LET'S GET DIRECT

# Scary Good Ideas from Michelle's Mailbox

## PART 2

October 29, 2026



PRODUCTION SOLUTIONS
A MOORE COMPANY

# Welcome

## Your Presenter



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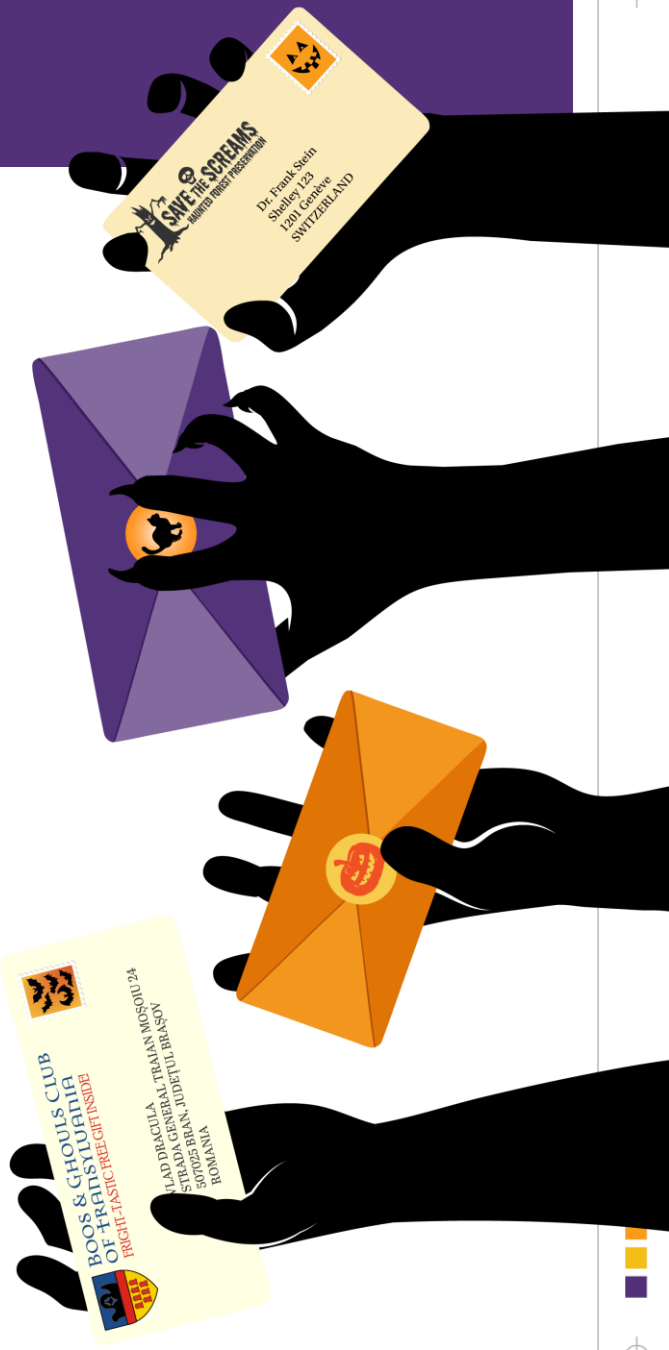


# What Makes a Scary Good Idea

Sometimes the best direct mail ideas are hiding in plain sight.

- **An unexpected twist** on a familiar format or technique.
- **A smarter use of components** that makes every piece work a little harder.
- **A thoughtful donor experience** that creates a stronger connection.
- **A simple solution** that delivers impact without unnecessary complexity.
- **An idea worth borrowing** that can be adapted for another audience, campaign, or organization.

***It's not always about doing something new. Sometimes it's about seeing something familiar in a completely different way.***

**We're exploring ideas, not declaring winners.**

**A note about results:** We generally don't have response or performance data, and many of these mailings are too recent for results to be available.

**Observe:** Look at real-world mailpieces for interesting creative, strategic, and production decisions.

**Question:** Consider why those choices were made and what they might accomplish.

**Borrow:** Explore how the underlying idea could work for another audience, campaign, or organization.

The goal isn't to prove an idea worked. It's to explore whether it's worth testing.

# Welcome to the Mailbox Creative Lab

# Make Every Component Work Harder

What if we looked at every piece in a package and asked what job it was actually doing?





# What if Every Component Had to Earn Its Place in the Package

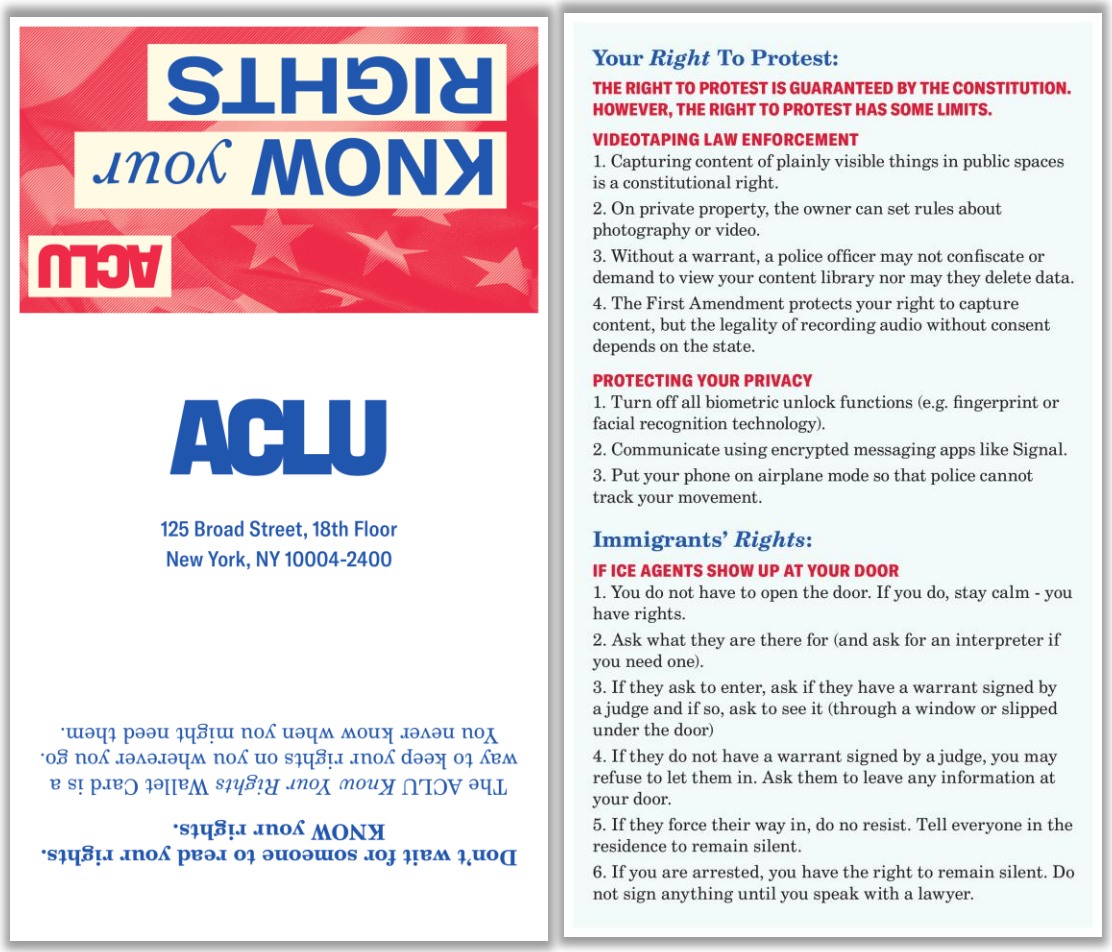
Every component in a direct mail package is an opportunity to do something meaningful.

