



# Best Practices for Effective Donor Messaging

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# Who's in the room?

- Your **role** is:
  - CDO / VP or Director of Development
  - CEO
  - Campaign Manager or similar
  - Other
- Your organization is **raising annually**:
  - Under \$1M
  - Between \$1M and \$5M
  - Between \$5M and \$20M
  - More than \$20M

# What will we cover today?

- Say **Three Things**
- Connect to **Your Mission**
- Use **Fewer Words**
- Your Turn: **A Working Session**

# Say Three Things

“If you try to say  
**everything,**  
your audience will hear  
**nothing.”**

# Principle

## Say Three Things

In general, your audience can remember up to three big ideas.

# Tool

## Ruthless Prioritization

- Gather stakeholders
- Brainstorm long list
- Stack rank
- Focus on Top 3  
("If you could tell them just one thing...")

# Example 1

**Manager Sending Email to Team**

# The Laundry List Email

Dear Team,

I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to give you an update on several things happening at once to ensure we're all on the same page moving forward. First, as we approach the end of the year, we need to make sure that we finalize the project timeline. This includes confirming milestones for the final deliverables. I know we've had discussions regarding deadlines, and I wanted to reiterate that we have some flexibility with certain tasks, so feel free to review and suggest any changes you see fit. I also wanted to remind you about the holiday schedule, as it's fast approaching. We'll be closing the office on December 24th, but if you need to work from home, please let us know.

Additionally, there will be an upcoming meeting next Monday to go over these items in more detail. We'll discuss the project, timelines, and any questions you have about your individual tasks. Also, I wanted to quickly mention that we will be moving forward with a new software tool starting in the new year. I'll be sending out an invite for a training session soon, but it's important to start thinking about how you might incorporate this tool into your workflow. Keep in mind that this new software system will require us to migrate all project data that is updated after Dec. 20, so you should keep track of any significant changes that take place in the last few weeks of the year.

Finally, please make sure you've completed your time-off requests for the holiday period. We want to ensure we've accounted for everyone's availability, and it will help us plan for any necessary adjustments to the project deadlines. If you haven't yet requested time off, please do so as soon as possible so that we can finalize staffing plans. If you want to check your PTO balance, reach out to Cindy in HR or use the HRS system and your login. You can rollover 7 days of PTO each calendar year.

Let me know if you have any questions, and I look forward to seeing everyone on Monday. Thanks for all your hard work!

Best regards,

Your Manager

# The Prioritized Email

Dear Team,

I hope you're doing well. Here are the key updates I'd like to share:

- **Meeting:** We will have a meeting next Monday to review the project timeline and discuss any updates or questions.
- **Project Timeline:** Before then, please review the project milestones and let me know if you have any suggestions or adjustments.
- **Holiday Schedule:** The office will be closed on December 24th and 25th. Please submit your time-off requests as soon as possible.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out. Thanks for your continued hard work!

Best regards,  
Your Manager

# **Example 2**

**Animal Rescue Nonprofit Sending Out Quarterly Update**

# Example 2

## Ideas for Newsletter Update

- # animals rescued in past 6 months: up 20% YoY
- Heartwarming story about a Dachshund
- Increased demand for services due to climbing pet abandonment rates = funding gap
- Changes in county zoning: need for advocacy at upcoming meeting
- Volunteer Training Opportunities & Summer Internships application deadline
- Upcoming Gala - table sponsors needed
- Notable award from governor's office
- Local celebrity visited our facility

# Example 2

## Ideas for Newsletter Update

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## 3 “big ideas”

- 1. Our mission is needed more than ever**
  - 20% Yoy growth
  - Pet abandonment rates
- 2. Goal for Gala: Close our funding gap!**
  - Ways you can help... table sponsor, share invite, volunteer etc.
- 3. Thanks to you... Sparky finds home, rescues Grandma from fire**



# Connect to Your Mission

Donors want the **ends**  
*(your mission)*

But we often lead with the **means**  
*(your programs)*

# Principle

## Connect to Your Mission

Empathy for our audience calls us to connect our messaging to what they care about – which for nonprofits *should be your mission*.

# Tool

**How does each of your three ideas relate to your mission?**

Think outcomes vs. outputs, impact vs. programs/facilities.

