

## Tributes, Honorials and Memorials

Dear Ask the Pro,

*This is not a big \$ value question but I am curious how we should handle this...it is a real situation. We received a check (which we have not cashed) in the amount of \$150 from a local business person with the memo line of the check indicating "donation-feed the hungry."*

*The letter that accompanied the check said: "I am enclosing my check in honor of the following list attached. Please acknowledge them by advising of this donation in their honor. Thank you.*



*Attached were 142 address labels including 4 Canadian addresses and 1 German address. (Basically a donation of \$1.05 per label.) Our letterhead cost is \$.15 each, envelopes \$.12 each, and with postage at \$.44 - we would already have \$.71 of that \$1.05 spent.*

*In order to do a mail merge for the letter, it would require a staff person to create an excel spreadsheet. Not to mention having our executive director sign all 142 letters or the time required to stuff the envelopes, run them through meter, etc. I fully understand there is a cost associated with doing business and at our organization we are proud of the fact that only a very small fraction of revenue is used for fundraising.....*

*What would you do? Basically, if we accept this donation it will cost us more than we received ....which from my business background does not make sense...*

*The skeptical side of me says this is a ploy to have a tax deductible donation be used as a marketing piece for this businessman and have our organization absorb the cost.*

*By the way....this person makes no other donation during the year - not that makes any difference....*

*What would you do? Identify me as curious in Sarasota.....*

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Dear Curious,

Your situation is not that unusual. Often we get into situations where the costs do not justify or accomplish the purpose of the gift. Many organizations have established written policies related to tributes, honorials or memorial contributions. Most that we have seen establish a minimum gift amount. The threshold varies from organization to organization. For example, a \$15 or \$25 memorial or tribute gift might have a limit of 2-4 recipients per the minimum dollar amount. Other organizations may have a higher threshold.

We assume you are in this predicament because you do not have an established policy. Our recommended approach would be to contact the donor by phone or in person and have a conversation.

We would suggest that you start off with a statement to the donor such as: "We want to thank you for your recent gift to provide food for the hungry. We also wanted to let you know that we strive to spend as much as we can from each contribution on our service delivery and feeding programs. We want to make sure we are able to fulfill your intent." Explain that the cost and time to send all of the acknowledgements would leave little for feeding the hungry. However, immediately suggest a solution. Offer to send the acknowledgments to a smaller, more reasonable number of people or suggest a larger contribution if they want to include all.

Another approach might be to ask for email addresses and send the acknowledgements electronically. If the donor does not show empathy for your situation or expresses dissatisfaction over your suggestions, we would recommend that you go ahead and meet their request rather than to alienate the donor. (Look on the positive side, you may have just received a prequalified list of 142 potential donors, who with cultivation, may become new annual donors to your organization.)

Whatever the resolution, we suggest that you move quickly to work with your leadership to establish a reasonable policy that fits the needs of your particular organization and situation. Chalk it up to another learning experience.

The recommendations above will hopefully allow you to take the moral high ground.....and that, Curious in Sarasota, is what we would do.