LSC End-of-Year Fundraising Playbook

Executive Summary

The end-of-year (EOY) fundraising season is an extremely important time for nonprofit organizations. While this may seem obvious on its face, very few of us understand just how crucial this time of year is to social good organizations. Nearly half of all individual giving happens in the last two months of the year (Neon One, 2025), with the bulk of that coming in December. In fact, over 30% of annual donations occur in December (Charity Auctions Today, 2024), and about 5% of all annual giving happens on December 31st alone (Neon One, 2025).

This accelerates as the year draws to a close, with 10% of all individual giving to nonprofits in a given year, coming in the last 3 days of December. Within that period, recurring gifts increased by over 21% in 2023, and first-time donors setting up recurring gifts grew by 34.48% (Neon One, 2024), signaling a major opportunity for building long-term donor relationships, instead of just one-off holiday transactions.

End-of-year fundraising represents a massive revenue opportunity that all but the most seasonal of nonprofits need to capitalize on to ensure their long-term success. In 2024 alone, charitable giving in the U.S. rose to $592.5 billion, up from $557.16 billion in 2023 (Giving USA 2025). Of that, $374.40 billion (67%) came from individuals (Stelter Blog / Giving USA 2024), underscoring just how vital personal giving remains to nonprofit health.

However, despite this growth in total dollars raised, the number of participating donors continued to decline (Giving USA 2025). This widening gap between revenue and donor count is a warning bell: nonprofits cannot rely on a shrinking pool of contributors to keep delivering year after year. Instead, this trend underscores the urgency for nonprofits to invest in deeper donor engagement strategies (Giving USA 2025).

There are many compelling factors that contribute to this effect. First, there is the race to claim necessary tax deductions before the end of the fiscal year (although taxes often do not motivate meaningful philanthropy, they do generate quick donation transactions). Second, there is the spirit of generosity that permeates the holiday season. For example, on GivingTuesday in 2024, an estimated $3.6B was raised in the U.S — a 16% increase over the $3.1B in 2023, with about 36.1 million people participating (Giving Tuesday, 2024). What's too-often lost in the push of holiday fundraising, however, is the enormous donor acquisition and engagement opportunity it represents. What many organizations forget (or forget to actualize) is that donors are not ATMs. They're living, breathing individuals with full lives, concerns, and desires - and they're capable of contributing far more to a social good organization than just cutting a check during the holidays - especially if the organization is prepared to build lasting relationships into the new calendar year.

The Leaky Bucket Dilemma

Nonprofit organizations in general – for a variety of reasons, but mostly related to a reluctance to invest in fundraising and marketing – have an enormous and self-imposed challenge when it comes to growing revenue year over year. We call this the "Leaky Bucket Dilemma."

According to the latest data, overall donor retention in 2024 dropped to about 42.9%, meaning that more than half of donors will not return to give again the following year. The gap is especially stark between first-time donors, whose retention averages just 19%, and repeat donors, who are retained at more than 60% (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2025). With the cost of acquiring a new donor landing somewhere around 10 times the cost of retaining an existing one, this widening gap highlights why many organizations struggle to secure sustainable, reliable revenue to fund programs, make key hires, and grow.

There are many reasons donors leave an organization (referred to as "churn"), but chief among them is lack of effective communication. Occasionally the death of a donor, changing interests, or change in economic factors are at play, but they represent a tiny minority of the reasons for churn. Donors report a variety of other reasons for churn, but the vast majority (~85%) of the reasons given amount to lack of effective communication and engagement.

Maximizing the Impact of Holiday Fundraising

With decades of experience in delivering practical solutions, Lindsay Simonds Consulting (LSC) has compiled some distinct advantages that can be used to buck these trends and ensure success in the coming years.

Building a Holistic Strategy

It's so easy to look at holiday fundraising as all about the revenue. The feast-or-famine revenue cycles experienced by many nonprofits, combined with an incredibly high percentage of annual donations flowing over the holidays can really "put the blinders on" so to speak, and they often miss the longer-term (and much bigger) opportunity. Organizations fail to engage with supporters beyond their capacity to give financially, and they fail to continue their engagement with donors beyond the scope of the holiday campaign.

The four recommendations that follow are designed specifically to maximize near-term funding, while simultaneously setting your organization on the path towards long-term growth and sustainable revenue.

1. **Getting Started Early**
   As every marketer knows, it takes multiple touchpoints to get people to take action. By starting the holiday campaign in the fall, your organization can set itself up for success during the end of the year push. But if for some reason you didn't get a chance to plan until December, we've seen organizations pull off successful campaigns – you just might need to re-adjust your goals and expectations!