# Example

**First iPhone launch**

**5 GB Storage**

**vs.**

**“1,000 songs in your pocket”**

*Aka **Benefits vs. Features***

# Example

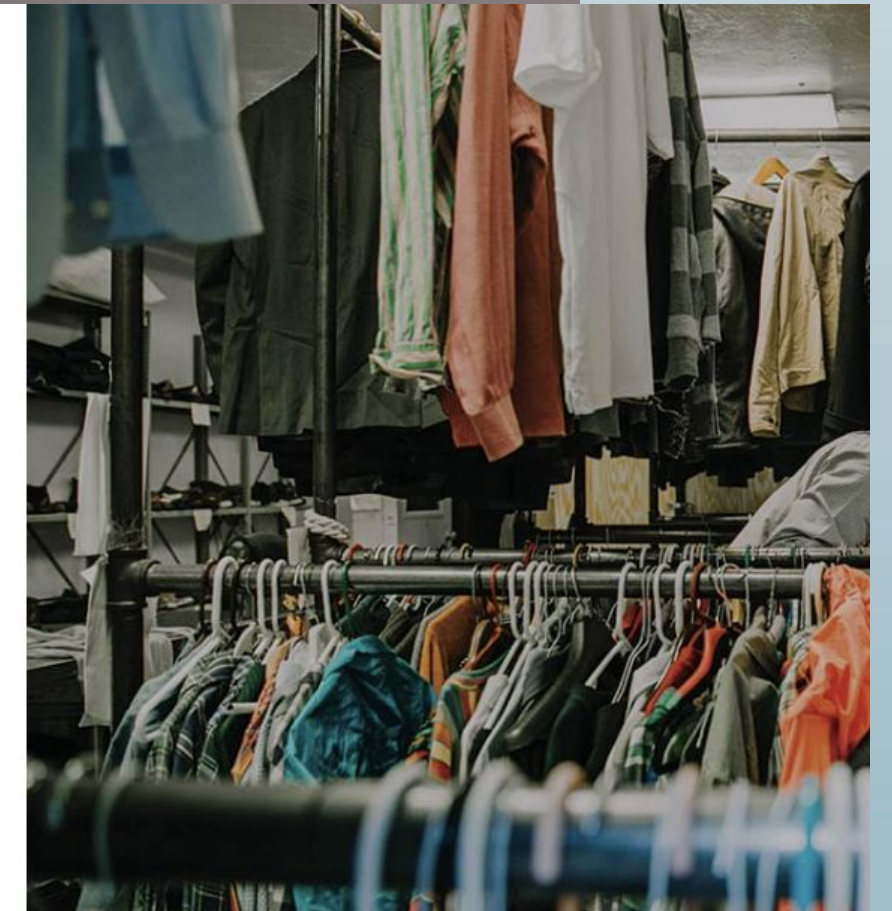
40,000 emergency showers

helped neighbors with limited access to hygiene care stay clean and comfortable.

Outputs and  
Outcome  
combined

27,000 articles of  
clothing

provided comfort and  
restored dignity.



# Example



400,000 meals

brought sustenance and relief to neighbors facing the daily reality of hunger.



65,000 nights of shelter

offered a comfortable, safe overnight stay to neighbors with nowhere else to go.

