

2.10. University of Maryland's letter to 'the community'

This letter first caught my attention when posted online by US fundraising innovator Greg Warner, from [MarketSmart](#)

Making a failure of announcing success

The letter below fails on just about every criterion.

- It is dull.
- It is addressed generically, to everyone and no one.
- It's way too much about 'we, us and I', rather than 'you'.
- It is bumptious and self-congratulatory.
- It fails to tell a story (which one senses could have been a good one).
- It puts non-donors before donors, mentioning donors only at the very end, almost as an afterthought.
- It praises senior staff while being condescending to small donors.
- It has no emotional excitement.

So with a little bit of encouragement Greg quickly wrote his own version, which follows.

December 12, 2012

Dear University of Maryland community:

In late 2006, the University of Maryland publicly launched the \$1 billion Great Expectations campaign.

Today, I am proud to announce that the Great Expectations campaign has achieved this landmark goal. Much of it was accomplished during a difficult economic climate.

We expected this campaign to accelerate our rise among the world's best research universities. And so it has.

The \$1 billion includes over \$250 million in scholarship and financial aid for our undergraduate and graduate students. This support has helped Maryland compete for the best students and help make their education more affordable.

We raised \$129 million to help us recruit, retain, and advance pre-eminent faculty. No university is better than the excellence of its

faculty. Through education, research, and service, faculty help transform the lives of students, contribute to knowledge, and improve the human condition.

We raised \$171 million in support of innovation — to turn ideas into impact. The University of Maryland encourages creative thinkers and entrepreneurial ideas, nurturing them from research and development into social and economic enterprises.

We raised over \$303 million for high-tech buildings and to upgrade classrooms, arts venues, and athletic facilities. The private support is leveraged for state capital appropriations, greatly magnifying its impact.

There are many, many people to thank for the success of Great Expectations. The campaign was conceived and led by then President [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], then Vice President of University Relations. We simply could not have reached our goals without their vision and leadership.

The College Park Foundation Board of Trustees provided unwavering dedication and guidance throughout this campaign. They gave not only financially, but their time, energy and collective experience.

Our entire faculty played a crucial role in this campaign. It is their research and their academic excellence that provided the motivation for so many of our supporters to give.

Our entire University Relations staff — now led by [REDACTED], our new Vice President of University Relations — worked tirelessly to make the goal a reality.

Over 124,000 unique donors supported this campaign, some gifts large, many small. All contributed directly to our expanding excellence. To each and every supporter, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your support.

In February, we will commemorate this milestone more widely, but I wanted to share with you this incredible news as soon as it was official. Please join me in celebrating our collective accomplishment, and more importantly, what it means for our students, for our faculty and staff, and for the University of Maryland.

Together, we have fulfilled our Great Expectations.

*Sincerely,
[REDACTED]*

*President
University of Maryland*

Here's another way of sending a message to donors, written very quickly by Greg (see his comment on the process, below). He wrote this following a challenge from an on-line reader who asked, 'Wondering if you might post your preferred version of same message as a counter-point?' Here's Greg's much shorter yet more emotional response.

'Simple stream of typing here..... no edits. I hope you like it Tim.'

Dear Greg,

You did it! You helped support people like Jeremy with scholarships. You helped Dayna keep the professor she adores. You helped Kwame research a cure for _____. And you helped Cheryl be more comfortable in an upgraded classroom now fitted with air conditioning!

*You and so many others like you helped support our beloved University in the Great Expectations campaign last year. The goal was daunting. \$1 billion! But you were not afraid. Because Terrapins are not afraid. "Fear the turtle!" right?**

Greg, thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

I know that this letter cannot adequately express the gratitude I feel toward you and so many like you who made the achievement of this goal possible. I can't imagine where we'd be without you.

Because of you and so many other amazing supporters like you, together, we made the future brighter. Your generosity is so very much appreciated. I hope you know that!

In February, we will be commemorating the milestone you helped us achieve. Together we have fulfilled our Great Expectations. I sincerely hope you will join me and your friends in the celebration of this achievement on March XX at 2 pm at XXXXX.

With gratitude,

Greg says, 'It's not my best letter at all but I think it proves that a person who cares about donors and uses emotion in their copy can write a better letter in just 2 minutes. Alternatively, I'll bet the University had several people spend hours, days and even weeks reviewing and critiquing the letter they posted online.'

*The terrapin is University of Maryland's mascot, with the slogan 'Fear the turtle!'

