

The Tail-Wagging Story Test

A Checklist to Ensure Your Story Connects &
Inspires Donors to Give



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A great fundraising story should evoke emotion, warmth, and connection—just like the joy of seeing a dog wagging its tail when it greets you.

If your story doesn't make someone smile or feel a deep emotional pull, it might need more heart. 'Heart' means making your story deeply relatable and emotionally resonant—giving it authenticity, warmth, and a clear emotional hook. It means showing real human (or animal) emotions, creating a strong sense of connection, and making the donor feel the weight of their potential impact.

Your story should also tap into the donor's inner story, aligning with their values and the change they want to make in the world. Not everyone will resonate with the story—only those who share the same values will feel deeply connected. More importantly, it should tap into the donor's inner story, aligning with their values and the change they want to make in the world. Not everyone will resonate with the story—only those who share the same values will feel deeply connected.

Use this checklist to ensure your story wags its tail!

The Tail-Wagging Test Checklist

Does your story make the donor feel like the hero?

Your story should position the donor as the one who can make a difference, not just an observer. Will they walk away feeling proud and empowered?

Is there a clear, emotionally engaging protagonist?

Your story should focus on a person, family, or even an animal that donors can connect with. People don't give to vague statistics—they give to individuals.

Does your story create a moment of transformation?

Every good story has a turning point. Can donors clearly see the shift from hardship to hope, with their potential gift playing a crucial role?

Does your story align with the donor's values and inner story?

Not every donor will resonate with every story. Have you ensured that your story speaks directly to those who share the same vision for change in the world?

Is there a single, emotionally compelling detail that makes the story stick?

Strong stories include vivid, specific details—a tattered backpack, a child's first real meal, a rescued dog's first tail wag. Have you included something memorable?

Does it spark a warm emotional response?

Read your story out loud. Does it make you smile, tear up, or feel inspired? If not, it may need more heart.

Is it clear what the donor's role is?

At the end of your story, does the donor know exactly what action they can take to help? Whether it's "Give \$35 to feed a child" or "Your support today rescues animals in need," clarity is key.

Does it avoid making the organization the star?

The best fundraising stories aren't about the nonprofit—they're about the impact the donor can have. Have you removed unnecessary mentions of "we" and "our organization" and focused on the donor's role?

Is there a happy or hopeful ending in sight?

Even if your story highlights struggles, it should end with a sense of hope—especially the hope that the donor can create a positive change.

Does your call to action reinforce the emotional connection and align with the problem in the story?

Your final ask should connect directly to the emotions stirred in the story. Is your call to action directly tied to the specific problem in the story? If the story is about someone who needs a meal, does the call to action focus on providing a meal? Ensuring alignment strengthens the emotional connection and makes the ask more compelling.

Try the Test: Rate Your Story!

Score each section from 1-5. If your story scores at least 40 out of 50, congratulations—it wags its tail! If it's below that, revisit your story and add more heart where needed.

If your fundraising story doesn't make at least one person smile, feel a warm glow, or get a little choked up, it may need more heart. Use this checklist as a quick gut-check before sending out any donor communication!

Now, go make your fundraising stories tail-waggingly good!

Want to Master the Art of Fundraising Storytelling?

Join us at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, where fundraising experts and storytelling masters will help you refine your message, craft compelling donor stories, and raise more money. Discover practical techniques and insider secrets that will make your stories irresistible to donors.

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