2. **Investing in Marketing, Engagement, and User Experience**
   As we'll outline later in this document, investment in the proper tools and infrastructure to provide robust communications and an elegant donor experience will pay massive dividends in the future. The goal of this campaign will be to maximize the direct revenue earned in the final stretch of the year while setting up your organization for success in the new year and beyond.

3. **Investing in Volunteers**
   Remember the Leaky Bucket Dilemma? In addition to sound marketing practices, having a volunteer program is one of the most powerful ways to eliminate this phenomenon, reduce donor churn, and increase Donor Lifetime Value (DLTV). According to Fidelity Charitable and Volunteer Hub,

   - 87% of volunteers say there is an overlap between their volunteering and financial support.

- 50% of volunteers say they give more financial support because of their volunteering.
- Volunteers are 2x more likely to donate to an organization than those who don't.
- Volunteering deepens the emotional connection between people and the organizations they support, strengthening their commitments, and leading to longer-term relationships.

By producing a holiday campaign that focuses on gratitude and the emotional impact of volunteering, and by following post-campaign engagement best practices, your organization will be well-positioned to revamp its recurring donor programs in the new year.

4. **Focusing on Recurring Gifts**

In 2024, overall donor retention dropped to about 42.9%, with retention of new donors particularly weak compared to repeat donors, who remain far more consistent in their giving (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2025). However, converting one-time donors into recurring donors—those who automatically give on a monthly basis—still dramatically improves retention. Recurring donor programs continue to achieve retention rates well above the average, providing a more stable base of support. By prioritizing recurring giving, organizations can significantly increase annual revenue, stabilize monthly income, reduce the feast-or-famine cycles common in fundraising, and position themselves for efficient, sustainable long-term growth.

The synergy between getting started early, marketing and engagement, volunteering, and recurring gifts cannot be overstated. Each reinforces the others, and your organization is uniquely positioned to capitalize on this effect. It's important that the end-of-year fundraising campaign is positioned as the launch of a new strategic approach (and an accelerant in future years). Of course, you'll want to maximize the revenue earned across the remainder of this year, but if you're successful, this campaign will serve as a launchpad with compounding ROI into the future.

About this Playbook

It's our hope that this holiday's fundraising sets your organization on a path towards increased influence, brand recognition, and financial stability. In these pages, you'll find all the cutting-edge industry techniques and best practices you need to succeed in your fundraising efforts this year and beyond. The Playbook is designed to be comprehensive and include all the information your organization needs to be successful on its own. The LSC team stands ready to answer any additional questions that may arise and welcomes the opportunity to provide advisory support as needed.

Table of Contents:

Executive Summary 1
The Leaky Bucket Dilemma 2
Maximizing the Impact of Holiday Fundraising 3
Building a Holistic Strategy 3
Chapter 1: Chronological Orientation to End-of-year Giving 6
Phase 1: Planning and Preparation 6
Sample Timeline: GivingTuesday drip campaign plan: *10*
Phase 2: Soft Launch 14
Phase 3: Public Launch 16
Phase 4: Thanksgiving & GivingTuesday 17
Phase 5: Recap, Reset, Relaunch 19
Phase 6: Home Stretch 20
Phase 7: Final Countdown 21
Phase 8: Follow Ups 21
Chapter 2: Strategies for Donor Retention & Pipeline Growth 24
Recurring Donor Programs 24
Fundraising Math 27
Global Marketing 32
Tell a Powerful Story 34
Chapter 3: Marketing, Communications, and Reminders 35
Website 35
Email 36
Email Templates 38
Newsletters 40
Automated Marketing 40
Social Media 41
Online Ads 43
Concluding Thoughts 44

Chapter 1: Chronological Orientation to End-of-year Giving

Phase 1: Planning and Preparation

(Early Fall)

Phase 1A: Brainstorming

This phase is characterized by blue-sky brainstorming and ideation without limits. During this phase, thorough consideration should be given to every possible asset, opportunity, risk, and possible contingency.