Some components explain the need. Others reinforce the mission, encourage action, create an emotional connection, or provide something useful to keep.

The strongest packages don't simply include more pieces. They make intentional decisions about what each piece contributes.

**The opportunity: Make every component part of the strategy, not just part of the package.**

# A Useful Component Has a Life Beyond the Mailbox




**The example:** ACLU Know Your Rights wallet card.

**The idea:** Turn educational information into something the recipient can carry and reference.

**Why it works:**

- The content is directly connected to the organization's mission.
- The format makes information portable and accessible.
- The value of the component doesn't end when the envelope is opened.

**The idea worth borrowing:** When developing an insert, ask whether the information could be useful to the recipient after the mailing has served its initial purpose.

# Different Components. Different Jobs. One Story



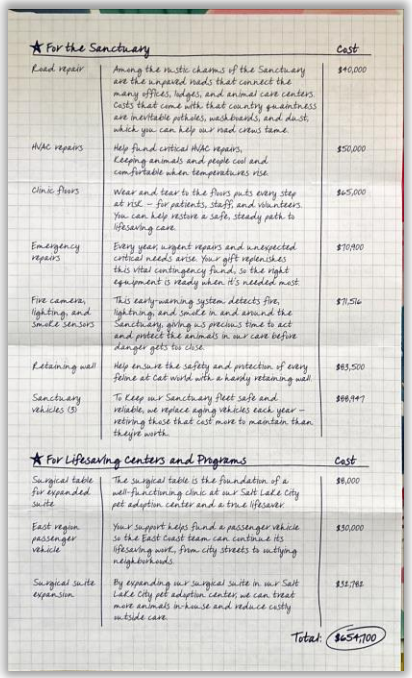


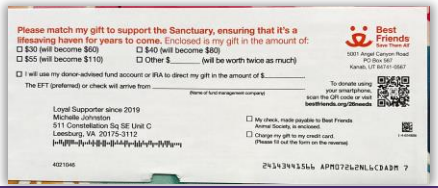











**The example:** A match package with a capital campaign feel using a faux invoice to communicate the scope of a renovation.

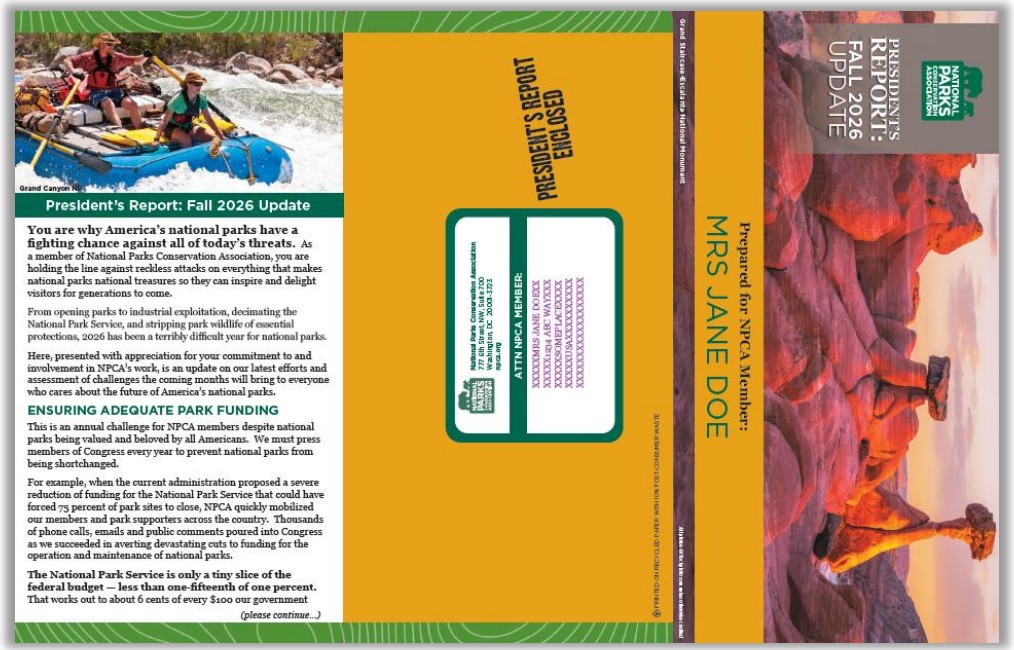
**The idea:** Instead of asking the letter to explain everything, use different components to tell different parts of the story.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The letter introduces the organization's work and the need for support.
- The faux invoice uses a familiar format to make the many elements of a renovation more tangible.
- The reply device connects the need to an immediate opportunity to give, supported by a matching gift.

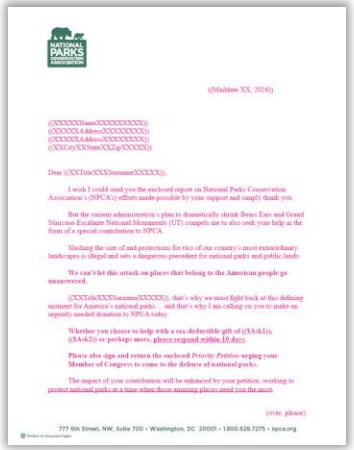
**The idea worth borrowing:** Every component doesn't need to repeat the same message. Consider how each one can contribute something different to the overall story.

