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FREE RESOURCE

Donation Thank-You Letter Sample Pack

Six ready-to-adapt letters for the moments that matter most — each one warm enough to earn the second gift, and precise enough to satisfy the IRS and your donor's CPA.

Prepared by GivingArc — nonprofit bookkeeping, accounting, and Form 990 preparation.

This pack is general information, not tax advice. Reviewed by Min Kim, CPA. · givingarc.com

First-Time Donor Thank-You (Cash Gift)

WHEN TO USE A new donor's first gift, any amount. Doubles as the IRS acknowledgment for gifts of $250 or more. Send within 48 hours.

Dear [First Name],

Your gift arrived on [day], and we want you to know exactly what it set in motion: [one concrete, specific outcome — “this week, 14 families will pick up groceries without standing in a second line”]. Welcome to the work.

This letter also serves as your tax receipt. It acknowledges your contribution of $[amount], received by [Legal Organization Name] (EIN [XX-XXXXXXX]), a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3), on [date]. No goods or services were provided in exchange for this contribution. Please retain this letter for your tax records.

You'll hear from us again soon — not with another ask, but with an update on what your generosity made possible.

With gratitude,

[Name, Title]

Tip: the first sentence is the retention sentence. Make it specific, make it fast, and have a real person sign it.

COMPLIANCE NOTE

Required for the donor's deduction on any single gift of $250+ (IRS Pub 1771). The bolded-style sentence “No goods or services were provided…” is the language auditors look for first. Email delivery is acceptable.

Monthly Donor Year-End Summary

WHEN TO USE January, to every recurring donor. One letter can substantiate all of last year's gifts — send by January 31 so every donor files with it in hand.

Dear [First Name],

Twelve months, [N] gifts, one steady vote of confidence in [mission phrase]. Monthly donors like you are the reason we can plan beyond next quarter — thank you for being the quiet engine behind this work.

For your tax records, [Legal Organization Name] (EIN [XX-XXXXXXX]) gratefully acknowledges the following contributions received from you during [year]:

[Jan 15 — $50]   [Feb 15 — $50]   [Mar 15 — $50]   [continue for each gift]

Total for [year]: $[total]. No goods or services were provided in exchange for any of these contributions.

Please retain this letter for your tax records.

With gratitude,

[Name, Title]

Tip: list every gift with its date. Each $250+ gift needs its own line to be individually substantiated.

COMPLIANCE NOTE

IRS Pub 1771 allows one annual summary to substantiate multiple $250+ contributions. Payroll-deduction donors substantiate with pay stub + pledge card instead — this letter is still good stewardship.

SAMPLE 3 OF 6

In-Kind Donation

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WHEN TO USE	Any gift of goods or property. Describe the gift; never assign it a dollar value — valuation is legally the donor's job.

Dear [First Name],

Your gift is already at work: [one sentence on how the item is being used — “the refrigerator you donated is keeping this week's produce fresh for 60 families”].

This letter acknowledges your generous donation of [specific description: “one used commercial refrigerator” / “40 children's winter coats”], received by [Legal Organization Name] (EIN [XX-XXXXXXX]), a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, on [date]. No goods or services were provided in exchange for this contribution.

As required by the IRS, we have not assigned a value to the donated property; determining fair market value is the responsibility of the donor.

Please retain this letter for your tax records.

With gratitude,

[Name, Title]

Tip: be generous with the description and stingy with numbers. “Forty coats” is a description; “$800 of coats” is a liability.

COMPLIANCE NOTE

The charity describes, the donor values (IRS Pub 561). Donors whose total non-cash gifts top $500 file Form 8283 — their side of the paperwork. Vehicles over $500 use Form 1098-C instead, within 30 days.

Event Ticket / Quid Pro Quo

WHEN TO USE Any payment over $75 where the donor received something in return — gala seats, auction items, benefit dinners. This disclosure is the one acknowledgment the IRS can fine YOUR organization for skipping ($10 per

Dear [First Name],

Thank you for joining us at [event] — [one warm sentence about the evening or what it raised].

This letter acknowledges your payment of $[200] to [Legal Organization Name] (EIN [XX-XXXXXXX]) on [date]. In exchange, you received [dinner and entertainment] with an estimated fair market value of $[75].