Some key questions to ask include:

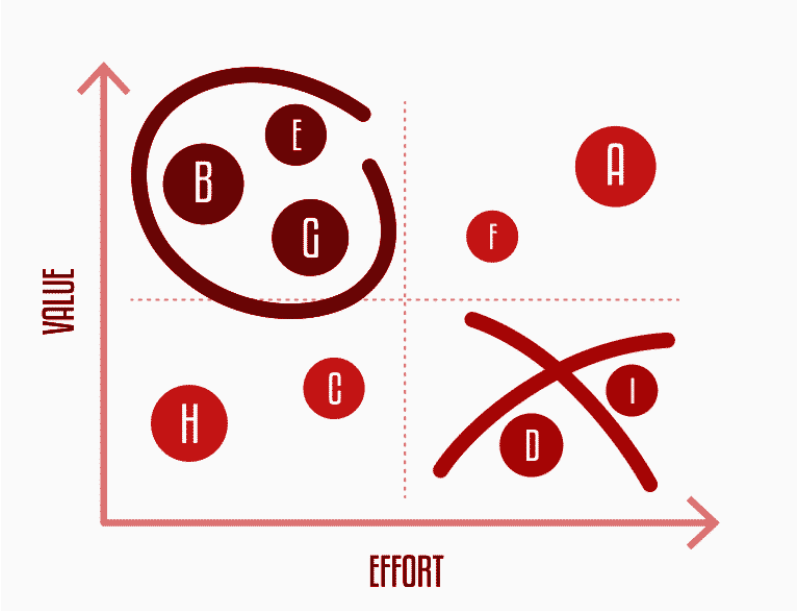
- What's the overall theme of the campaign?
- What are the fundraising goals? (Most include these goals: total dollars raised, total number of donors, total new donors, increased gifts, impressions made, volunteers engaged, matches activated, year over year increases, new prospective donors id'ed)
    - Who might agree to match all donations at year-end? Or a subset of year-end gifts (e.g., GivingTuesday contributions, gifts between December 26-31, etc.)?
    - How many supporters (volunteers, donors, influencers) should we engage?
    - How many new donors should we seek to acquire?
- What societal trends, fads, or newsworthy events may impact the campaign either positively or negatively?
- What important dates/holidays exist that we can take advantage of through our fundraising? What might we manufacture ourselves?
- What hubs of support (groups, clubs, companies) might we have access to?
- What influencers might we tap into?
- What organizations might we partner with in various ways?
- What unexpected contingencies might arise, and how might we prepare ourselves to adapt to them well?

This phase should be creative, wide-eyed, and optimistic. No ideas are bad.

Once an exhaustive list is compiled, it's time to start cutting! If you've done this part well, there's no way you'll be able to accomplish everything and so it is important to be realistic about which ideas are the best to accomplish your goals.

List, stack-rank and/or group the ideas in terms of their feasibility, likely impact on the campaign, the campaign theme, and alignment with your organization's ethos, mission, vision, and values. Make ruthless decisions on what's in and what's out and try not to second-guess your decisions. You can always revise later if needed, and having the overall list on-hand will help!

It can be helpful during this exercise to use a Prioritization Matrix to facilitate this process:



Anything considered to be both high value and low effort should be included. Anything considered to be low value and high effort should be eliminated.

Phase 1B: Segmentation & Engagement Planning

It's important to segment (categorize) your audience into specific groups based on unique attributes that define them. You can slice and dice your audience into infinitely smaller categories, and we'll get into some of those later. In the meantime, focus your efforts on dividing your audience by who is most likely to support, somewhat likely to support, and least likely to support. The easiest way to do this is by recency and amount of last donations, and/or level of engagement with your content and/or volunteer opportunities.

Example:

- Group 1: High engagement / High likelihood of support
    - Donated within last 6 months and/or active recurring donor
    - Subscribes to newsletters and/or is an active consumer of content. This information is typically available within your Customer Relationship Management tool (CRM).
- Group 2: Medium engagement / Medium likelihood of support
    - Donated 6-12 months ago
    - Low engagement with newsletters and other content
- Group 3: Low engagement / Low likelihood of support. These people are in your audience, but have not donated in the past year, don't make use of your organization's products/services, and don't engage with content.

BONUS: Create a 4th group for lapsed supporters - those who were highly engaged at one point, but for one reason or another have not been active in some time.

Stick a pin in this for now. We'll come back to it later.

Phase 1C: Content Creation

It's time to get writing! Using all of the above, what content do you know you'll need? Some key items include (but may not be limited to):

- Campaign website and associated content (like landing pages, pop ups, and action bars)
- Campaign announcement email
- Campaign announcement press release
- Sponsorship presentation
- "Thank Yous" to donors and fundraisers
- Emails about Thanksgiving, GivingTuesday, the end-of-year holidays, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day
- Campaign progress reports
- Fundraiser activations and spontaneous calls to action
- Etc.