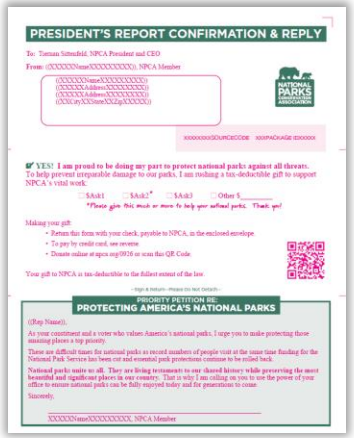
# When the Package Becomes the Message











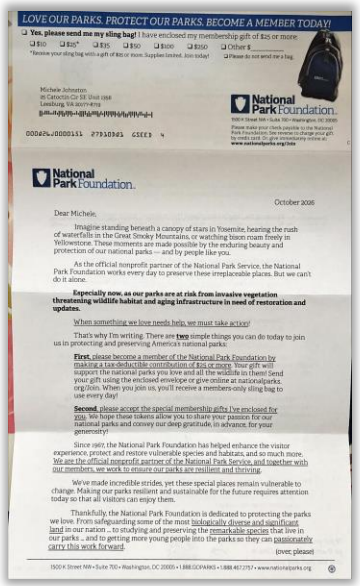




Consider whether the outer mailpiece could also carry the message, eliminating the need for separate components.

# When Every Component Reinforces the Mission

























**The example:** National Park Foundation acquisition package featuring stickers, a notepad, and a sling bag offer.

**The idea:** Use multiple components to reinforce one cohesive message.

**Why it's interesting:**

- Each premium relates to the experience of parks and outdoor exploration.
- The visual identity connects the pieces.
- The upfront premiums offer a tangible reminder of the organization's mission.
- The backend premium creates an additional giving incentive.

**The idea worth borrowing:** When using multiple premiums or inserts, make sure they reinforce the same story rather than competing for attention.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

# Audit Your Components

The goal isn't to make every component do everything.
It's to make sure every component contributes something.

# Old Ideas, New Jobs

Sometimes the most interesting innovation isn't the format—it's what we're asking that format to accomplish.



Some of the most interesting direct mail ideas begin with something familiar.

A postcard can do more than solicit a gift.
A premium can support more than acquisition.
A stewardship approach developed for one audience may work equally well for another.

The opportunity is to look beyond how we've traditionally used a format or technique.

What else could this idea accomplish? And who else might it work for?

**Sometimes the innovation isn't the format...it's the assignment**

# A Gift Catalog Doesn't Have to Sell Gifts










**The examples:** Cru and American Cancer Society gift catalog approaches.

**The idea:** Borrow the familiar structure of a symbolic gift catalog to make different types of giving opportunities more tangible and understandable.

**Why it's interesting:**

- Cru uses a more traditional symbolic gift catalog approach, presenting giving opportunities through recognizable gifts.
- American Cancer Society uses a similar concept to help communicate needs and impact that aren't necessarily represented by tangible items.
- The catalog approach allows donors to explore different opportunities and connect giving amounts with specific purposes or outcomes.
- Presenting intangible needs in a more concrete way can make the impact of a donation easier to understand and visualize.

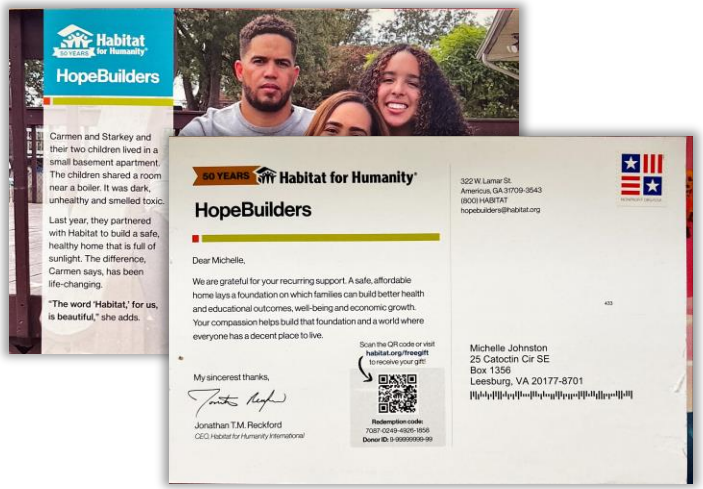
**The idea worth borrowing:** You don't need a collection of physical or symbolic gifts to borrow the gift catalog concept. Consider how a catalo

# A Postcard That Recognizes Progress













**The example:** Habitat for Humanity monthly donor anniversary postcards.

**The idea:** Use a familiar postcard format to recognize milestones in an ongoing giving relationship.

**What makes it interesting:**

- Four versions correspond to 3, 6, 9, and 12 months of giving.
- The message changes as the donor progresses through the relationship.
- A gift redemption opportunity is introduced after three months.
- The communication recognizes ongoing support rather than simply requesting another donation.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Look for meaningful moments in the donor journey that deserve acknowledgment.

