YMCA Thank-You Letters

February 2017

**Gift Acknowledgment Versus Thanks:**

In an earlier template package, we provided examples and guidance on writing gift acknowledgment letters. These are letters that get to donors quickly after they make a gift and confirm the details of the gift so the donor knows it has been processed properly.

In this project, we are separating that acknowledgment letter from the “thank-you letter.” The thank-you letter is freed from the scheduling and administrative demands of the acknowledgement letter, allowing the thank-you letter to focus on creating the desired connection with your donor.

**Characteristics of a Great Thank-You Letter:**

* **Timeline:** The timing of a thank-you letter should fall between the gift acknowledgement letter and any impact reporting that you expect to occur. We recommend 3-6 weeks following the gift – far enough from the acknowledgement of the gift that it doesn’t feel redundant, yet not so distant that the letter feels unconnected to the gift.
* **Author/Signature:** Unlike the gift acknowledgement letter where the board chair and CEO are the best names to have at the bottom of the letter, the thank-you letter could be from any number of people: program staff, program participants, parents of program participants and volunteers, for example.
* **Template:** These letters should follow a template or example to help with your efficiency and quality, but the key to making these letters compelling for donors is to customize them whenever possible and to provide the impression to the donor that this letter was written from scratch for him or her.
* **Format & Content:** Keep it short and heartfelt and speak to the donor personally by mentioning giving history, past personal interactions and/or personal details if the donor would expect the YMCA to know those details (for example, mentioning a big birthday or family milestone). You should also feel free to go with unconventional and/or changing formats: handwritten letters, cards, photography, writing on unconventional stationary (for example, a water safety donor could be thanked with a note on the back of a program schedule or with a note on the back of a photograph of kids in the pool).

**Sample Thank-You Letters:**

*Dear Lou:*

*Last summer, I spent an afternoon with our Water Wise team. Six of us went to the outdoor pool at the Parkdale Housing Complex in the West End. When we arrived, there was no one at the pool. I got the distinct feeling this was a decidedly underused community asset. As we set up, children and families started coming to the pool, some in bathing suits, but most in shorts. Within half an hour, that empty pool was alive. In total, 37 children participated in our program that day, learning the basic swimming and water survival skills that so many of us take for granted.*

*That was our first time taking our program to the Parkdale community. We were able to do that because of the support we received from donors in 2016. This summer, your gift will allow us to bring Water Wise to another new site and to at least two dozen more children and families.*

*Lou, thank you so much for your gift. You’ve always been a generous supporter of the Minneapolis YMCA and your latest gift will help us make a big splash this summer.*

*Sincerely,*

*M.T. Moore*

*Board Chair*

*Dear Mr. Costanza:*

*Yesterday, I went to see one of our Little Sprouts soccer games. At halftime, I sat down on the grass with the kids as they had a drink of water and I told them I was going to write a thank-you note to a donor who had contributed to our Kids’ Sports program. I asked them what they thought I should write. I’m going to turn the rest of this note over to them:*

“Donors are great. Do they buy our oranges?” *– Kaleb, 6*

“My mom says to always say thank you, so I would say thank-you, but I would also tell the donors ‘Good job.’ That’s what coach always says when I do something right.” *– Cynthia, 7*

“I think I want to be a donor when I grow up. I’m going to give lots of money for soccer because every kid should play soccer.” *– Julio, 6*

*George, your generosity not only helps the Manhattan YMCA deliver our Kids’ Sports program, it looks like your philanthropy is helping to set an example these children will follow for a long time. That’s a powerful gift indeed.*

*With thanks,*

*Elaine Benes*

*Youth Sports Coordinator*