



GUIDELINES FOR GIFT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Purpose

The recommendations put forth in this document are designed and intended to help guide and support efforts to consistently deliver acknowledgments that are meaningful, scalable, and timely while appropriately balancing this effort with other critical stewardship priorities. These guidelines have been endorsed by the University of Washington Stewardship Network.

Overview

The University understands that timely and meaningful acknowledgments are essential to donor satisfaction and retention. Good acknowledgments demonstrate that a donor's generosity is appreciated and that their gift will help to advance the mission. In addition, acknowledgments create trust and transparency for our donors, as well as set the stage for ongoing strategic communication about a donor's gift that will deepen their connection.

Acknowledgements are the foundation of donor stewardship efforts, yet they also create challenges. Due to the University's size and decentralized model, variations in acknowledgment practice can create inconsistencies in the donor experience. Also, acknowledgments often assume an inordinately high priority within stewardship efforts, supplanting other critical stewardship elements as a result. Important as acknowledgments are, they are only one component of a robust donor stewardship program, which also includes impact reporting, donor recognition and engagement efforts. Thus, the amount of time and effort devoted to acknowledgment production should be balanced with other stewardship priorities.

Essential Elements

This table outlines the baseline University expectations of acknowledgments regardless of whether they are produced in bulk (e.g. pre-printed pieces), customized notes/letters (e.g. via mail merge), or one-off letters written from scratch.

Base Guidelines ("Baseline")

Timing	<p>Prompt acknowledgment contributes to donor satisfaction and helps build strong relationships between donors, the Unit and its leadership.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send acknowledgments within 10 business days of Gift Services processing the gift • Tailoring for major donors may require longer timeframes; avoid delays when possible
Names/ Salutations	<p>Salutations should be appropriate for the signatory.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use stacked names for envelope address block • For merged letters, use unit's standard salutation (first names vs formal)
Content/ Customization	<p>Thank you letters should be customized when appropriate to acknowledge the relationship between the donor and the Unit or their area of giving. Language should be focused on gift appreciation and impact.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a template that can be modified as needed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Review and update templates on a regular basis (recommended: biannually)

Content/ Customization Cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express gratitude multiple times and in multiple ways – remember that this is about the donor not about us • Do not indicate gift amount (i.e. dollar total; tax information is delivered via receipts) • Identify a contact person for questions; does not need to be the signatory • Flag and specifically tailor letter for special cases (VIPs) – <i>see Special Considerations below</i> • Common filters for segmenting and customizing content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gift amount (e.g. above/below \$1,000) ○ Donor type or giving pattern (e.g. alumni, faculty, sustainers, memorial/honorary) ○ Gift fund (e.g. capital project fund, scholarship fund, etc.)
Signature	<p>Individual signing the acknowledgement should be appropriate to gift amount or the donor's relationship with the Unit.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate each acknowledgment with an actual person (not a department name, position title, etc.) that is appropriate for each donor or donor segment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unit/Department head ○ Individual who secured the gift ○ Donor Relations/Stewardship staff
Special Considerations	<p>These segments should receive customized/tailored acknowledgments.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit VIPs – highly personalized letter; not dependent on gift amount • Memorial and Honorary Gifts – acknowledgment to mention the individual being honored • First gift – special acknowledgement of the first gift • Payroll – acknowledge at time of pledge and at time of completion • Sustainers – acknowledgment at time of first gift, once per year thereafter, and at time of completion

Defining Success

The following are indicators of progress and success:

Documentation

Each unit has a written plan that documents and guides their acknowledgement processes. Plans are reflective of the shared guidelines outlined here, and establish the expectations and framework for acknowledging contributions.

Timeliness

Each unit's plan and process is structured for timeliness of acknowledgment.

Personalization and Segmentation

Each unit's acknowledgment plan and processes is structured to accommodate appropriate segmentation and personalization. Letters can follow a template format that is able to be modified for giving levels, donor segments, or can be drafted on an ad hoc basis for highly personalized letters as appropriate.