In This Chapter

- Who to include in a mail campaign: segmentation
- Crafting a powerful appeal package
- Managing the logistics of your mail appeal
- Where it fits in the calendar
- Adding a successful phone campaign or phonathon

Steps included:

Step 1—Create your list and your segments
Step 2—Add new names into your list
Step 3—Crafting a powerful appeal
Step 4—Getting your appeal printed…
Step 5—…And getting your appeal out the door
Step 6—Following-up by phone or hosting a phonathon
The Preview before the Overview

Here at National 4-H Council, we’ve got some mixed feelings about including this whole topic in this guide…

On the one hand, we know that some states have established direct mail appeals that run throughout the year and are actively—and effectively—soliciting funding to support 4-H program priorities statewide, and are not using these appeals to ask for targeted funds for specific programs. This is optimal. We don’t want you to lose the momentum of these appeals and start “silo”-ing your donors into giving to only one program inside all the wonderful work that 4-H does. However, if you do have capacity to, or already are sending targeted mailings to your donor pool—for camp, or livestock programs, or 4-H Science or whatever else…and you also have a robust group of “Health Rocks” or Healthy Lifestyles affiliated donors, you might consider launching a direct mail and/or phone program to seek their gifts.

On the other hand, there are states—especially those who are going to be doing a lot of work at the county level to make Health Rocks! self-sustaining within individual communities—where direct mail and phone calling could be the “bread and butter” of your fund development efforts. It’s accessible, it’s pretty cost-effective and it’s a big step up from selling “stuff” to raise money for your programs.

In that spirit, we opted to include this chapter. Please recognize it for the good option that it is, but don’t consider it a directive, especially if you already have a strong, sophisticated direct mail approach running. We also encourage you to think about if, how and when the tactics described on the following pages support your fundraising based on your state’s grouping within the Health Rocks! grant cohort.

For example, states which received an institutionalization grant this year may want to think about planning for a mail and/or phone campaign to support Health Rocks! in year 2 or 3 of the program, while a state which will receive their institutionalization grant from Council in year 3 may not see a need for such a campaign until after Council’s grant funding has ended. The choice is entirely yours based on your state’s overall fundraising capacity and plan.
Overview

The face-to-face solicitation part of your annual giving program is “hand-built”, meticulously tended with careful attention to the individual needs and relationship building steps for each donor. Those who really enjoyed creating the case for support portion of this Guide, will probably also thrive in this work. If you got a bang out of pulling data, massaging it and setting your goals, you’ll probably enjoy the direct appeals aspect of your annual giving program work: creating a system for making all the “moving parts” move, whether it is through the mail, via email or over the phone.

In those programs that are large enough to have more than one person on the development team, be attentive to the skills and competencies that you each have—and play to your strengths. Are you a systems-builder? Or a relationship-builder? If you have only one staff person in this role, recognize that a comprehensive annual giving program plan needs both aspects—and you will have flex your style to accomplish the tasks that come less naturally to you.

At its best, your direct mail appeals should seek to approximate the kind of one-on-one attention you are paying to each donor you are visiting face-to-face. By segmenting your appeals, you can craft a letter (or email or phone message) that begins to address the unique relationship that different groups within your overall donor community have: some are current volunteers or past volunteers; some are parents, others got to know you through a particular special event, and yet others may have lapsed in their giving. Though your overall message—or core case for support—will remain consistent, the focus you put in the letter and the “wrapping” you put around how you make the ask will change depending on your audience.

The challenge is not in dreaming up how you could segment your appeal, but in determining what is realistic given your capacity to manage a multi-faceted project without losing any potential donor names through the cracks and without losing your mind!

You’ve already done the most preliminary segmentation by deciding whom you will visit and whom you will appeal to with a less personal approach.

