate so that she could receive the care that she needs.

You helped provide that care for 80,000 patients like Juliana. Thank you.

Thanks to your donation, this week we did not have to turn away a single patient. We were there to hold every hand every time we were needed. We were there to respect, not judge, every patient until the last moment they needed us. We were there to protect, not harm, every person until their need was met.

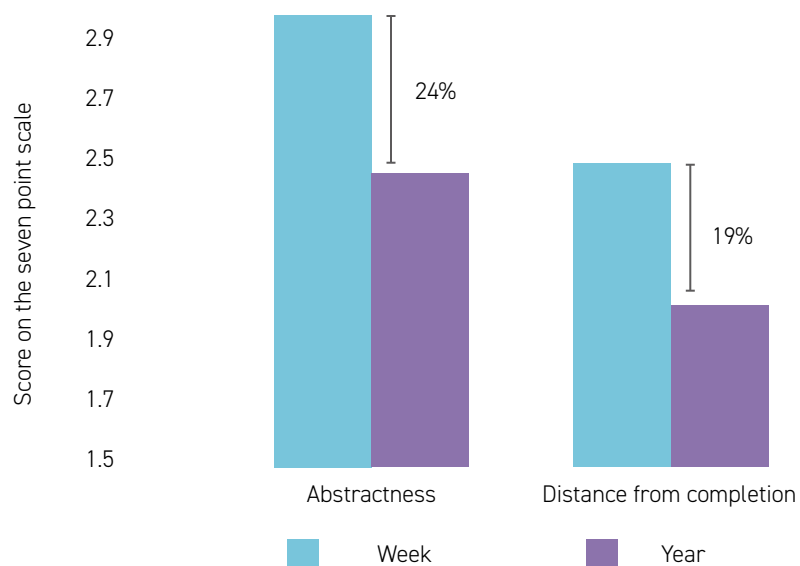
In the coming days, we do not want a single person like Juliana to feel let down. Even if Juliana were the last patient to come to us, we would still want her to feel the same respect, protection, and care - not an ounce less.

In the final survey sample (no missing data), there were 81 donors who saw the short-term phrasing and 86 who saw the long-term phrasing. The final sample of survey respondents ($n = 167$) were 29 males and 138 females. 64% were married, and the average age was 51 years old. On average, the total lifetime giving was \$641.74 over 4 gifts. The average individual donation size in the sample was \$64.48. Donors had an average time lapse between gifts of about 772 days. We controlled for donor demographic

information, past giving behavior (total lifetime giving and the number of donations) and experimental conditions in all analyses reported.

Donors in the week condition felt that the mission was significantly more abstract than those in the year condition (24%, $B = -.60$, $p = .016$) (see Figure 14). Donors in the week condition felt that the mission was marginally further from completion than those in the year condition (19%, $B = -.37$, $p = .064$).

