



# THE NONPROFIT MARKETER'S GUIDE TO SMARTER OUTREACH

14 tips to drive  
connection, acquisition,  
and retention in 2025



# INTRO

How we interact with others and conduct business has changed. For some, that change has been dramatic.

Consider your donors and members. It's safe to assume their daily routines and personal priorities look different today than they did a few years ago. Now the big question: How has this affected your organization's approach to marketing and communications?

As you evaluate your fundraising and associated outreach efforts, refer to this guide.

From strategy to analytics to direct marketing, it contains a curated collection of tips — time-tested and highly actionable — from our subject matter experts in the nonprofit space.

With this valuable information in hand, you'll be able to fine-tune your donor engagement and drive a successful program.





# 01 Paint a clear picture of donor impact

According to a [U.S. Trust Study of High Net Worth Philanthropy](#), “when wealthy donors reported being more knowledgeable, they also tended to be more personally fulfilled from their charitable activity, as well as more likely to give more.”

# 02 Personalization does not have to be as one-to-one as possible

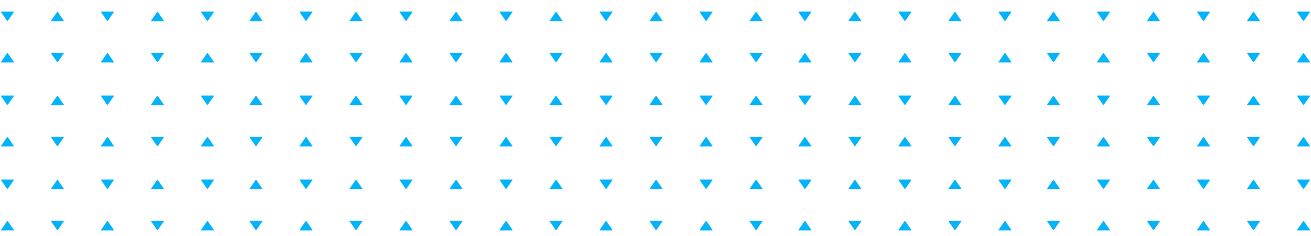
Yes, variability helps prove that you know something about your donor. However, just from an imagery perspective, leveraging things like geographic cues can resonate. What are the key creative elements that will make this communication meaningful to the recipient? That’s an important question that needs to be asked and answered.

# 03 Don’t get bogged down in creative aspirations

“What’s our message?” Yes, it’s an important question, but also one that can open the floodgates to elaborate ideas, which makes aligning creative ambitions with a real-life budget more difficult. Instead, ask these questions first in order to help position a strategy on top of a program and stay on budget:

- What is the output of this campaign going to be?
- Are we going to have a mail piece?
- Are we going to have some kind of an email program or a microsite?
- What does this journey look like?

This approach is much more tactical. It’s also more prudent because it helps paint a realistic picture of the campaign early on — and what it’s going to cost.



## 04 Overcome in-house creative challenges

Organizations are really questioning, “How do I do this more efficiently?” In reality, most in-house teams aren’t in the position to add five more team members or invest in new technology infrastructure. An outsourced model, however, complements and plugs into existing infrastructure and teams. The flexibility here is the real benefit, giving your organization the ability to resource-up or down and still carry a lower cost.

## 05 Get a grip on your analytic focus

Taking an analytic perspective to fundraising is a little different than how you might approach a consumer vertical. That personal connection a donor has with a cause is extremely valuable.

First and foremost, it’s important to recognize that the affinity donors have with your cause or foundation has so much to do with your success. And, in general, a donor has a tendency to be a donor again. So, short answer: Analytics should really be focused on the current donor list.

Consider an RFM (recency, frequency, monetary) analysis. It’s simple, effective, and rooted in your donors’ past behavior. It works well in the retail environment and has proven to be reliable for fundraisers prioritizing their retention and upgrade efforts.

## 06 Step up the amount a donor gives

Once you’ve identified donors who consistently give the same amount every year, you can use that insight to guide the next piece that goes out to incentivize them to give more. For example, let’s say your traditional appeal has four checkboxes: \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100. If you know a donor consistently gives you \$10, you may want to step up that lowest amount on the next mailer to \$15 — or even eliminate it.



## 07 Address the gaps in your donor database

What useful data points are missing from your donor profiles? If there are gaps in your database, answering that question starts with simply asking your donors for more info. Zeroing in on their preferences around how you communicate with them can be a smart place to start.

- What channel (e.g., direct mail, email, text) are they most likely to respond to?
- What kind of information or content do they want to receive?
- And when or how often do they want to hear from you?