Let’s start with some fundamental segments and then dream about others than are possible:

1. “Quad 4”: remember those on your projected table of gifts whom you thought might give a gift of $1,000 or more, but probably haven’t in the past and don’t have either a high enough capacity or inclination to land on your priority “in person visit” list? That is a great segment in your mail appeal. You are strongly encouraged not to just include them in any appeal you send to the “rest of the world” because you aren’t going to be asking everyone to consider a gift of $1,000. Craft a special letter that makes the case for a first leadership gift; perhaps ask a volunteer who recently stepped up to that level to be the signatory on it and make certain that a personal note gets added to each of these letters.
2. Another segment—that should be a “no brainer” is all of the current (last fiscal year), lower-level donors. This is the core of your mail appeal, and they are likely to be the ones who not only give the most through the mail but also have the highest rate of return (how many letters sent vs. how many gifts received).

3. If you have the data management capacity, pull out your lapsed donors from your current donor group and mail to them in separate segment. You’ll start to see diminishing returns for donors who last gave four or five years ago—though you can include them as well, if you have the resources to send extra letters. The best group is those who gave two to three years ago, but not last year. With this segment, you can send the message “We’ve missed you” and update them on the ways you put their last investment to work, as well as new, exciting ways that gifts will be used this year. Just as with the “Quad 4” group, the tailored message is a slight variation, but an important element.

4. Since direct mail—along with special events—are a great, cost effective way to acquire new donors into your donor community, you might also include a segment of exclusively new names who have entered your pipeline—through suggestions from board members, volunteers, other donors who have reviewed lists for you in the past. With this group you need to not only make the case for supporting Health Rocks, but spend some time introducing who you are. Here the “What we Accomplish” message will be balanced by a strong “What we Do” message. As well, you’ll want to be sure that this appeal includes a link to your website so these potential donors can check out your work and research you before giving.

5. Bonus Points: (This is the third time in six chapters that you’ve been offered bonus points. I wonder what special gift these points get you and who is keeping score?) Also consider segmenting any special event donors from last year. The ideal is that a donor who gave through a special event in one year will make an outright gift (because they were asked in person or by mail/email/phone). Retention numbers are perennially lowest for special events donor—often they may not identify as a donor to Health Rocks or 4-H but a participant at an event, (or worse, they know they had an enjoyable evening but was that for the Boys & Girls Club? Or Big Brothers Big Sisters? Or who was that again?) Your relationship with them has been transactional—“give money and you’ll get a fun event in return.” By acknowledging that past relationship, reminding them of the impact of that past gift (and that it was a gift) as you solicit the next gift, your chances of holding onto them as a donor skyrocket. If you deliver some great stewardship six weeks to three months after the special event, referencing the amount raised and how you’ve put it to work and then solicit these event donors two to three months after that your risk of offending anyone should be very low. They’ll probably be glad to have the chance to give to you again.
The second part of the question is a different answer: ultimately, your success is tied to how much you raise, not how much you raise through an event. And your goal is to offer your donors the opportunity to give, not necessarily give through your event. It’s a great success if your event introduces new donors to your program every year because you are asking more and more of your current donors in a more cost-efficient and time-efficient way. For those donors who love your event, they’ll keep giving to it too!

Those four—or maybe five—segments are fundamental. It’s the standard to strive toward as you build capacity in your annual giving program—and with your data. (And if these four are going to be a huge challenge to manage: lump them all together, craft a really clever letter and send it out there. Better to ask in a less that perfect way than to not ask at all).

If these four or five segments are going to be no problem for you and you’re ready to move on to the more advanced stuff, here are more ideas for segmenting and tailoring your direct mail appeal:

- Current and/or past parents—tailored to the economic situation of your parents, but acknowledging the power of participation and paying it forward—even $5 at a time—for others
- Current and/or past volunteers—acknowledging the gift of their time as well
- Staff and program facilitators
- Past board members—though hopefully many of them will be in your in-person solicitation plan
- Past campaign or “restricted purpose” donors
- Program alumni
- The kids you’ve served—a Youth Giving Circle
- Who else do you know?

A great appeal should include:

- The letter (Duh. We’ll cover how to develop the letter itself in the step-by-step actions below.)
- A thoughtful signatory—who is the right person to sign this letter? Often it is the program leader or co-signed with a lead volunteer. Or you can turn to a donor-volunteer, a parent or even a youth leader to craft (with your help) and sign the letter. There is not “the” right answer this question, but many. Mix it up and keep it fresh.
- A separate pledge card and return envelope or a “BRE” (business reply envelope—those postage-paid envelopes with all the bars and lines on them).
- Your program should have a supply of BREs to use regularly. Have them printed without any information that may change regularly (no year or specific staff names, for example) and you can invest once to use for many years.
- For your upper-level donors and your Quad 4 segment, a separate pledge card and return envelope without postage or postage paid sends a more formal message to your potential investors.
- Also consider including a page with stories, quotes and photos of the kids in your program in action, recent (short!) press clippings or other testimonials to your work and impact in the community. A package with a variety of elements is more likely to be opened and read—at least in part.