For federal income tax purposes, your deductible contribution is limited to the amount of your payment that exceeds the fair market value of the goods and services you received — $[125] for this event.

Please retain this letter for your tax records.

With gratitude,

[Name, Title]

Tip: put the same disclosure on the invitation itself. The IRS requires it at solicitation or receipt, stated conspicuously — not in fine print.

COMPLIANCE NOTE

Required for quid pro quo payments over $75 (IRS Pub 1771; IRC 6115). The trigger is the payment amount, not the deductible portion. Token items within IRS annual limits can be disregarded.

Major Gift (Personal Note)

WHEN TO USE Significant gifts deserve two touches: this personal letter from your ED or board chair within 48 hours, plus the standard receipt. A thank-you phone call on top measurably lifts retention.

Dear [First Name],

I read your gift notification twice to make sure I had the number right. Then I walked over to [program lead]'s desk to tell her in person, because news like this shouldn't travel by email.

Your gift of $[amount] means [one specific, concrete thing that is now possible — a program extended, a position funded, a waitlist cleared]. I'd love to show you rather than tell you: may I call you this week to share what happens next?

For your records: [Legal Organization Name] (EIN [XX-XXXXXXX]), a 501(c)(3) organization, received your contribution of $[amount] on [date]. No goods or services were provided in exchange for this contribution.

With deep gratitude,

[Name, Title — a real signature here matters]

Tip: Bloomerang's study of 1.9M donors found one thank-you call within 90 days lifted first-year retention from about 33% to 41% — and multiple touches to 58%.

COMPLIANCE NOTE

Same six required elements apply. For pledged gifts, acknowledge each payment as received — a pledge itself isn't deductible until paid.

Memorial & Tribute Gift

WHEN TO USE Gifts made in honor or memory of someone. Two letters: the tax acknowledgment to the donor, and a notification (no amounts) to the honoree or family.

TO THE DONOR:

Dear [First Name],

Thank you for honoring [Honoree Name] with your gift. We are moved to be part of how [he/she/they] will be remembered, and we have sent a note to [family contact] letting them know of your kindness (the amount stays between us).

This letter acknowledges your contribution of $[amount], received by [Legal Organization Name] (EIN [XX-XXXXXXX]), a 501(c)(3) organization, on [date]. No goods or services were provided in exchange for this contribution. Please retain this letter for your tax records.

With gratitude, [Name, Title]

TO THE FAMILY (separate note, no dollar amounts):

Dear [Family Name] — We want you to know that [Donor Name] has made a gift to [Organization] in loving memory of [Honoree]. Gifts like this carry a story forward; we are honored to be part of [Honoree]'s.

Tip: never disclose the gift amount to the family — only the fact of the gift.

COMPLIANCE NOTE

The donor letter carries the tax language; the family letter never mentions amounts. Standard $250 CWA rules apply to the donor's side.

KEEP THIS PAGE

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IRS Language Cheat Sheet

The six required elements (IRS Publication 1771)

1. Your organization's legal name (EIN optional but helpful)
2. Amount of any cash contribution, with date received
3. Description — never the value — of any non-cash gift
4. “No goods or services were provided in exchange for this contribution.” (if true)
5. If goods/services were provided: description + good-faith estimate of fair market value
6. If benefits were entirely intangible and religious: a statement saying so

THE THREE MAGIC SENTENCES

Cash, nothing in return: “No goods or services were provided in exchange for this contribution.”

Something in return: “Your deductible contribution is limited to the amount of your payment that exceeds the $[X] fair market value of the goods and services you received.”

In-kind: “We have not assigned a value to the donated property; determining fair market value is the responsibility of the donor.”

Deadlines & thresholds

- $250+ single gift -> donor needs this letter to deduct. Threshold is per gift, never aggregated.
- $75+ payment with goods/services in return -> written disclosure required. Penalty for skipping: $10 per contribution, up to $5,000 per event.
- Timing -> donor must have the letter before they file (or the return due date, whichever is earlier). Operational rule: everything out by January 31.
- Email counts — the IRS accepts letters, postcards, or electronic acknowledgments.
- Never include -> the donor's SSN, or a dollar value on donated property.