# A Solicitation Doesn't Always Need A Reply




**The example:** Orbis donor-advised fund postcard.

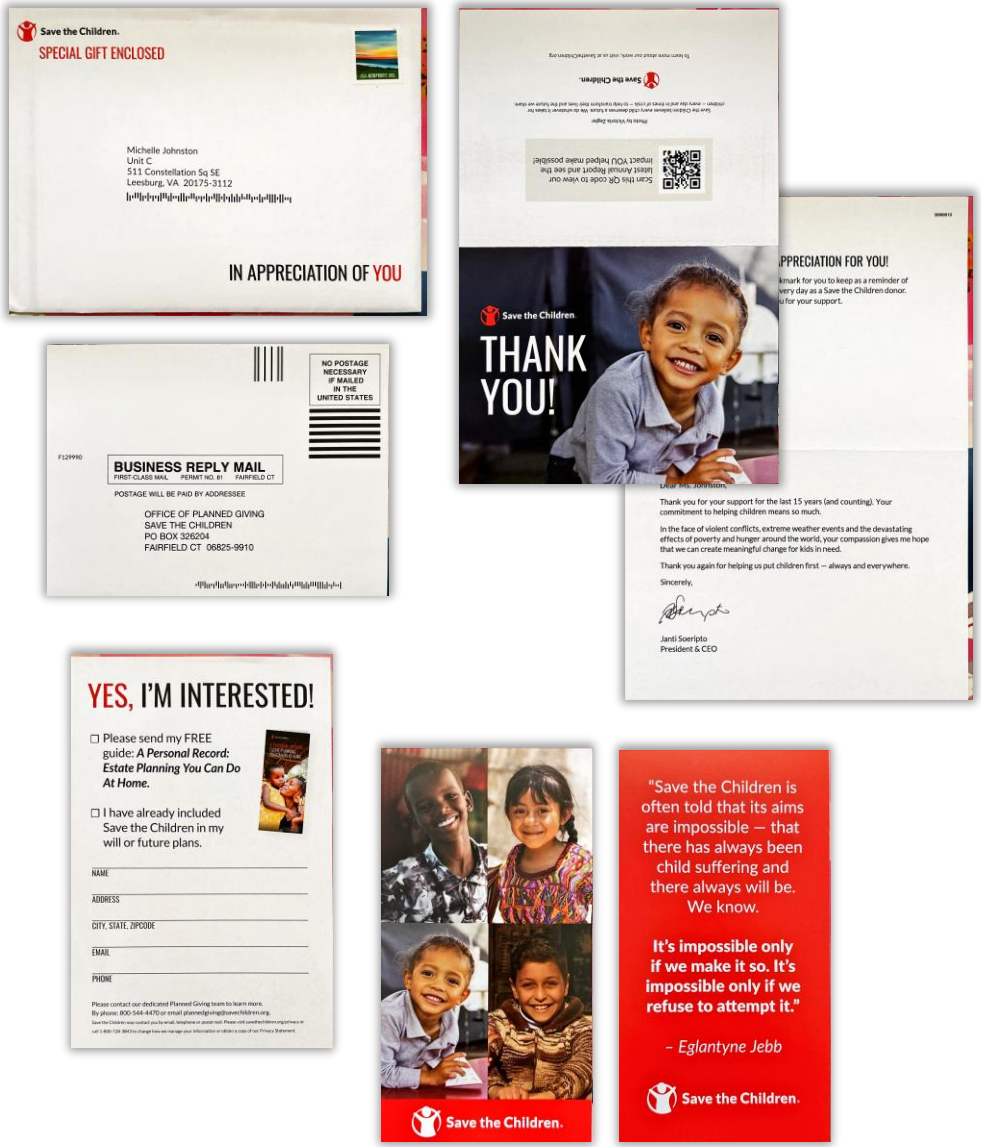
**The idea:** Rethink traditional solicitation formats for donors who give through donor-advised funds rather than responding with a mailed donation.

**Why it's interesting:**

- DAF donors typically recommend grants through their fund administrator rather than returning a check with a reply device.
- These donors still need to be cultivated and solicited, even when their method of giving is different.
- A postcard or self-mailer can deliver a compelling fundraising message without including a traditional reply device or return envelope.
- The format can focus on the mission, the need, and how to recommend a grant, potentially reducing unnecessary production and postage costs.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Match the solicitation format to how the audience actually gives. For donors who don't need a traditional reply mechanism, consider whether a postcard or self-mailer could communicate the ask just as effectively.

# One Package. More Than One Objective.




**The example:** A mid-level donor mailing that incorporates a planned giving ask.

**The idea:** Use existing donor communications to introduce other giving opportunities rather than always developing separate packages or campaigns.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The mailing uses a familiar mid-level package approach while introducing planned giving.
- Mid-level donors may also be strong prospects for planned giving conversations.
- Incorporating the message into an existing communication creates another opportunity to introduce donors to ways they can support the organization.
- The approach can potentially reduce the need for a completely separate mailing while expanding awareness of other giving programs.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Look for opportunities to introduce other giving programs within communications you're already sending. An existing package may provide a natural place to introduce planned giving, monthly giving, or other ways to support the mission.

# A Commercial Mailer That Borrows from Personal Correspondence




**The example:** A commercial window company's advertisement designed to resemble a personal Christmas card.

**The idea:** Borrow the familiar appearance of personal holiday correspondence to encourage recipients to open and engage with a commercial mailing.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The outer envelope uses details associated with personal correspondence, including a family-style return address and handwriting-style addressing.
- Seasonal artwork and postage treatment reinforce the appearance of a holiday card.
- The commercial message is revealed only after the recipient opens the piece.
- The approach demonstrates how presentation can influence expectations before the message is even seen.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Look beyond traditional fundraising mail for creative approaches. Consider how the outer envelope can create curiosity, familiarity, or a more personal experience—particularly for stewardship, holiday, anniversary, or mid-level communications.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

# Give A Familiar Format A New Assignment

Sometimes a new idea isn't new at all. It's a successful idea finding a different home.

# Know Where To Spend

There isn't one right level of investment. The question is whether we're spending in the places that matter.



The right investment depends on what you're trying to accomplish, who you're communicating with, and which elements will make the greatest difference.

Sometimes that means adding a personal touch or enhancing the presentation. Sometimes it means adapting an existing format. And sometimes it means deliberately keeping things the same, even when another approach might appear less expensive.

The opportunity isn't simply to spend more or less. It's to understand which decisions create the greatest value for the overall program.

**Not every communication needs the same investment.**

**And not every change is worth making.**

# Recognition Doesn't Have to Be One-Size-Fits-All



2026 Annual Fund **Leesburg Drive**

American Cancer Society
Every cancer. Every life.

Ms. Johnston: 1 in 3 men and women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. Support from your business helps make a critical difference in your community.
**Please give your Annual Fund gift today to help save lives and free the world from cancer.**

☐ $15 ☐ $25 ☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ Other $_____

To donate online, visit cancer.org/EveryCancer today. To donate using your credit card, see the back of this form.

**Dedicated Supporter**
Michelle Johnston
25 Catoctin Circle, Box 1356
Leesburg, VA 20177

American Cancer Society
P.O. Box 1749
Vienna, VA 22183-1749

American Cancer Society
**2026 Annual Fund — Please give generously**

Dear Ms. Johnston,

Businesses like yours set an important example in the community. We deeply appreciate your support on behalf of people facing cancer — a coworker, a loved one, perhaps even yourself.

**1 in 3 men and women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime.**

But gifts from your business can help us save lives and provide hope in the community. Thanks to your support, more people are surviving cancer every day, in part through critical research that has led to better prevention and early detection, as well as through more effective treatments.

**Your donation helps make lifesaving progress. Please send a generous gift today.**

Your generosity helps fund groundbreaking research and provides essential programs for prevention and early detection, patient support, and the trusted information people facing cancer and their families depend on. Together, we can fight back against cancer and help save more lives!

As a thank-you for your continued support, I have enclosed your 2026 Certificate of Appreciation. Please display it as a symbol of your dedication to helping us end cancer as we know it, for everyone.

This is the time to help save lives — please send what you can today. Thank you.

Kimberly Jackson
Executive Vice President
Southeast Region

P.S. Your support can help save lives in your community. Please give a gift today.

cancer.org/EveryCancer • Call 1-800-227-2345

Detach here and display with pride

**2026**
***Certificate of Appreciation***

In honor of your support of the American Cancer Society and your dedication to helping us end cancer as we know it, I am proud to recognize

**Michelle Johnston**
**Dedicated Supporter**

Thank you for your generosity and commitment. Your support is helping save lives.