But, don’t get fancier with all this than you can deliver!

If no ask goes out, no gift comes in.
As you planned your calendar for the year, you should have already established when you will be sending your broad-based appeals—either mail or email or a combination of both. As a quick reminder:

- Once a year is generally not enough; twice or three times is better.
- Many organizations use a “once per quarter” approach, but segment out those who gave early in the fiscal year—so you’re not asking for four different gifts in a single 12-month period. Annoying.
- Others will ask three or four times but return to ask those who gave early in the fiscal year for a second gift late in the fiscal year. Not so annoying, especially if this spans two calendar years (for example, gift #1 was given in September 2009 and gift #2 was solicited in May 2010 for a fiscal year running from July 2009 to June 2010.)
- Make sure you include a “clean up” mailing very close to the end of your fiscal year (within the last four to six weeks) and include those who were on your face-to-face list but whom you weren’t able to solicit in-person during the year.

Tweak your calendar if you need to and remember to include that adjustment in your annual giving program plan, factoring in prep time for each appeal.

Step-by-Step Actions

These steps should work in conjunction with any email appeals you do throughout the year—and you may want to substitute an email appeal for a mail appeal with some of your segments. Doing a Youth Giving Circle or young alumni campaign? You’re bound to reach them online. We cover online, new media and special events in the next chapter; read both and then coordinate your plan.

Step One—Create Your List and Your Segments

1. Determine to whom you will be mailing. Do you have the “bandwidth” to create several different segments in your mail appeal? Or will it be wiser for you to keep it streamlined?
2. Run your queries to create your segments and check for duplicates. Has anyone inadvertently ended up in more than one segment? You don’t want to be sending duplicate mailings to the same person.
3. If you have a very large (thousands of names), consider making a small investment in an address look-up service. These services will check for bad addresses—or no addresses—and attempt to update your data against a national file of addresses on recent moves kept by the post office. This is only worth the investment if you have a very large database file. Otherwise, spot check for missing addresses or addresses that you have marked as “Lost” based on returned mail in the past. Suppress these names from your segment so you don’t waste the postage on them.
4. So that you only have to create these reports and perform these checks once during the year, consider giving everyone a code to denote which segment they are in. For example you might mark your in-person visit names with: V10—for “Visit In-Person during FY10” or “Tier3-11”—a code you might create for your lapsed donor segment in FY11. Once you create a segment plan that works for you, develop the codes you’ll use and add them to your records.

NOTE: For new names that you receive over the course of the year, remember to code them as well—or they won’t end up in subsequent mailings or communications.

5. Once you have coded everyone—or have pulled all the names you are going to include in your appeal (if you’re keeping your segments simple)—go back into your database to look for any names you are not including. Was that on purpose? Have you overlooked any group inadvertently?

Step Two—Add New Names Into Your List

1. Preparing for your mail appeal is a great time to seek new names and engage additional volunteers in helping you cast your net more widely into the community. Certainly this is something you can and should be doing throughout the year, but an upcoming mail appeal adds urgency to your request.

2. Don’t under-estimate the time it will take to collect these names and add them into your database. If you are putting out a broad call for new contacts, do that no less than four weeks (and better to do it six weeks) in advance of when you want your appeal to go out in the mail.

3. Add these new names, along with email addresses (ask for them!) and the contact name. Who shared this name with you? You want to be able to report back on who has responded to your appeals so your contacts can thank their friends for supporting Health Rocks.