# Example

## Outputs

By God's grace, here's fruit that we have seen

**6,029** Attendees at public events since we launched in 2017.

**57** Student Fellows program participants since 2020.

**260** Students and faculty participating in short courses and reading groups.

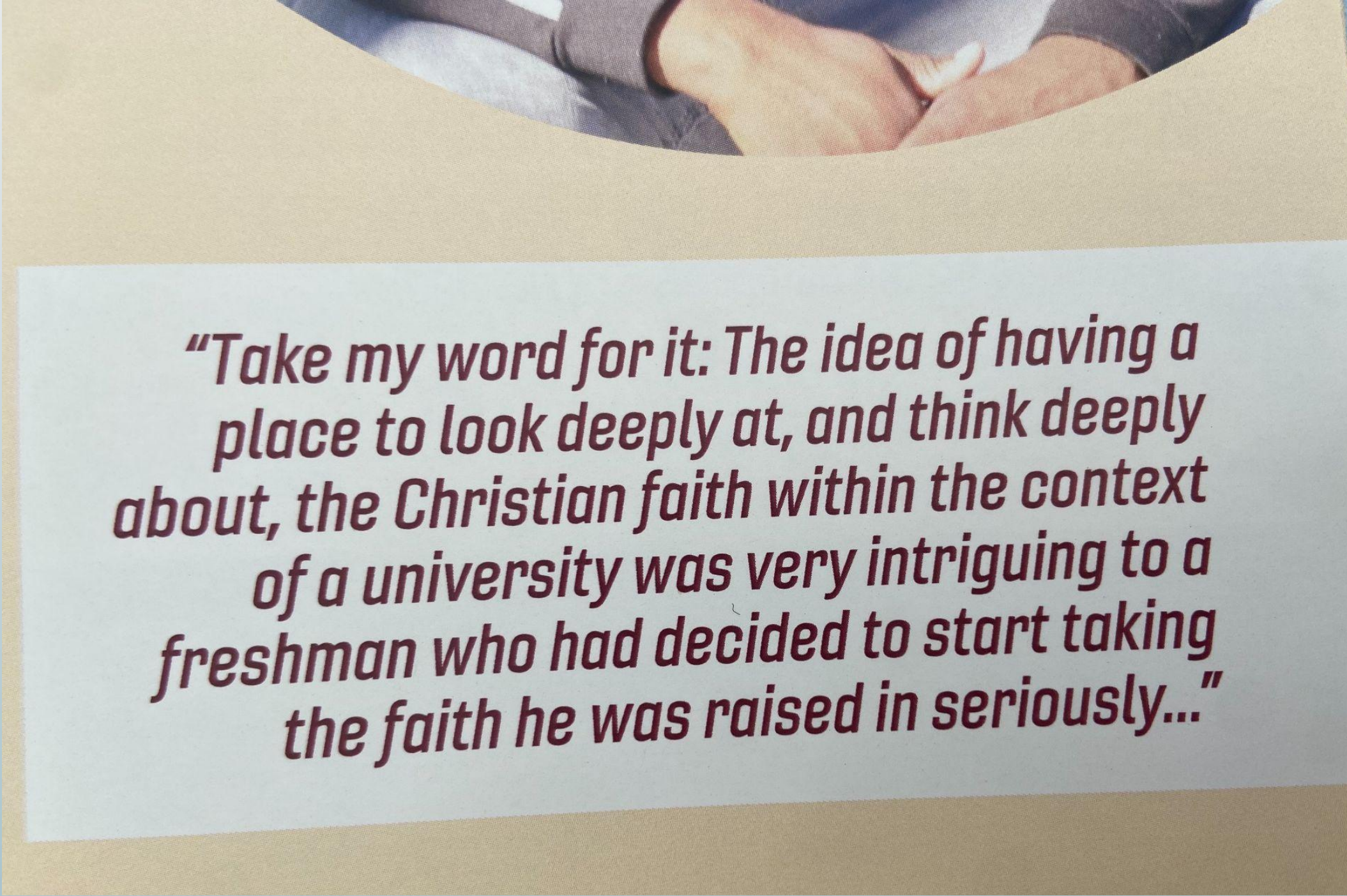
**2,500** Square feet of hospitality space used by students for studying and connecting.

**17** Campus ministries and local churches who have regularly used our space for worship, discipleship, and activities.

# Example

## Outcome

(separate but both represented)



*"Take my word for it: The idea of having a place to look deeply at, and think deeply about, the Christian faith within the context of a university was very intriguing to a freshman who had decided to start taking the faith he was raised in seriously..."*

# Use Fewer Words

People get 100+ business emails per day  
(data varies widely)

On average, people spend 12 seconds reading  
(skimming!) each email.

Relevant emails tend to get more attention

# Principle

## Use Fewer Words

Can your message pass the Skim Test?

**Tool**

# **The Pomelo Principle**

Accessibility before Accuracy

# What is a pomelo?

# What is a pomelo?



# What is a pomelo?

## Option 1

“A pomelo (*Citrus maxima* or *Citrus grandis*) is a citrus fruit native to South East Asia. The rind is very thick but soft and easy to peel away. The resulting fruit has a light yellow to coral pink flesh and can vary from juicy to slightly dry and from seductively spicy-sweet to tangy and tart.”



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## Option 2

“A pomelo is basically a supersized grapefruit with a very thick and soft rind.”

# Pomelo Principle

Accessibility before Accuracy



Along with excluding words,  
be sure to include:

- White space
- Images (keep it fresh!)
- Infographics
- Updated branding

# Example

## DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

This month, gifts made during Imago Dei's Christmas Challenge will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$50,000!

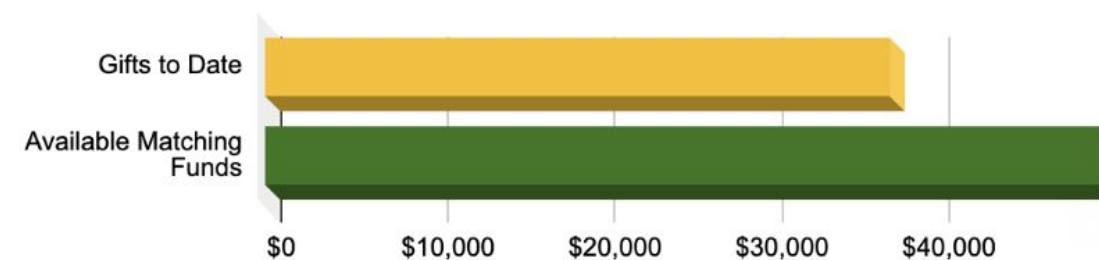


### JUST FIVE MORE DAYS TO HAVE YOUR GIFT DOUBLED!

**Update:** Generous partners have given \$37,425 since December 1. This amount has been matched, dollar-for-dollar by our challenge team, for a total of \$74,850. That's awesome! THANK YOU, GENEROUS PARTNERS!

