

Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Express thanks to nonprofit donors in a personal way

Barry VanderKelen

The Thanksgiving holiday is a good time to remember how to say “thank you” to everyone who helps make our nonprofits successful. Too frequently, gratitude is expressed by a form letter or a passing “Thanks.”

Internal Revenue Service regulations require a receipt be given to the donor for gifts of cash and donations larger than \$250. A receipt is a piece of paper or e-mail that includes the name of the charity, the date the donation was received, the amount, and the value of the goods and services received in exchange for the donation. Donors are required to keep these receipts for income tax purposes.

These acknowledgements, however, are not proper thank-you letters. To learn more about saying thank you properly, I contacted a local resource, Miss Etiquette (www.miss-etiquette.com).

“The only proper way to say thank you is by a handwritten note,” Miss Etiquette says. “We present a thank-you note as a gift to the donor. The note is something tangible to the donor.” Sending anything more, like a trinket or

memento, might lead the donor to question how the gift is being used. Perhaps nonprofits have combined acknowledgments and thank-you letters to save time.

“Our most precious resource is our time,” Miss Etiquette observes. “The symbolism of the time it takes to write the note is the true expression of gratitude.” If one must depend on form letters, always add a handwritten note at the bottom. Thank-you notes are to be sent within three days of receiving the gift. Keep a supply of note cards, envelopes and stamps on hand. Being prepared will help meet the three-day rule.

What about sending an e-mail message? “That’s tacky. E-mail messages are easily erased.” Miss Etiquette also explained the etiquette of the note itself. “It only has to be as long as the note card. It is always handwritten. The words “thank you” are to appear only once in the note. The envelope is to be hand-addressed with no abbreviations.”

The content of a proper note con-

tains three sentiments: recognition that the gift was received; acceptance of the gift; and appreciation for it. Without realizing it, nonprofits can send multiple receipts for the same gift. In order to prevent this from happening, thank-you notes should not contain the amount of the donations; it is best to put that in the formal receipt.

Miss Etiquette recommends keeping a book or file of thank-you notes for two reasons. First, you’ll have a record of what note was sent to whom. Second, you’ll have a reference of wording ideas to use in the future.

A proper thank-you note connects the nonprofit to the donor in a personal and tangible way. The nurturing of the relationship will benefit both parties.

I want to thank all of the donors and volunteers who help make the nonprofit community vibrant and strong. Your involvement helps improve the quality of life for all residents of San Luis Obispo County. Unfortunately, technology prevents me from handwriting this column.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.