4. If you are using coding to identify each segment, add the right code to these new names.
Step Three—Crafting a Powerful Appeal

1. Good news! You have most of this accomplished already with your strong inventory of language from your case for support. The task now is just tying this together into a compelling (and coherent!) letter. Here’s an outline that is tried and true:

• **Challenge #1** is getting the reader to read the letter. Your first paragraph needs to hook them in with a bold quote, a provocative statement or an unexpected thought. Just like the rest of the ways you make the case for Health Rocks, your appeal should start with a story.

• **Challenge #2** is keeping the reader reading. Your second and third paragraphs (or more) should use bold, italics, different length paragraphs—some longer, some with bullet points, some only one sentence long—to make the letter visually interesting on the page. (But don’t overdo this and make it a visual circus! If you’re not sure how it’s looking, ask others around the office for their feedback.) In these middle paragraphs you want to share the outcomes of what your programming has accomplished—this is where you talk about what you have achieved, not only what you do.

• **Challenge #3** is to build a strong case. The great debate is “long letter” or “short” letter. Direct mail professionals will tell you that long letters (three, four or five pages) have a better return than short letters. But, remember that generally these direct mail programs are mailing to tens of thousands—if not hundreds of thousands—of people and are not communicating with people already in “their network”. You are. Like that old adage from school: “Your term paper should be as long as it takes to communicate your thoughts.”—the same holds true here. Only one page is probably not going to be long enough (or it’s going to be a very crowded, text-filled page,) but three pages is likely more than you need. Shoot for about a page and a half or two full pages.

• **Challenge #4** is how to make “the ask”. In your second to last paragraph you must ask and you must ask for as specific an amount as possible. “Please make a gift.” is not a strong ask. If you have the capacity to segment down to past giving—for example, asking everyone who gave $50 last year to step up to $100 or $150—go ahead and do that. That does take intensive staff and data capacity—and is not required for success. Offer several giving level options tied to specific impacts (think mini-impact statements!).
Here’s how this could be phrased:

In giving to 4-H through Health Rocks!, you **invest in a child and change a community**. Your gift will make an immediate and tangible difference in the lives of the kids we serve today and the many children we will be serving throughout the next year. Consider making a gift of $50, $100 or $250 to create **more** conversation about wise health decisions, **more** talk among peer mentors and elementary age kids, **more** kids who are poised to take well-informed and courageous action in changing peer pressure in their schools for the good. Or join us with a gift of $1,000 or more to make your own bold declaration of your belief in the futures of our youth in this community.

or

Our goal is to increase the number of youth served by expanding our outreach services to kids in schools, churches and other community organizations throughout the state. Please continue your support of these critical efforts for our youth. While there are several levels to this giving opportunity the following is one example of the impact of your gift: a contribution of $250 equips a child with the tools he needs to build a strong base of knowledge, unlock new possibilities as he moves into middle and high school or help her discover that she CAN create and build the school community that she envisions. We need your help to be able to do this!

- **Challenge #5** is to wrap-up in a strong way with your last, short paragraph. Return back to your opening hook or quote and reference it again—talking about how Health Rocks solves this problem or inspires this sentiment or has an answer to this provocative issue.

- **Challenge #6** is to make this letter feel as personal as possible. Include a P.S. message about additional reasons to give, ways to give or add a line about honoring someone else with a gift to Health Rocks. Including the person’s name in the P.S. line—as in: P.S. Jen, make a secure gift online at www.4hyourstate.org: you save postage, enable us to put your gift to work immediately and you can **pass along the enclosed return envelope to someone else who also believes in the power of 4-H**!

Studies have shown that often the only parts of a letter that get read are the opening line, the bullets in the middle and the P.S. Read those three elements in your finished letter to ensure that together they create a skeleton of an appeal: opening hook, reasons to give, ask to give.

We’ll come back to yet more ways to make your appeal more personalized in a later step.
Step Four—Getting Your Appeal Printed…

1. The days of being able to send a “Dear Friend” letter are over. In this technologically savvy, Web 2.0 world, the expectation is that your letter will start Dear (First Name) or Dear (Formal Salutation). (Choose which one you use based on the culture of your area, to whom you are writing, and who is signing the letter. A letter from a youth leader should use a formal salutation. A letter from a state leader to long-term donors should probably use first names).