It's important to think about which of these will be one-off newsletters, which will be part of an email series, and which will be automated based on various events.

For example, we know that GivingTuesday will be on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. This is a natural case where we can get great utility out of a drip campaign (*sending a limited number of emails to your audience automatically, on a set timing, based on actions they take*). The best part of a drip campaign is that it can be planned far in advance and automated.

Sample Timeline: GivingTuesday drip campaign plan:

RELATIVE DAY	OCCASION | FOCUS	MESSAGING IDEAS
Day -X (about a week before Thanksgiving)	Save the Date	"What is GivingTuesday?" Introduce how your org is participating. Send a Save the Date reminder.
Day 0	Thanksgiving Day	Happy Thanksgiving message. Emphasize gratitude & generosity. Gentle reminder: GivingTuesday is coming.
Day +1 (GT -4)	Black Friday	Tie in Black Friday. "Save some generosity for GivingTuesday." Share how your mission connects to GT.
Day +2 (GT -3)	Light Touch	Optional. Share a story, teaser, or keep engagement light.
Day +3 (GT -2)	Anticipation	"Only 2 days to go!" Share a compelling story, need, or testimonial.
Day +4 (GT -1, Cyber Monday)	Cyber Monday	Tie in Cyber Monday. "GT is tomorrow!" Encourage early gifts (especially matches).
Day +5 (GT)	GivingTuesday (GT)	Main campaign appeal. Strong, urgent call to action. Highlight impact of giving today.
Day +6 (GT +1)	Thank You	Gratitude message. Thank donors. Share results or impact stories.

Don't worry about inundating your audience with too much content. They're receiving a ton of emails anyway, so many are easily missed. Make sure your message gets through by creating short, succinct, meaningful content!

It's also useful to think of each type of communication in terms of a package, if applicable. For example, it can be helpful to write a blog about a topic related to the campaign (GivingTuesday, for example). Then, use that blog content to create an email newsletter. When followership reaches a critical mass, create a series of social media posts using some of the blog copy to promote the blog and by extension, the campaign. *Make sure to pay to promote social posts, so they will display in all of your followers' feeds.* Blogs are great because they're SEO-rich evergreen content that can be parsed out and used to create additional resources.

Use this phase to write as much content as you can, and gather a bank of images, videos, and GIFs that can be used throughout the campaign. Seems like a lot of work? It can be! But done thoughtfully and thoroughly, it can be an enormous benefit to the success of the campaign.

Suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- Create all campaign assets, sponsor decks, and CRM lists and workflows.
- Begin outreach to potential sponsors, partners, and major philanthropists.
- Begin outreach to any influencers in your network to introduce the idea of the campaign.

Pro Tip: Fundraising Accelerators

During the planning and preparation phase of the campaign, it's important to define and start planning for things that might accelerate fundraising. It's good to get creative and look for innovative opportunities that align with your brand and mission, but here are a few tried-and-true ideas that are proven to increase fundraising activity.

Sponsorships & Other Matches

Matching grants are a phenomenal way to increase donation activity throughout the campaign. Here's how it works: a corporation or private individual commits to a large donation of $X amount. Instead of just depositing the funds and calling it a day, that gift is marketed to supporters as a "Matching Donation," whereby every $ they donate will be matched by the large donation already made. Per the match, each donation is then worth 2x (or more!) the value of the smaller individual donation. Research shows that matching campaigns have the effect of significantly increasing donation volume during the period of time the match is active.

Learn more about leveraging matching challenges via Classy.org here.

Here are a few tips to maximize the impact of matching challenges:

- **Introduce matches at times when donation volume is likely to be highest**, like during GivingTuesday, or some other significant event during the campaign.
- **Highlight the limitations of the match** - the total amount and the duration during which it'll be active. This creates a sense of urgency among donors, which translates into higher activity, even from those who have already given to the campaign previously.
- **Promote the match ahead of time** - people are more likely to respond when the match goes active if they know it's coming.
- **Align with the needs of the donor.** Anonymous matches are great, but if the donor has an interest in being known - this is especially true for a family foundation or corporate sponsor - coordinate with them! Make sure you're promoting their name and logo, links back to their website, and collaborate with their marketing teams to get them to promote the match through their channels as well.

- **Double up.** If a 2x match is good, then 3x is better! Running simultaneous matches is a great way to boost excitement even higher.
- **Make sure everyone knows when matches are active** by adding pop-ups and action bars on your website that announce the match and link directly to the donation forms.