American Cancer Society
Every cancer. Every life.

William L. Dahut, MD
Chief Scientific Officer
American Cancer Society



USO
FOR THE PEOPLE WHO SERVE

**2026 CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION**

THIS CERTIFICATE IS PRESENTED TO

*Ms. Michelle Johnston*

In recognition of your extraordinary support for the men and women of our military and their families. We salute your dedication to the U.S. Armed Forces and the USO.

General David L. Goldfein
USAF (Ret.)
Chairman, USO Board of Governors

1941-2026
USO

Michael S. Linnington
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army, Retired
Chief Executive Officer & President, USO

**The examples:** Two different approaches to donor recognition certificates.

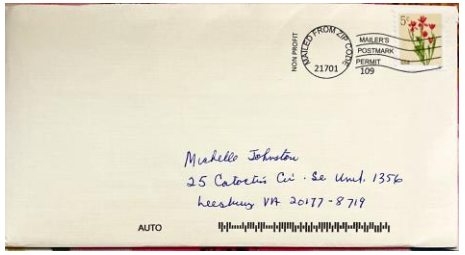
**The idea:** Recognition can be adapted to different audiences and investment levels.

**Why it's interesting:**

- A certificate provides a tangible acknowledgment.
- Presentation can influence how meaningful the recognition feels.
- The investment can vary based on audience and program economics.
- The purpose remains the same: helping supporters feel valued.

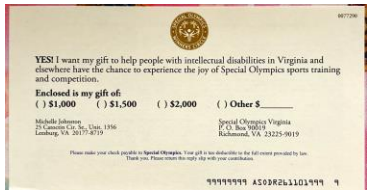
**The idea worth borrowing:** Start with the recognition experience you want to create, then choose the format and investment that make sense.

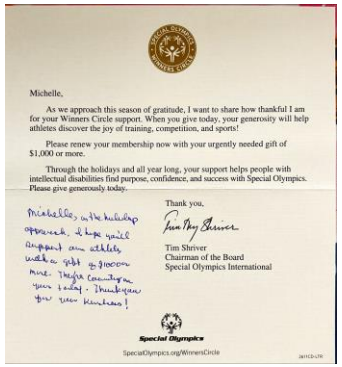
# The Details Can Carry the Value









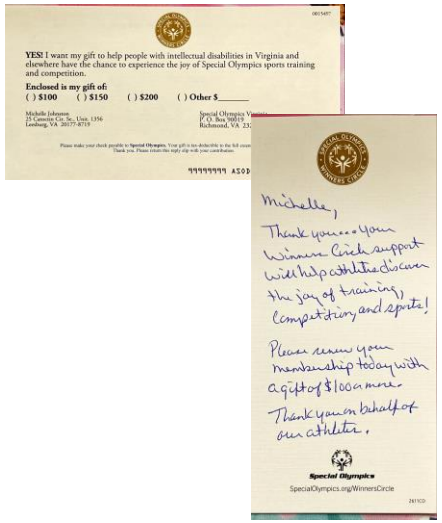













**The example:** Renewal communications with handwritten elements for different giving levels.

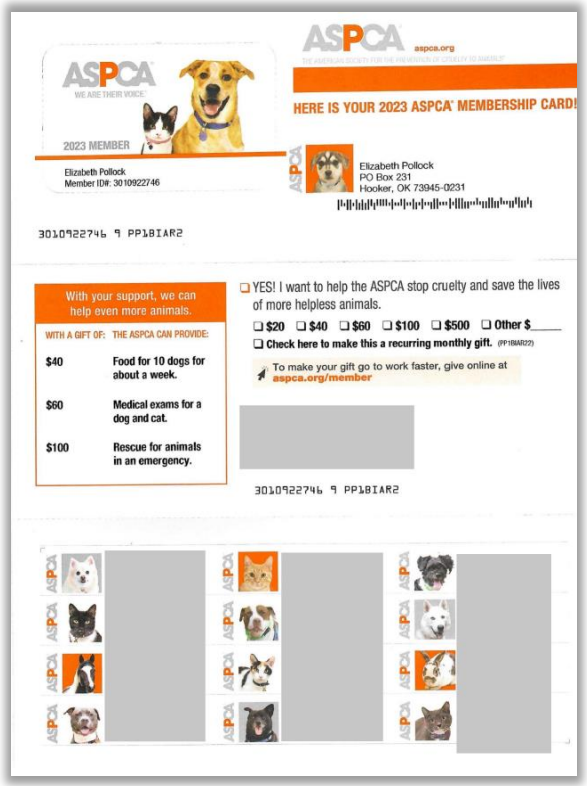
**The idea:** Invest in personal presentation rather than simply adding more materials.

**What makes it interesting:**

- Both versions use handwriting to create a personal feel.
- The higher-level version includes additional presentation details and components.
- The smaller version retains a personal approach with a more compact format.
- The experience is adapted to the intended audience.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Identify which details communicate personal attention, then determine how to deliver them appropriately at different investment levels.

# Different Formats. Different Investments. Same Purpose.










**The example:** ASPCA acquisition and lapsed-donor mailings featuring address labels and a membership card.

**The idea:** Adapt an established acquisition package concept for a different audience by changing the format and presentation rather than reinventing the entire approach.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The acquisition version combines integrated address labels, a membership card, and a reply device.
- The lapsed-donor version uses a smaller 4" × 6" greeting card with a detachable membership card and separate address labels.
- Changing the size and presentation visually differentiates the lapsed-donor communication while retaining the familiar elements of the original concept.
- The smaller format may also offer production efficiencies, although smaller doesn't automatically mean less expensive.

**The idea worth borrowing:** When adapting a successful concept for another audience, consider whether changing the format and presentation can create a more appropriate experience—and potentially improve production economics. Price the alternatives rather than assuming which will cost less.

# Sometimes Spending More in One Area Makes Sense




**The example:** National Parks Conservation Association calendar premium test.

**The idea:** Make a deliberate decision about where to accept additional costs to avoid unnecessary changes elsewhere in the package.

**Why it's interesting:**

- When testing a calendar as a backend premium, NPCA chose to keep the other package components unchanged.
- That meant mailing a flat package and accepting increased postage costs.
- Maintaining the existing components avoided the expense of developing and producing an additional package version.
- The approach also helped keep the test focused on the calendar rather than introducing multiple creative changes.

**The idea worth borrowing:** The least expensive choice for one component isn't necessarily the most economical approach for the entire program. Evaluate the total cost and the purpose of the test before deciding where to spend.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

# Spend With Purpose

Knowing where to spend also means knowing where to make changes—and where not to.

# Reduce Cost Without Reducing the Idea

What can we simplify without losing the experience or the message?





