

Letter Writing

One of the most effective fundraising techniques is to simply ask people you know for support. Remember, your letter serves two purposes – it educates people about your study abroad choice and it is a tool to raise money. It may seem awkward at first to ask your second-cousin for \$50 when you haven't talked to her in years, but even if she isn't able to help you out financially, she will appreciate the update on what you are doing. Many people will never have the opportunity or the desire to take a trip like the one you are taking, but they still may be eager to help your cause!

People will give based on capacity, interest in the project, and their relationship to you. The greater their capacity and interest, or the closer their relationship to you, the more likely they are to give. It's okay to ask different people for different amounts of money; in fact, customizing your letters and asking more from some people is usually more effective than asking everyone to give the same amount. When making your list, keep in mind that only 20-25% of people you write are likely to give, so your list may need to be longer than you first thought. Finally, prepare for some surprises. The person you thought would definitely donate may not respond; the aunt you haven't heard from in years may make a large donation.

Make a list.

This list may consist of everyone you know and all the local organizations and companies who might be able to donate. This list can include your family, friends, neighbors, contacts, etc., but can also include people from other aspects of your life, such as your place of employment, school, place of worship, neighborhood groups, doctors, teachers—anyone you think may be able to help sponsor your trip. Many local organizations or companies are eager to donate to causes like yours, so think outside the box!

Keep it short and simple (KISS).

You may want to begin your letter with a brief description of why you chose Global Seminars as well as a brief description of the organization that you will work with in the host country. You will want to describe what you'll be doing in a manner that conveys the importance of the cause, but doesn't bog the reader down with details about international development. Make sure that you stress the sustainable nature of your education to ensure donors that their money is being used in high-impact ways. Keep your letter to one page and invite people to visit your blog for more information.

*Tip: Some people you contact will be extremely supportive, sharing your enthusiasm and excitement, while others may not respond, but always remember, "if you don't ask, you won't receive."

Convey a sense of urgency and immediacy.

They must act now! "If I don't make the payment by the end of June, I won't be able to study public health in Jordan this summer." This limits their time to forget about giving you a contribution. Set a deadline by which donors should make their gifts. Refer to your program payment schedule to determine when your final program payment is due and request that donors give before then.

Contextualize Giving Amounts.

State your overall fundraising goal then suggest a variety of different giving amounts and show what these amounts are able to fund. This way, donors have the opportunity to choose a level of giving comfortable for them. Asking for a specific amount of money also lets your donors know how much you need. For example, you may ask donors to contribute:

- one dollar per day that you will be studying abroad
- one day's expenses (program fee divided by number of days)

If your birthday or the holidays are coming, ask for donations toward your program in place of traditional gifts. Be advised that most people will check the lowest option so make sure that the amount you choose is enough to meet your goals.

Promise an educational presentation or another type of follow-up.

Promising to speak to groups or to show photos when you return can be a great way to secure funding from religious organizations, civic groups, alumni associations and educational institutions. For example, as an incentive, one volunteer promised to send all her supporters a "newsletter" from overseas. Tangible evidence of your actions abroad helps people "see" where their dollars have gone. Other visuals, such as pictures of you in your respective country can be good reminders of how they have helped. Remember, often the prime motivation for giving is how it makes the giver feel, not how it makes the receiver feel. Hopefully, your supporters will feel good each time they look at your picture or receive an update from you.

Make it easy to donate!

Because you are writing letters to ask people for donations, considering including pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes. You may also want to include instructions on how they can donate online (e.g. using PayPal) as well as the address for your blog.

Follow up to maximize your donations.

While people may be excited about your upcoming trip, they may need a little bit more persuasion before they actually write the check. Or, they may have simply put your letter aside and intended to write a check, but were distracted by other tasks. Consider following up with an email or phone call if there is no response after several weeks. A personal email or phone call confirming that they received the letter and offering to clear up any details about the trip may be necessary in order to get some people to lend their support.