Gathering answers to those types of questions is key to perfecting your engagement strategy.

## 08 Avoid the biggest direct mail mistake most organizations make

Too often, organizations try to save themselves into prosperity. They'll say, "We can't mail a package that costs any more than our current control." Very successful charities, however, understand that package cost is irrelevant. They recognize net dollars are what's relevant.

The biggest mistake so many organizations make is limiting themselves when it comes to what they'll test; they won't add something that costs more than their control to the mix. This is a constant conversation we have. It's so important to just test. If the more expensive option works, then next year you should ask for additional budget dollars based on the test result and the ROI associated with it.

If it works and an organization still can't get the budget dollars, we'll suggest mailing that costlier, stronger package to fewer names — your best names.



# 09 Hone your mailing strategy when budgets get tight

It’s not uncommon for organizations to say, “I can’t afford to increase my budget,” “My budget has been beaten up,” or “I’m going to mail my least expensive package.” When budgets get tight, some will instinctively want to mail a less expensive, poorer performing package to all file segments.

We recommend mailing the more expensive, better performing package, but only to your top donors. These top people are likely to respond at an even higher rate to the more expensive package, which will deliver a higher net contribution.

# 10 Recognize high-dollar donors with a special report

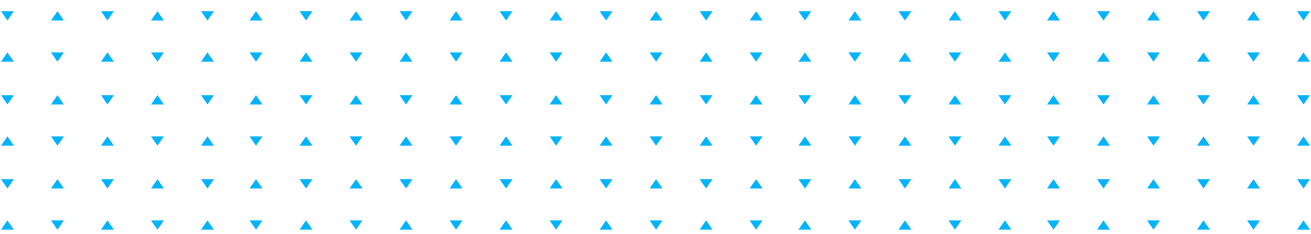
Higher-dollar donors want to be recognized. They also want to understand how their last contribution was spent and where their next one will be spent. A special report is a perfect example of a very effective technique for these folks, because it will appear to be specially prepared for an individual donor and include content (e.g., news, research, updates, or human interest stories) around specific areas of interest.

# 11 Think quality over quantity in your storytelling

Donors relate to personal stories that focus on an individual. These stories include a person’s conflict and how the organization provided a solution that made a difference. We’ve found telling one story in detail resonates with donors more than telling three or four brief stories. These stories are relatable and bring the institute’s work to a personal, one-to-one level with the reader.

# 12 Engage physically and simplify digitally

According to the [Association of Fundraising Professionals](#), most nonprofits are still seeing a higher response rate for direct mail outreach than digital outreach alone. Direct mail creates a high-value, tangible interaction with donors. This touchpoint can serve as a campaign catalyst that ultimately directs donors to give online, on any device, at any time.





## 13 Create a common thread for an omnichannel approach

Designate the name of the program (e.g., “2025 Annual Appeal”) on your outer envelope and at the top of the letter. This signifies to the reader this is a special campaign. For people who only give one time each year, this lets them know this is the most important campaign of the year.

This can also help open up multi-touch opportunities across multiple channels. However, although an organization will call it an annual appeal mailing, for example, they might not be unifying under that theme.

To ensure donors recognize an all-embracing theme, create a logo for the campaign itself. Then the entire campaign becomes branded and shares a common look no matter where you see it. From a mailer to an email to the website, the campaign logo helps tie everything together.

## 14 Remember: Never stop asking

“That’s a mistake that comes from thinking about your donors as your financiers instead of as your partners,” says Betsy [Steward, Senior Fundraising Consultant](#). “Your donors believe in your mission, and it matters to them if you’re successful or not in making the changes to the world that they want to see.”





# IT WILL ALWAYS BE ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In the end, your marketing and communications programs — at their core — must always be about building the relationships you have with your donors. There's no reason that should change.

And as you work toward your goals, remember this: You don't have to go it alone.

Working with an experienced partner can help you avoid frustrations, stay productive, and create positive change. It can also open up access to accountable experts and the latest technology, heightened speed to market, industry-specific experience, and scalability.

To learn more, visit: [rrd.com/nonprofit](https://rrd.com/nonprofit)



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