Managing direct mail costs doesn't always mean removing something important.

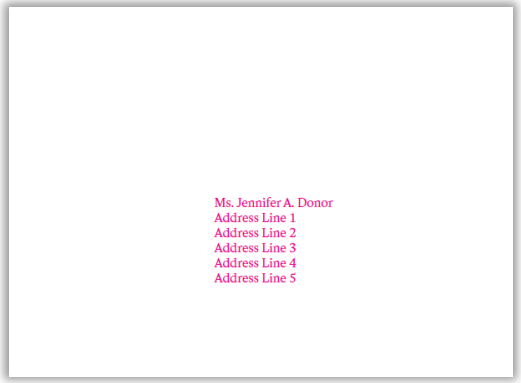
Sometimes the opportunity is to rethink how we're producing the communication.

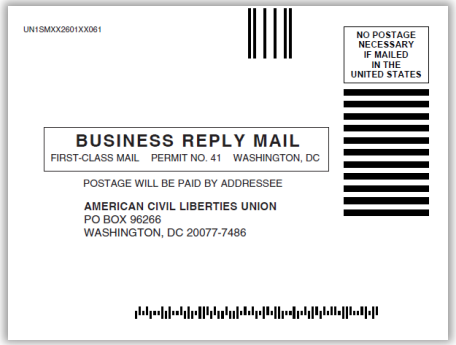
A different format, fewer components, simpler construction, or a more efficient production approach may preserve the intended experience while reducing expense.

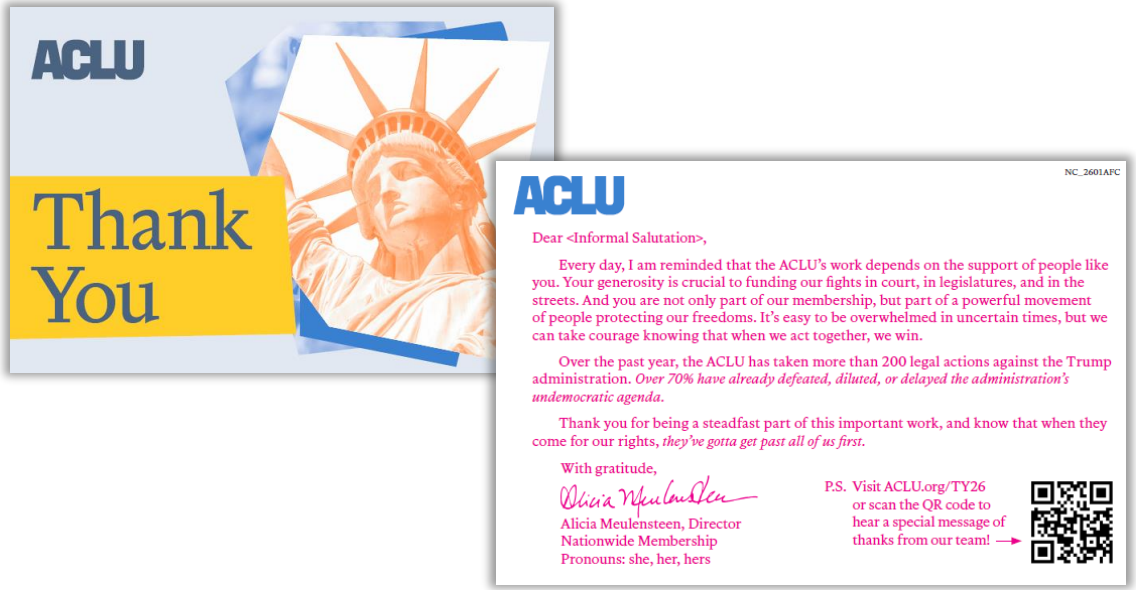
The challenge is knowing which elements create value—and which ones simply add cost.

## What can we simplify without losing the idea?

# The Experience Doesn't Have to Change Just Because the Format Does




**The example:** A double-sided flat card used instead of a traditional folded notecard.

**The idea:** Preserve the personal feel of a card while simplifying the production format.

**Why it's interesting:**

- A flat card can still deliver a warm, personal message.
- Eliminating the fold may reduce manufacturing complexity and cost.
- The simpler format can be particularly appropriate for stewardship communications with no ask or only a soft ask.
- The change focuses production investment on the message rather than the construction.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Identify the experience you're trying to create, then determine the most efficient format that can deliver it.

# A Short Message Can Still Have Impact






**The example:** An animal-focused stewardship postcard featuring a compelling image and a concise thank-you message.

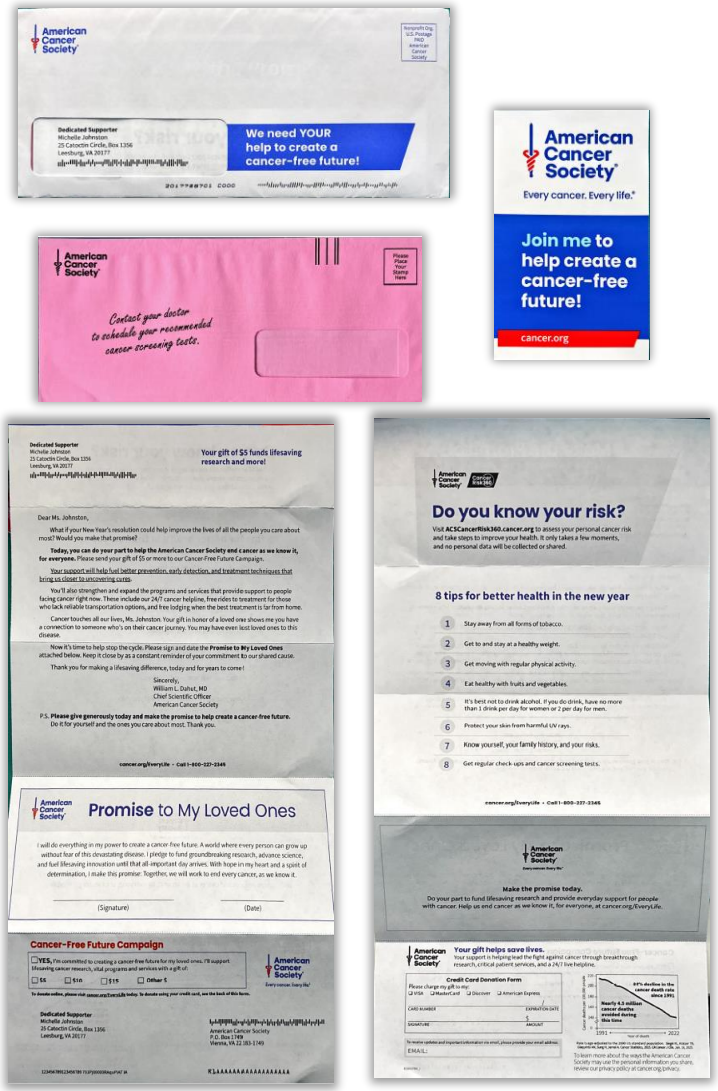
**The idea:** Use a simple format and focused message to deliver appreciation without building a more elaborate mailing.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The image immediately establishes an emotional connection.
- The message has one clear purpose: appreciation.
- The postcard doesn't need multiple components to communicate that purpose.
- The compact format provides an opportunity to manage production and postage costs.

