Catholic Foundation
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19-Point Checklist for Email Donation Acknowledgements

Here is a 19-point checklist for your donation email acknowledgements. Follow this formula for an effective thank you that drives additional action!

1. Subject Line
Subject lines are typically perfunctory, but they don't have to be. In fact, you can have some fun and set a donor-centric tone before the recipient even opens up your email.

- Okay: "Donation receipt"
- Better: "Thank you for your donation"
- Best: "Your gift just changed a life"

The risk with that last example is that it might not clearly signify a receipt. Subject lines are a great thing to test, measure and adjust.

2. From/reply-to address
In order to make your email look more personal, set the sender as a real email address, like john@nonprofit.org. This looks far more appealing than no-reply18590101@nonprofit.org.

3. Branding
Emails that look like they came from your org, rather than a generic payment processor, are more authoritative and trustworthy. At the bare minimum, include your logo.

4. Personalized greeting
The first words of your email should be a personal greeting that includes the donor's name. No personalization is better than "Dear donor," or "Thanks %%USER NAME%%!" (when bad data causes something to break).

5. Tone
Don't be afraid to take an informal, conversational tone in your email, unless it absolutely contradicts your brand image or voice. A thank you email does not have to be as bland sounding as the note you wrote to your grandmother thanking her for that brand new pair of socks.

6. Short paragraphs
Short, scanable paragraphs improve readability and help move the recipient down through the email. If they open your email and see one giant wall of text, you can pretty much guarantee that it won't be read. Shoot for two sentences per paragraph break; three at the absolute most.

7. 1st thank you
The first full paragraph of your email acknowledgement should be a thank you. And not just any thank you. You need to shower them with the love and adoration they deserve.

8. Impact statement
The second full paragraph should communicate the impact that the donation made. "Because of you, a family of four will stay warm for one week" or "Your $20 just supplied the vaccinations one dog needs to be eligible for adoption." Specifically stating how the dollars will be used is best, and you'll really score points if you can weave in the story of a specific recipient.

9. 1st action request
The third full paragraph should ask the donor to take action. This can be a new donor survey or a request for feedback on their experience as a supporter. You could even highlight volunteer opportunities or inquire about employee matching.

10. 2nd thank you
The fourth full paragraph should reiterate how much you appreciate them. Seriously, pour it on here.

11. Humanization
Look for opportunities to humanize your brand, perhaps through a photo of your team or a thank you video.

12. Next steps
In the case of a first-time donation, the fifth full paragraph should set expectations for what the donor should expect from you next. In a survey conducted by Roger Craver, one of the top seven drivers of donor engagement was that the donor "knows what to expect from your organization with each interaction." In fact, his was the second-most important (all seven are represented in this checklist).
Set the stage here. Start by saying "Over the next few weeks, you can expect to receive…"
If this is a returning donor, set the stage for the next immediate touch.

13. Close with personal authorship/signature
You don't want your thank you emails coming from your logo or brand name. Make them come from a real person, like your ED (ghost-written is okay).

14. 2nd action request
Same as above, just do something different from the 1st action request. If the body of the email is getting a little long, you could put this in the footer.

15. "Tax receipt" and org name
The term "tax receipt" and your org name should appear in plain text somewhere on your email. The donor may have to search their email inbox around tax time, long after the actual donation, to locate this document. Make it easy for them. If it's embedded in an image, the email client search tool may not pick up on it.
If this email is in addition to a tax receipt email sent by the payment processor, you can skip this step – just make sure that first email is search-friendly.

16. Social sharing
Consider a "Tweet your support" link that opens a pre-written tweet for the donor to send, like *"I just donated to @NonprofitName and you should too >>> (link)."*
Click To Tweet is a simple and free tool for creating pre-written tweet links.
Recommending that the donor follow you on social media is also a prudent ask.

17. Subscription options
Because this email is a transaction-based email, they are exempt from CAN-SPAM regulations and you are not required to offer an unsubscribe option. However, it is a best practice to offer a "manage email preferences" option that includes unsubscribe.

18. Speed
If this email is the only acknowledgement and includes the tax receipt, it should come within minutes of completing the donation. If it is a follow-up to a separate tax receipt, it can come hours later (but same day is best).

19. Size
Strive to keep the file size of your email as small as possible, as this is a trigger for spam filters. *Email On Acid* recently found that the optimum size is somewhere between 15kbs and 100kbs. Avoiding too many images is the best way to keep your file size down.