

# Newsletter Checklist

**Your newsletter is a major investment. Let's make it work for you.**

Your newsletter was once viewed as a way to document activities. Now it's seen as a major part of your communication strategy to inspire donors and community members, invite them to be part of the solution, and convey impact they have.

Despite the use of online publications and emails, print communications continue to play an important role in emotional engagement and information retention. Content, messaging and understanding how to engage your readers matters more than ever.

That's why well-crafted newsletters convey your organization's values, focus, vision, and strategy for change; it's a central part of your organizational brand reflecting your voice, tone, and commitment to positioning your reader as a catalyst for change.

If you want your newsletter to stand out and build loyalty towards your land trust you'll want to think strategically about when, how, and why, you are using a hardcopy newsletter.

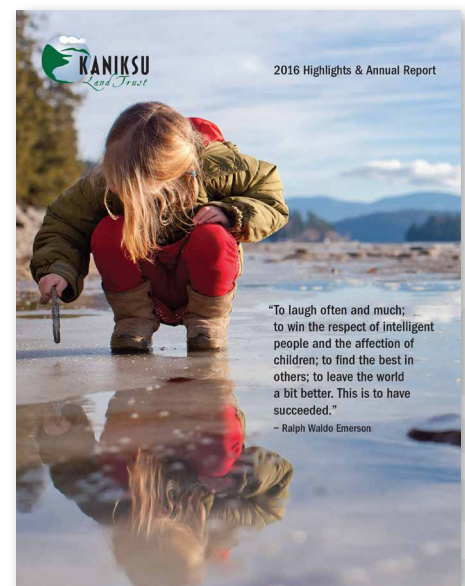
- **What's your mailing strategy?** How are you segmenting your audience? For example, you might send newsletters to: current donors (within 12 months), lapsed donors (between 12-24 months), in-kind donors, volunteers, business and organizational members/partners, foundations, community leaders, financial advisors, sponsors, conservation landowners, etc.

You might send an oversized postcard, with the same cover image, to prospects or those who have lapsed more than 24 months, driving them to the website where the PDF of the newsletter is located.

- **Evaluate your newsletter** to see how welcoming, inclusive, inspiring, and impactful it is.
- **Does your newsletter focus on impacts/change/problems/solutions** (i.e. "Stories of Change")? After reading your newsletter, will your readers understand what the key impact was, what they can continue to do, and how they can spread the word?
- **How will you repurpose the newsletter stories in your social media and e-Newsletter?** Avoid posting the full newsletter as a PDF except for in your newsletter resource area on your website.



Barnstable Land Trust



Kaniksu Land Trust

Good	Could Be Better	New Idea	Newsletter Component
			<p><b>Before you start:</b>            What do you want this newsletter to do?            How is it part of your engagement strategy?</p>
			<p>Have you created a story map?</p>
			<p>Have you identified the impact that the work of your organization is having on the community, thanks to your donors?</p>
			<p>Do you have Stories of Change and related photographs?</p>
			<p>Have you clarified your audiences?</p>
			<p><b>First impressions:</b>            What makes your reader want to pick up this newsletter?</p>
			<p>What does your “brand” feel like? Do you feel welcoming, friendly, helpful, engaging, inclusive?</p>
			<p>How skimmable are the stories?</p>
			<p>Are you using feature boxes to highlight calls to action or next steps?</p>
			<p>Titles and subtitles: are they engaging?</p>
			<p>Captions: Do they convey key elements of the change or challenge, do they draw the reader in?</p>
			<p><b>Content:</b>            Do you feature core program areas that relate to your mission and values?</p>
			<p>Do you know what your members and supporters care about, and have you included one or more stories related to that topic, showing change?</p>
			<p>Shared values: do they come across in different ways, in different stories?</p>
			<p>Evergreen topics: what are they? How are you keeping them fresh?</p>
			<p>Are you offering invitations for engagement beyond asking for money?</p>
			<p><b>Donor-reader-centered writing:</b>            Is your tone friendly and conversational?</p>
			<p>Did you avoid jargon (e.g. are you using conservation agreement instead of conservation easement)?</p>
			<p>What’s your “you” to “we, together, us” ratio? Tom Ahern, donor communication thought leader, suggests it should be approximately 2:1.</p>
			<p>If I were a reader, how would this newsletter make me feel? (Can I help? Am I helping to create positive change?)</p>

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			<p><b>Communication strategy:</b> Are you “drip-feeding” new ideas where you help make the case or bringing people on a journey of change with you?</p>
			<p>Are you helping readers see possible impacts, outcomes, and visions of what could be?</p>
			<p>“Stories of Change:” are you including them in different ways?</p>
			<p>Are you including counter-messaging to misinformation or areas of “push-back?”</p>
			<p>Are your messengers varied? Do they reflect who your different audiences trust? Are you elevating local voices?</p>
			<p><b>Visuals and design:</b> Are your images emotionally connecting, and sized large enough for impact?</p>
			<p>Is the text clear and large enough for elderly readers?</p>
			<p>Have you created a design that provides for short paragraphs, adequate white space, and inspiration?</p>
			<p>Do you have high contrast text? (Avoid white text on dark backgrounds unless for small accent areas.)</p>
			<p>Have you selected two primary colors, and one or two accent colors? You want to avoid a “rainbow” of colors for readability and brand identity.</p>
			<p>Have you avoided red text (which comes off as aggressive) unless that is your desired effect?</p>
			<p>Do your visuals feel welcoming? Do they represent the diversity of your community, in ages, genders, occupations, and ethnicities who you are working to engage and serve? (Or are you showing the same type of person?)</p>
			<p><b>Other Thoughts?</b></p>

**“Your constituents are busy people, and frankly, they aren’t looking to your letters and communications for long, rainy day, settle-in-with-a-cup-of-tea kind of reading. They want to understand what you’re trying to tell them, and they want to process it quickly. Your goal, then, should be to give them something they can read through easily—if you don’t, you might find they won’t read it at all.”**

–Tom Ahern, Donor Communications