2. For the vast majority of programs, this means that you’ll need to engage the services of a mail house or printer to at least merge your data onto your letter and mailing envelope, print them for you. You may also ask them to stuff the pledge card and any other material you are sending, and stamp the envelope for you. Depending on how many volunteers you can engage in this project, you may want to have them mail the letters for you as well. For a cost, many mail house operations have auto-signers that can be programmed to sign (in real, blue ink!) the letters for you with a signature that is very close as if they were hand-signed.

3. Creating your appeal letters from your office to save on budget has other opportunity costs—it’s very time intensive—and what else could you be doing with this time? If budget is an issue, you likely don’t have an excellent printer than creates a beautiful page—your appeal is going to send the professional message you want it to transmit. If you truly can’t afford a mail house or printer’s services, ask board members and corporate contacts if they would donate their printers to create these letters. And then build it into your budget in future.

Step Five—…And Getting Your Appeal Out the Door

1. All that’s left is to “stuff, stamp and seal, right? There are a few more items to consider adding to the appeal package to take it to the next level of personalization.

2. Consider hosting a “note writing party”—getting together your colleagues and volunteers who shared names to ask them to add personal, handwritten notes to the letters of their friends and contacts. You should add additional notes to any letter not covered by a team member or volunteer. Use an ink pen in a different color than the letter is printed—blue or green, to match your logo.

3. If you have used a formal salutation on the letter, for those you know well, strike out that salutation and hand-write the person’s first name on it. This will let that person know that a real human being paid attention to their letter.

4. Ask volunteers to add their last name to the outside envelope, above your 4-H or Health Rocks return address. As the letter arrives, this will signal that this is not just a piece of mass mail—but something that a person paid attention to before sending.
Step Six—Following-Up by Phone or Hosting a Phonathon

1. Adding a phone campaign component to your mail appeal will create a **much** better return on the investment in the printing, the postage and the time you’ve put in on it. (Remember those stats on face-to-face solicitation vs. phone calls vs. mail?) Ideally you are reaching out by phone about 2 weeks after your mail appeal left the office—or about 10 days after they received it. But, a lot of people can’t stand the idea of getting on the phone to ask for gifts. Understood.

2. Prioritization is the name of the game again. For those volunteers who are willing to do it, have them call your current donors and their own friends on your new contacts list. If you’ve got a fearless caller, provide your recently lapsed donors and finally your new names. (Otherwise, reaching out to them should fall to you. This is why you’re getting paid.) For some, being able to take names and contact information, along with basic past giving history, to make calls in their own time works best. Share no more than 10 names at a time:

   • You don’t want to provide an overwhelming task and
   • You don’t want too much of your data out there in the world at once and
   • You don’t want too many names tied up with one person.

   What if that person says they’ll call but then doesn’t get to it. And doesn’t get to it. And doesn’t get to it. You’ve got a lot of people that you or others could be dialing all tied up.

3. For others, especially if you’ve got a group who are willing to try this but aren’t so sure about their skills, or a group of older youth in your program or their parents, hosting a phonathon is a great way to have some fun and make a lot of calls at once. Ask people to bring their cell phones to your site—or have a restaurant host you in a private room with donated food and drinks. Start with a quick mission moment to provide everyone with a great story to share on the phone, highlight the core elements of your program and provide a cheat sheet of information on your program to each caller. Have lists with names & contact information, pledge cards to be filled out and sent with a personal note of thanks, and get dialing! Pause periodically to report on the total, celebrate the number of new gifts, ring a bell for large pledges and offer Health Rocks prizes to everyone for participating.

   This same idea works really well as a thank-athon as well! Consider adding it to your calendar twice a year.
Summary of Key Points

Coordinating mail appeals and phone calls requires a lot of advance planning. Develop a timeline from when you want your letter to go out and work backwards to schedule in the many activities and steps along the way.

Go back to your core message points in your overall case for support and use that to craft an appeal that is strong, reinforces your story and includes an specific ask for support.

Think creatively about ways to include phone calls in your post-mail follow-up. Are there a few volunteers who could make calls to the most promising groups in your mailing? Can you schedule a staff (and youth) phonathon over a couple of evenings in your office? You don’t want time spent “working the phones” to overtake your face-to-face time with top prospects. Keep a balanced in what you do.

Tools, Templates and Samples

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