**Ask:** We need to raise \$12,575 in the next five days to leverage every available matching dollar. If you have not already made a gift, would you prayerfully consider doing so today?

*\*End of year gifts made through one of Imago Dei's tax credit programs are not reflected on the graph below.*



### Imago Dei Neighborhood School BRINGING LEARNING TO LIFE



First graders are exploring place value on their abaci and enjoying geometry this month. We love to see students working hard, experiencing the joy of accomplishment!

#### DECEMBER PRAYERS & PRAISE

This month, we are focusing our attention on the true meaning of Christmas - that God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son as Emmanuel - the God Who is With Us. Play that our team, our families, and our students would take this truth deeply into our hearts and minds as we prepare for Christmas.

Please also pray for families who are in our admissions process for next year. We continue to have more interest - and there is more need - than available seats. This is an incredible gift and a heavy responsibility.

Hiring gifted, godly educators in our current societal moment is not easy; we so grateful for our faithful, joy-filled teaching team. Please pray that the Lord would bring us a part-time elementary Spanish teacher for the second half of the year.

#### WHAT'S HAPPENING IN DECEMBER?

We are gearing up for our third annual traditional Christmas pageant December 21! Students will lead us through the nativity story and congregational singing of Christmas carols. We will close with a gospel message followed by a cookie reception for Imago Dei students and families.

Family Ministry Coordinator Tasha Smith will lead a four week parent discussion on **Andy Crouch's Tech Wise Family**, considering the ways Imago Dei families can work together to think wisely about the use of screens in our homes.

For the 4th year in a row, generous donors are coming together to offer a 1:1 Matching Challenge for the month of December. More information about the what, how and why of this special opportunity will arrive in your inbox on December 1. Please prayerfully consider how you might invest in the students and families of Imago Dei!

#### SEEKING A SPANISH TEACHER FOR SECOND SEMESTER

We are looking for an amazing Spanish speaker to introduce the language and cultures of Spanish-speaking countries with our young students.

Classes meet Wednesday afternoons and on Fridays. The position opens in January. Classroom experience is preferred. If you would like to learn more, please contact [Sarah Kennedy](mailto:Sarah.Kennedy@imagoidei.org).

#### PHOTOS FROM NOVEMBER

A picture is worth a thousand words!



PreK students joined students from Veritas School and Providence Christian for a fun fieldtrip with Jesse the Juggler.



Hands-on learning continues in PreK, truly "bringing learning to life!"



Chapel provides a weekly opportunity for students to serve their schoolmates through Scripture reading and presentations.



Older students read to our younger students as part of Book Character Dress Up Day.



First graders work on their nature journals on a mild November day.



Second graders love having lunch outdoors together!



Station 18 of the Richmond Fire Department brought their ladder truck and equipment to campus, teaching our youngest students age-appropriate fire safety practices.



The Board of Directors treated the team to cozy purple hoodies. We love seeing "Imago Dei" purple all over campus - it matches the joy our team brings each day!



Older students meet for S.W.A.G. (spiritual wisdom and outcasts) lunches each

# Example



5 THINGS IN 5 MINUTES  
WITH  
J.R. BRIGGS



November 12, 2024

*5T5M = 5 Things of Value in Less Than 5 Minutes to Read*

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1 2 3 4 5

**Thought:**

The most important factor to your development may not be what you do; it may be what you refuse to do.

We attend conferences and events and come away with to-do's and take-aways.

But when was the last time you left an event with *to-don'ts* and a list of leave-behinds?

1 2 3 4 5

**Link:**

Leaders are learners. A good list of [9 learning habits by top leaders](#).

1 2 3 4 5

**Recommendation: *Newsletter***

One of the first few activities I do each morning is pour my coffee, journal, read my Bible, and [read the newsletter 1440](#). It's a daily curated, distilled, unbiased newsletter of the most impactful news stories each day - and it's free.

1 2 3 4 5

**Quote:**

*"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."*

-Catherine of Siena

# Continuing to hone your messaging skills:

1. Study what others are doing (subscribe, etc.)
2. Share examples with others
3. Ask for constructive feedback
4. Use AI as editor (“shorten this text”)

# Working Session

# Your Turn

## 1. Write down your answers (5 minutes)

- a. For your next communication, brainstorm a list of ideas then choose your Top 3 Ideas.
- b. Reframe one to connect it with what your audience cares about.

## 2. Share with a partner (5 minutes)



# Q & A





Thank you for attending  
**Best Practices for Effective  
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