**The idea worth borrowing:** When the objective is straightforward, consider whether a simple postcard can deliver the intended experience just as effectively as a more complex package.

# Making the Most of Every Inch




**The example:** American Cancer Society extended letter/reply format.

**The idea:** Use an integrated format to bring the appeal, pledge, and response device together while preserving space for a compelling mission message.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The front combines the letter, pledge, and reply device into one cohesive fundraising communication.
- The reverse side provides space for a health-focused message that reinforces the organization's mission and impact.
- The format allows the emotional appeal and practical response elements to work together without requiring separate printed pieces.
- Combining these functions into one document may create production and inserting efficiencies while retaining the full message.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Before adding another component, consider whether a different format could accommodate the same content and response opportunity more efficiently—without sacrificing the story you're trying to tell.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

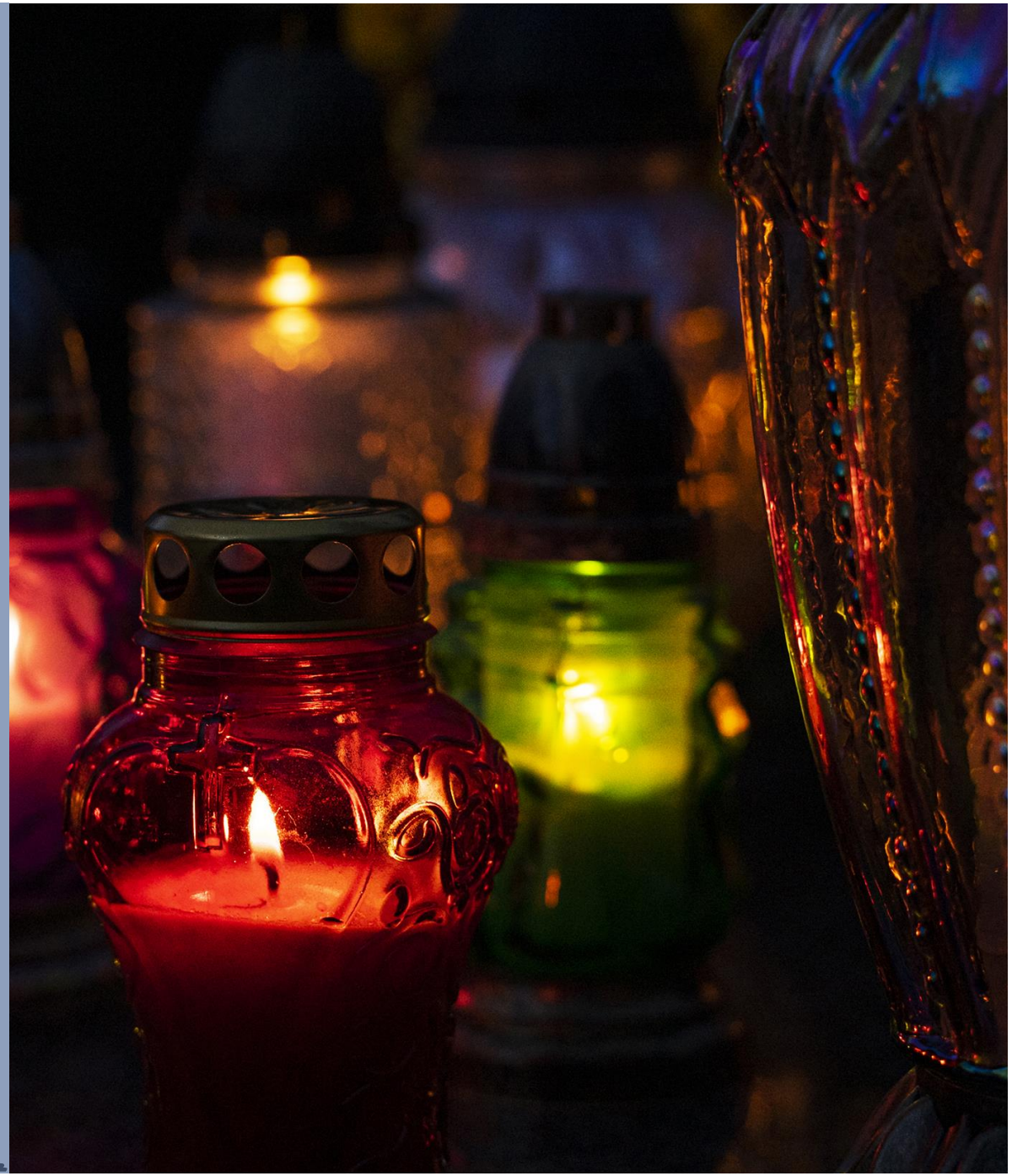
# Simplify Without Sacrificing the Experience

The goal isn't to make the mailpiece cheaper at any cost. It's to eliminate expense that isn't contributing enough to the experience or the results.

# Direct Mail Isn't A Stand Alone Channel

What belongs in the mailbox, and what could another channel do better?





Direct mail doesn't have to carry every message, tell every story, or provide every piece of information.

Digital channels can extend the experience by introducing new voices, offering more in-depth content, or making information accessible beyond the original mailing audience.

The opportunity isn't simply to add a QR code or website address.

It's to consider what belongs in print, what works better digitally, and how the two can create a more meaningful experience together.

**The mailbox can be the beginning of the experience, not the end.**

# One Campaign. Multiple Channels. A Consistent Experience.




**The example:** Coordinated direct mail and digital communications using similar graphics, messaging, and visual elements.

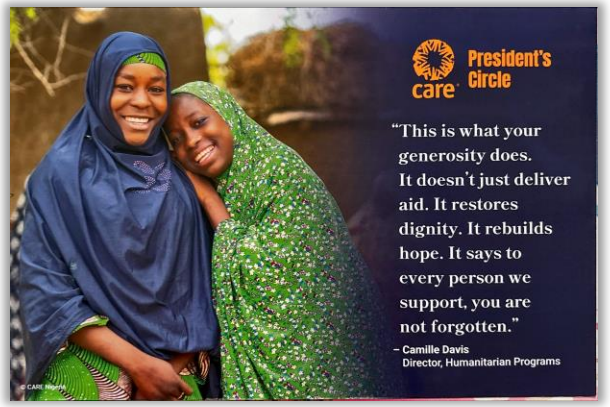
**The idea:** Create a recognizable campaign experience across channels by maintaining a consistent look, feel, and message.