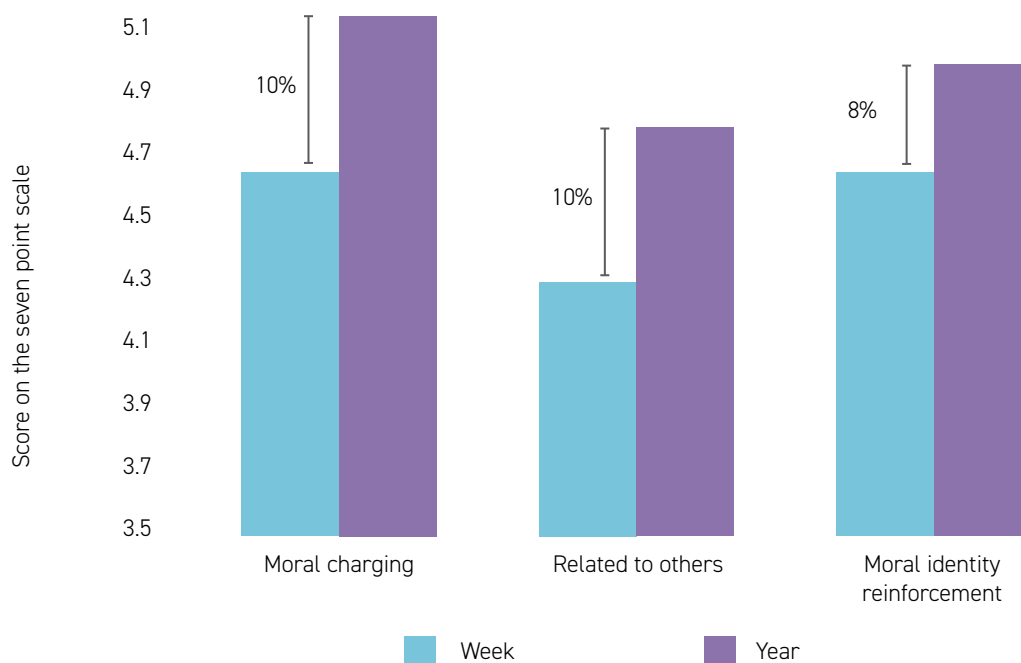
Figure 14. Using year language makes the mission more concrete and seem closer to completion



In comparison to those in the week condition, donors in the year condition also felt significantly more morally charged (10%, $B = .48$, $p = .027$),

more related to others (10%, $B = .43$, $p = .038$) and marginally more morally reinforced (8%. $B = .35$, $p = .083$).

Figure 15. Using year language makes donors feel better about themselves.



Test 6: How can an abstract mind set be translated into giving and good feelings?

Test 4 showed that thanking donors for the difference they make to one beneficiary is more effective than thanking donors for the difference they make to thousands of beneficiaries. Test 5 showed that thanking donors for the difference they make in a year is more effective than thanking donors for the difference they make in a week. In addition, it showed that the reason for this is because the benefit for a year makes people feel that the mission is more concrete and achievable than the benefit for a week. It is this mission concreteness and achievability that makes people feel more uplifted and charged (morally charged), reaching one’s own ideal sense of self for being a kind and caring

individual (moral identity reinforcement) and connecting with other like-minded people. One question remains is why do these two tests show different results?

A closer look at these tests suggest that the level of emotion portrayed in these two tests are quite different. In Test 4, the beneficiaries Goodwill portrayed probably triggered milder emotions than that those presented with Planned Parenthood’s beneficiaries in Test 5. When stronger emotions are triggered, it is possible that this emotion can then be translated into bigger psychological benefits through a sense of more concrete mission achievement. So how can organizations whose domain of operation dictates that they can only trigger mild emotion

in their donors use a sense of vastness? Test 6 was run to address this question.

IPTV “provides quality, innovative media and services that educate, inform, enrich and inspire lowans throughout the state.” Because enriching and inspiring their audience are the values inherent in what IPTV does, we experimented with priming versus not priming the concept of vastness in the survey of their donors. We then measured how likely people were to continue giving and how they felt about it. In the context of IPTV, vastness is defined as the extent to which their programming can stretch people’s minds and open up new worlds for their viewers.

The survey was designed with two versions: Condition 1 and Condition 2. The difference between these two versions was whether ‘vastness’ questions appeared at the beginning of the survey or at the end of the survey, i.e. when the questions appeared at the beginning, ‘vastness’ was primed, otherwise, donors were not primed (see Figure 16).

