

Short-Form Fundraising Story Framework

A step-by-step guide to writing
story-based donor appeals

*Learn the 6 step framework to
create donor appeals that
inspire people to give.*

Short-Form Fundraising Story Framework

A step-by-step guide to writing donor appeals that inspire giving.

This framework helps you craft short, emotionally compelling fundraising stories that build momentum step by step—leading donors naturally toward giving.

Each section builds on the last, creating a complete, persuasive story that draws readers in and inspires action.

The 6-Step Story Flow:

1. The Cliffhanger First Sentence – Grabs attention and sparks curiosity.
2. The Introduction – Establishes credibility and relatability.
3. The Backstory – Shows the problem with emotional, specific details.
4. The Discovery – Introduces the solution and how it works.
5. The Benefits – Highlights the transformation made possible by donors.
6. The Call to Action – A clear, simple invitation to give for someone still in need.

Each step leads naturally into the next, pulling readers deeper into the story and closer to taking action.

1. The Cliffhanger First Sentence

Your first sentence's job is to stop the reader and make them curious enough to keep reading. A strong first sentence hints at a deeper story and emotional stakes.

Examples for Fundraising Appeals:

- "I was too scared to open the letter, but when I did, I cried..."
- "Her one wish wasn't for herself—it was for her baby brother."
- "I'll never forget the sound of his stomach growling in the quiet classroom."

Why These Work:

- They introduce an emotional moment that needs resolution.
- They create curiosity without giving away the full story.
- They pull readers into a specific moment, making them want to know more.

2. The Introduction

This is where you establish a connection with the donor. Introduce yourself or your nonprofit with a brief, relatable detail while keeping the focus on the bigger story.

Example:

"My name is Sarah, and I've worked at the food pantry for eight years. But last winter, I saw something that broke my heart. A first-grader named Jason sat in class, too hungry to focus. His teacher told me she had seen him faint from hunger the week before."

Why This Works:

- Provides credibility (eight years at the food pantry).
- Includes a vivid, human moment (a child fainting from hunger).
- Keeps it short while making the reader want to learn more.

3. The Backstory

Now, introduce the problem in a way that the donor can feel. Share the struggle of a real person helped by your organization, using specific, emotional details.

Example:

"Jason's mom, Maria, works two jobs. But after paying rent and medical bills, there was nothing left for groceries. Jason was skipping meals so his mom could eat. The first time he saw a full plate of food, he whispered, 'Is this all for me?'"

Why This Works:

- Uses a real person's story to make the problem tangible.
- Shows specific struggles (skipping meals, working two jobs).
- Ends with a moment of impact (Jason's whispered words).

4. The Discovery

This is the turning point—the moment when your organization offers a solution. The reader should feel a sense of hope.

Example:

"We knew we had to help. So we started a weekend meal program for families like Maria's. For \$30, we can provide groceries for an entire week. Last month alone, 237 children received meals—and smiles replaced hunger."

Why This Works:

- Introduces the solution naturally.
- Keeps it simple and specific (\$30 = one week of food).
- Uses numbers to show impact (237 children helped).

5. The Benefits

Show what happens after help is given. Paint a picture of the transformation donors can create.

Example:

"Because of donors like you, Jason doesn't skip meals anymore. He's thriving in school, and last week, Maria told us, 'I feel like I can finally breathe again.' Your gift doesn't just provide food—it gives hope, dignity, and a future."

Why This Works:

- Highlights the donor's role in making change happen.
- Uses a real person's words to reinforce impact.
- Frames giving as a life-changing action.

6. The Call to Action

Now, invite the reader to give. Make the ask specific, simple, and easy to act on. Most importantly, shift the focus to someone who still needs help.

Example:

"But right now, another child is sitting in class with an empty stomach. Another mom is skipping meals so her kids can eat. For just \$30, you can provide a family with a week of groceries. Please click the button below to give. Every dollar makes a difference, and every child deserves to eat. Donate now, and together, we can end hunger in our community."

Why This Works:

- Keeps urgency high by focusing on those still in need.
- Clearly states the impact of giving (\$30 = a week of food).
- Removes hesitation with an easy call to action ("click the button below").

See the full example story on the next page.

Tying It All Together: A Full Example Story

Each section is labeled in light grey so you can see how the steps build upon each other.

Step 1: The Cliffhanger First Sentence

"I'll never forget the sound of his stomach growling in the quiet classroom."

Step 2: The Introduction

"My name is Sarah, and I've worked at the food pantry for eight years. But last winter, I saw something that broke my heart. A first-grader named Jason sat in class, too hungry to focus. His teacher told me she had seen him faint from hunger the week before."

Step 3: The Backstory

"Jason's mom, Maria, works two jobs. But after paying rent and medical bills, there was nothing left for groceries. Jason was skipping meals so his mom could eat. The first time he saw a full plate of food, he whispered, 'Is this all for me?'"

Step 4: The Discovery

"We knew we had to help. So we started a weekend meal program for families like Maria's. For \$30, we can provide groceries for an entire week. Last month alone, 237 children received meals—and smiles replaced hunger."

Step 5: The Benefits

"Because of donors like you, Jason doesn't skip meals anymore. He's thriving in school, and last week, Maria told us, 'I feel like I can finally breathe again.' Your gift doesn't just provide food—it gives hope, dignity, and a future."

Step 6: The Call to Action

"But right now, another child is sitting in class with an empty stomach. Another mom is skipping meals so her kids can eat. For just \$30, you can provide a family with a week of groceries. Please click the button below to give. Every dollar makes a difference, and every child deserves to eat. Donate now, and together, we can end hunger in our community."

Use this 6 step framework to create donor appeals that move people to action. The better you tell the story, the more donors will want to be part of the solution.

Want more storytelling-driven fundraising tips? Go to:

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