There are various kinds of direct mail, but the conventional wisdom is that a personally addressed letter, rather than a brochure by itself, for example, is most effective.

A compelling direct-mail message needs to contain good accurate information, but you need to give more than “just the facts, ma’am.” It is the “so what?” factor that needs to come through—and from the heart. Some examples include:

- What do you love about this community?
- Why is it a special place?
- What does it mean to you?
- Why is the community foundation or fund important for your community?
- What can having a community endowment do that will preserve those things that make your community unique, or change the things that need improvement?

Remember to use a personal tone. And try to create a sense of urgency.

Some things you will want to think about as you develop your appeal include:

- **Who signs the letter?** The letter should be signed by one person, usually the board chair or the executive director. For a fairly small mailing, board members can divide up the letters and sign them—or add a brief, handwritten “P.S.” note, which they sign. If the letter is signed by the recipient’s friend or associate and there is a brief handwritten message, this makes it more personal and more effective.

- **Length.** Two-page letters are more effective than a single page, and a “P.S.” at the end attracts attention.

- **Writing the letter.** Write short, declarative sentences, without jargon or buzz words. Avoid clichés like the plague! Write short paragraphs and use bold type to highlight important points—but not too much of it. Use large type in a typeface that is easy to read for older or challenged eyes.

- **Ask for what you want!** If this is a fundraising letter, be clear about that and suggest an amount or amounts. Then, offer them something. The “offer” is extremely important. As a community endowment you offer them a legacy, the chance to see their dreams fulfilled, you can offer them recognition…and most of all, a grateful, and better, community.

- **Provide contact information.** Donors may want to contact you with questions or for more information. You’ll want to conclude with an enthusiastic invitation to get in
touch with and learn more about your community foundation or fund, to contribute or to volunteer.

- **Keep your lists up to date.** Use other mailings to keep your mailing lists up to date by requesting “address service” from the post office. This costs a bit for every piece sent to a wrong address, but the new addresses the post office sends you will be invaluable to your fundraising efforts.

- **When to send?** Review your overall schedule of mailings, news releases and letters to the editor. Decide when the mailing would fit in the schedule. The last two months of the year are often an optimum time (you should be in touch with your current donors anyway as year-end approaches). Mailings to snow birds or sun birds will dictate a particular time. Don’t mail in April around tax time, or near a primary or general election when people are drowning in mail.

- **Be sure to enclose an addressed return envelope or a pledge card.** You don’t need to add postage. Studies have shown that it doesn’t raise the response rate.

- **If you enclose a brochure, make sure the brochure has pictures.** Studies have shown that pictures do raise the response rate.