- 1 **CONDITION 1** – 927 donors were primed, with the ‘vastness’ questions appearing towards the beginning of the survey
- 2 **CONDITION 2** – 819 donors were not primed, with the ‘vastness’ questions appearing at the end of the survey

Figure 16: Vastness primed (Condition 1) versus not primed (Condition 2) surveys



Vastness is primed by asking the following question at the beginning (as opposed to the end) of the survey:

Below is a list of statements. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. (7 = Strongly Disagree, 1 = Strongly Agree)

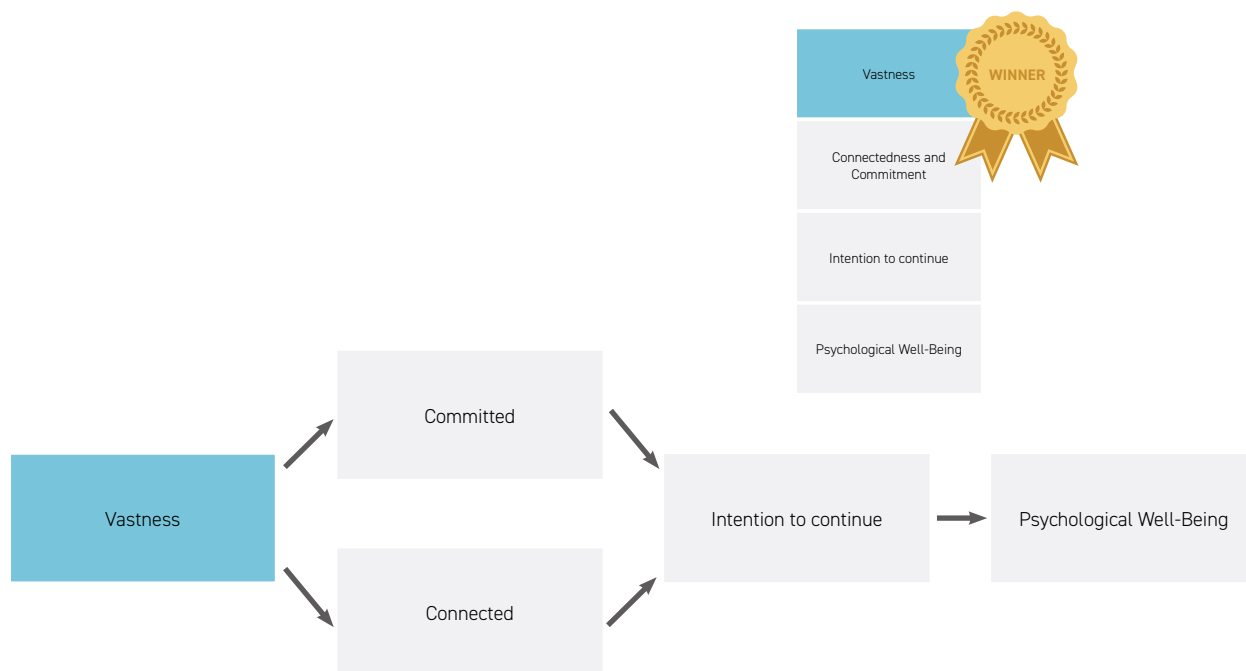
Iowa Public Television's programs:

- » Can make me feel a sense of vastness
- » Can challenge my world views

- » Can allow me to see the world differently

Figure 17 shows the results of our path analysis. It shows that when primed with a feeling of vastness, people feel more committed to what IPTV does and more connected to IPTV in comparison to when vastness is not primed. These feelings lead them to be more inclined to continue their support for IPTV. This inclination to continue their support, in turn, makes them feel more autonomous and more uplifted and encouraged about their giving.

Figure 17: Path analysis of IPTV survey



This finding suggests that when an organization works in a domain where only mild emotion is possible to genuinely engender in your donors, the best way to structure your thank-you communication is as follows:

- 1 Begin with a single heart-pulling story of a beneficiary that has been helped;
- 2 Then thank donors too for the vast difference they have made;

- 3 Then help donors to strengthen their sense of connectedness with the organization and their passionate commitment to the cause;

Our survey results suggest that this kind of sequence will allow donors to have a higher inclination to give by the end of reading the letter and that this giving will lead to better enrichment of their psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The focus of this report has been the topic of donor acknowledgments. For this project we conducted interviews with leading practitioners and ran a series of field experiments with leading nonprofits in the United States.