The types of gifts and sponsorships that work for matching campaigns like this take time to secure, so the sooner you get started, the better. A lot of budgets need to be spent (and may dry up) by the end of the year, so get started now. Create some sponsor decks and other collateral and start reaching out. Especially when dealing with outside businesses, make sure you're looking for ways to help them achieve their marketing and CSR-related goals.

Incentives

Everyone likes prizes and free gifts now and again, right? By 2025, experiential benefits such as digital badges, access to exclusive online communities, livestreams, and behind-the-scenes content are proving more effective than traditional swag in fostering donor loyalty and connection. Providing incentives can be a great way to further increase donation activity and deepen brand loyalty, but they can also inhibit giving when not done properly.

When people make donations, generally speaking, they're in an emotional, giving state of mind. They're generally being altruistic, which from a neuroscience perspective is fundamentally different from making a retail purchase decision. When organizations provide prizes and incentives that are different from the brand of the organization and not tied to its mission, the logic part of their brain gets switched on, and can "crowd out" altruistic thinking, actually reducing the likelihood of giving. If you provide incentives, make sure they are branded with your organization's information. Learn more

Reminders

- All incentives offered should align with the brand, mission, and ethos of your organization.
- The value of the incentives should be proportional to the value and type of donation being made. Bigger gifts and bigger commitments should earn more valuable incentives.
- Incentives can be tangible, or not. Consider lunches with your organization's staff, unique access to content like fireside chats, or invitations to exclusive opportunities.
- Consider unique incentives for recurring donors, exclusive to them, to which other donors don't have access.

Events

Events are what you make of them – and are a great way to engage 3rd party supporters as well. Host livestream events from the office for GivingTuesday, or other strategic points in the campaign. Get corporate partners to host "give big days" for their staff or donate a share of retail profits over a certain period of time. Empower individual supporters to host events where the campaign and your organization in general can be a focal point. Arm them with talking points, collateral, direct donation links just for them, and any/all other information they need to advocate effectively for your organization.

Serendipity and Newsjacking

Unexpected events can and will come up, and there are a variety of holidays it might be useful for your organization to celebrate. When events happen in the news, look for opportunities to talk about how your organization is responding, or have responded to similar events. Look for ways to add value in larger topic-driven conversations online and across social media to raise your organization's brand profile. The more that people understand your organization's important role in our society, the more likely they'll be to support your organization, and entering (or leading) the conversation around relevant events can be a great way to reach new audiences.

Make a comprehensive list of events you know are happening during the campaign, and brainstorm ways that your organization might respond to unexpected events when they happen. Then, prepare some talking points and other collateral in order to maximize the speed and quality of its response throughout the fundraising season.

Phase 2: Soft Launch

Early Fall

Remember how we segmented supporters into three categories of high, medium, and low engagement? It's time to put that preparation into play. There's an important principle of neuroscience that most people aren't aware of, but that makes sense immediately on a fundamental level. It's called The Proximity Effect. In short, the Proximity Effect states that the closer a campaign is to reaching its goal, the more likely people are to support it.

Think about this with your own philanthropy:

If you're asked to donate the first $10 to a $1,000 campaign, you might feel:

- Uncertain of the impact of your gift
- Concerned that the goal might not be met, resulting in wasted money
- Afraid to back something that nobody else seems to be standing behind
- Insecure about why you were asked
- Trepidation about putting your name, resources, and reputation on the line for something possibly doomed to failure

On an emotional level, this is, "I don't know," "I'm scared," "I'm saving my money."

Now think about donating the last $10 to the same campaign, the one that finally puts them over the edge to meet or exceed their goal. You might feel:

- Proud
- Happy
- Grateful
- Heroic, being *the donor* who gave the last funding needed to guarantee success
- A sense of belonging, joining countless others in a successful campaign
- Secure in the knowledge that your $10 are part of a fully funded effort, set up for success

Much easier to give now, right? Believe it or not, your supporters are people as well, and subject to the same fears, dreams, and emotional responses that you are. For some, these feelings may be stronger than for others, but for all of us, they influence the degree to which we're likely to give, and how much we're likely to contribute.

Now look at your lists again. For the high-engagement supporters in your community - they know all about your organization. They've supported it in the past, often recently. They understand the value of your organization and probably have fond memories of doing so. They don't need to be taught why they should support the cause - they know its value and already believe in its impact. They're the most likely to support your organization's fundraising campaign(s) without needing to be told why, or feeling all the negative emotions others may feel about "going first." They'll happily give you their $10, without hesitation. Moreover, you can speak with this segment in more familiar terms - the ask is easier, and they're very likely to say yes.