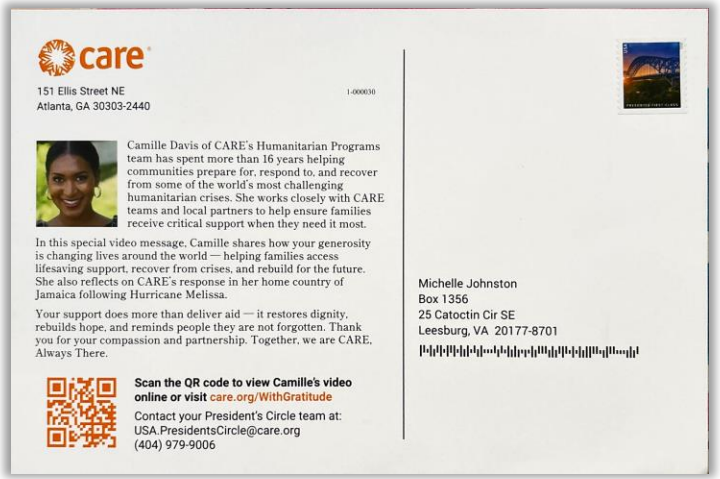
**Why it's interesting:**

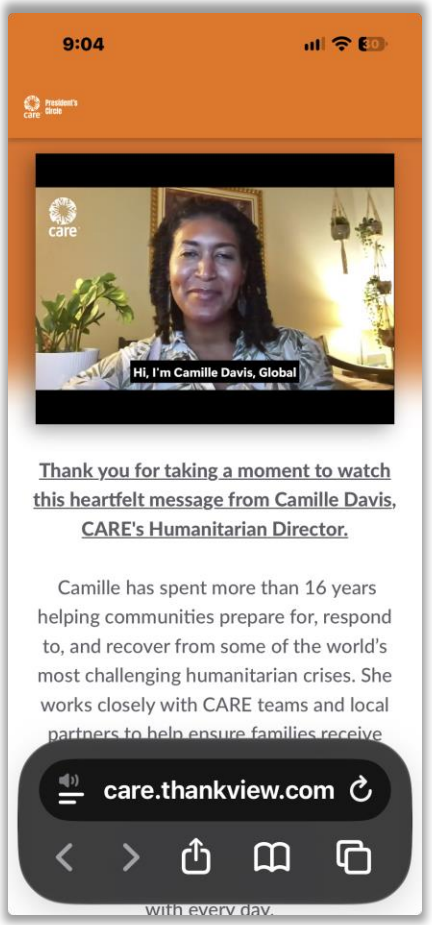
- Shared graphics, language, and design elements help connect the physical and digital communications.
- Consistency makes the campaign recognizable when donors encounter it through different channels.
- Each channel can serve a different purpose while reinforcing the same overall message.
- Coordinated creative allows the campaign to feel like one connected effort rather than a collection of separate communications.

**The idea worth borrowing:** When developing a direct mail campaign, consider how the creative will translate across other channels. Consistent messaging and visual elements can help reinforce recognition and create a more connected donor experience.

# A Thank You That Goes Beyond the Printed Message




**The examples:** CARE stewardship postcard featuring a QR code linking to a video thank-you from the humanitarian director.

**The idea:** Use the printed postcard to deliver appreciation and digital video to add another personal voice to the message.

**Why it's interesting:**

- The postcard provides a tangible expression of gratitude.
- The QR code offers an opportunity to hear a thank-you directly from the humanitarian director.
- The video introduces a different voice and perspective from within the organization.
- The digital content adds something the printed piece cannot communicate in the same way.

**The idea worth borrowing:** When connecting print and digital, consider what the second channel can add to the experience—not just what information it can repeat.

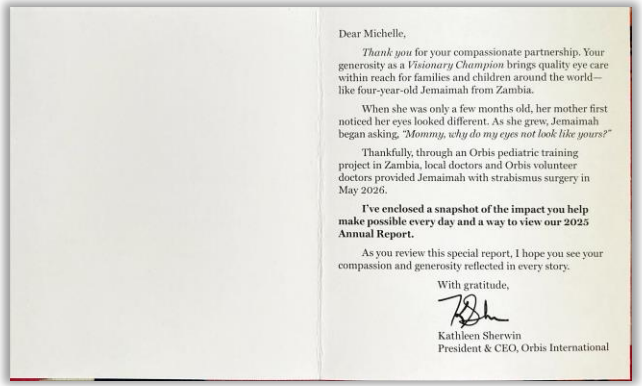
# When the Annual Report Moves Beyond Print
















**The example:** Orbis Visionary Society mailing featuring a QR code linking to the organization's digital annual report.

**The idea:** Use direct mail to connect donors with traditionally printed content that can now be delivered digitally.

**What makes it interesting:**

- Annual reports have traditionally been substantial printed pieces that can be expensive to produce and distribute.
- A QR code allows the mailing to direct recipients to the full report without including it as a printed component.
- Digital delivery creates opportunities to make the report available to a broader audience without the same incremental printing and mailing costs.
- The physical mailing maintains a personal connection while the digital report provides additional mission and impact information.

**The idea worth borrowing:** Consider which traditionally printed materials could be delivered digitally, using direct mail to introduce the content and encourage engagement rather than carrying every piece of information itself.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

# Plan What Happens Next

Don't add a digital component just because you can. Add it because it makes the experience better.

# Five Trends, Five Opportunities

| Trend | Opportunity to explore |
|---|---|
| Make Every Component Work Harder | Give every component a distinct purpose in telling the story. |
| Old Ideas, New Jobs | Borrow successful techniques across formats, objectives, and audiences. |
| Know Where to Spend | Evaluate where to invest, what to change, and what to preserve based on the overall program objective. |
| Reduce Cost Without Reducing the Idea | Simplify production without sacrificing the intended experience. |
| Direct Mail Isn't a Standalone Channel | Connect channels to reinforce the message, enhance the experience, or extend access to content. |

The best ideas don't necessarily require a new format, a bigger budget, or more complicated production. They require a clear understanding of what you're trying to accomplish.

# The Next Scary Good Idea Might Already Be in Your Mailbox

Don't just ask what the package contains.

Ask why they made those choices.

# THANK YOU!