Our findings support the conclusion that the acknowledgment and thank-you process is currently under thought. Few, if any, organizations approach the topic systematically and we could find no existing tools or frameworks that fundraisers might use to reflect on and analyze their current practice. We were able to develop one such framework from our review of the extant literature, which moving forward will allow fundraisers to reflect on the purpose and role of such communications and to design them appropriately as a consequence.

A greater amount of thought is undoubtedly warranted as in our experiments we found that even subtle changes to communications have the ability to profoundly influence how good donors feel as a result of reading that communication.

Our first three experimental tests were designed to explore the thank-you process at different stages of relationship development. Taken together we offer the following advice:

- 1 After supporters take an initial action for an organization, sending a prompt, short, but interactive email where people can affirm the contribution that the action has made to their wellbeing, will help boost how good people feel.

e.g.

[] Yes! Signing the petition made me feel I can voice my beliefs

[] Yes! Signing the petition made me feel more strongly connected to those who need protection from gun violence

[] Yes! Signing the petition made me feel I can make a meaningful difference

Even if people did not feel very good about what they did in the first place, ticking "Yes!" to these statements will increase the likelihood that supporters will feel better.

Organizations can, of course, choose to make the questions more engaging by adapting the above three statements into a list 6-7 similar statements built around the organization's programs and ask people to check the ones that describe them best.

- 2 After people make their first donation and before they have given as often as the average of the database, we would recommend sending out thank-you communications to primarily thank people for the differences that their donations have made.
- 3 After people give more often than the average number of times of supporters on the database, we recommend that organizations send out a thank-you letter to primarily thank donors for the long-term relationship that they have with key stakeholders or personalities, or for being who they are.

We evidenced that these practices have the potential to increase average donation amount and response rate, as well as how competent donors feel in making a difference, how well they feel their donations allow them to express their beliefs and how connected they feel they are to the cause they support and to others that they care about.

Our second suite of tests explored the nature of the feedback that should be provided in a thank-you letter. Should the thank you focus solely on the difference to a named or focal beneficiary, or should it give the reader a sense of their wider impact on the mission?

To summarize, Test 4-6 suggest:

- 1** When the individual story is mildly emotional, thank-you communications are most effective in generating behavioral benefits and make donors feel better when they thank the person, without mentioning wider benefits (Test 4).
- 2** When the individual story is highly emotional, additional information on vastness can serve to enhance donor wellbeing. So, for example, donors can also be thanked for the difference they will make over an extended period of time (i.e. in our test, a year not a week [Test 5]).
- 3** When an organization works in a domain where highly emotional individual stories cannot be used in fundraising communications, the vastness of an organization's mission accomplishment can still translate to additional wellbeing if it can be linked to donor connection with the organization and their passion for the cause served by the organization (Test 6). In plain English the donor needs to be primed to see how the vastness of the mission drives their involvement and passion for the work. The vastness is at the core of what is driving the relationship.

It is interesting how this latter finding supports what many leading fundraisers have been saying these past few years about the case for support and what differentiates good ones from bad ones. Fundraising consultant, Alan Clayton for example, talks about the need for fundraisers to focus on the "why" question and not the "what." So better to talk about why the work of the organization is important, rather than the nature of that work per se. We see this as a smart approach not least because the "why" is almost always vast in comparison to the "what." Our findings suggest that if that vastness is placed at the core of the rationale for the relationship the contribution that that relationship can make to the wellbeing of the supporter is greatly enhanced. Higher and more sustained giving will follow.

In sum we hope that this report will provide significant food for thought about how best to use the "thank-you" in fundraising communications and at the very least prompt more testing across the sector. Nonprofits and their communications agencies routinely test campaigns or solicitations, but few test what is arguably the most important communication of all, the thank-you. Such a focus is long overdue and, in our view, will lead to a dramatic shift in the nature of the donor experience as for the first time fundraisers genuinely reflect on how best to contribute to the wellbeing of their supporters. How we make people feel must surely be at least as important as how much we can raise from them to pursue our cause.

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