The soft launch is for, and about, this segment. Before making a big public announcement, before any PR, massive email campaigns, or mobilization, invite this segment to the campaign. They're not only more likely to get the campaign off to a roaring start, but they'll also appreciate the invitation and exclusivity around early access. It'll actually strengthen the relationship and help them feel seen.

Pro tip #1: The "highly engaged" segment is also a valuable source of information. Whether they give with the first ask (or series of asks) or not, they may be willing to provide information. A survey to this group about what they think of the campaign, and why they may have chosen not to give, could pay massive dividends in later stages of the campaign. It's also a great opportunity to improve the messaging and content you've already created!

Pro Tip #2: If you're able to segment your donors further and you have the time and resources to devote to each, then do so! Adding more phases to the soft launch, and/or saving engagement for the least likely donors for later will pay dividends. Further, if you can define pockets of donors based on interests, regions, group affiliations, hobbies, cause preferences, etc. you can speak directly to them in a more personalized way. The more your appeals align with their specific interests and concerns, the more likely they'll be to respond favorably to your outreach.

Suggested KPIs:

- Reach 10-25% of the campaign fundraising goal.
- Activate 30% of the donors from the "highly engaged" segment.
- Survey entire segment for feedback on the campaign, why they chose to support or not, and use learnings to improve the campaign for the rest of the duration.

Phase 3: Public Launch

With the soft launch underway, there should already be some decent momentum behind the campaign. It's time to appeal to your less-engaged audiences and the population at large.

The public launch, combined with the soft launch phase, is all about activation. Recruit, engage, appeal, and activate as many donors as you can over time. If the soft launch has been successful, your medium and low engagement supporters will see real activity and fundraising progress the first time they glimpse the campaign.

Whereas the soft launch was all about careful segmentation and a more personalized appeal, the public launch focuses on mass marketing. Press releases, email blasts, social media campaigns, and website takeovers are all worth doing - it's a full court press.

Suggested KPIs:

- Reach 40-65% of the campaign fundraising goal.
- Activate 60% of the donors from the "highly engaged" segment.
- Activate 25% of donors from all other segments.

Phase 4: Thanksgiving & GivingTuesday

At this point in the playbook, hopefully you can start to see a few themes emerging. One of these themes is: know your audience. This may seem obvious, but it's worth giving some special attention to the fact that Thanksgiving is about gratitude. There are many opportunities to reflect on what's most important, but people really don't want to be on their email at this time of year. Worse, they're being spammed by just about every organization out there, so you need to find ways to stand out from the crowd.

Due to the large number of emails we all receive during this time, it's important to remember a few things:

1. Open rates might be low. It's likely that your emails aren't being read, so feel free to send a few extra just to make sure people notice them.
2. Engage your audience in ways that add value to them. Some things you might consider:
    a. Remind people about the importance of gratitude and connection.
    b. Get nostalgic about memorable experiences, and what they've done for people in your organization's community.
    c. Provide food for thought, conversation topics, arm them with info (talk about your organization's impact).
    d. Reconnect people with the purpose of the week (i.e., in the selfish commercialism of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, don't forget to save a little for generosity on GivingTuesday.

For an example outreach cadence, see the table above.

Remember, we're in the calm before the storm at this point. We should view GivingTuesday as the launchpad that'll carry your organization through the end of the campaign, so it's important to get even more intentional about the messaging. Remember to apply what you've learned in the campaign to date, to adjust your content pillars accordingly, and update key messages throughout this week.

#GivingTuesday

A massive gift to the social sector from Asha Curran and our friends at New York's 92nd Street Y, #GT is more than a global social movement to support radical generosity, it's also the perfect kickoff for the holiday fundraising home stretch. If you don't know about the movement, you can learn more here: https://www.givingtuesday.org. It's an unmissable opportunity to reach new donors, elevate your brand, and lead a global conversation around generosity in all forms. Treat GivingTuesday like a miniature campaign within the campaign. Set a unique fundraising goal just for the event itself, as well as event-specific messaging and email series.

For a successful GivingTuesday:

1. **Treat GivingTuesday like a "nested campaign."** GivingTuesday should really be handled internally like part of the overall End-of-year campaign, but for your donors, it can be fun to treat it as a unique one-off, if for no other reason than to give them a break from your end-of-year (EOY) messaging.

2. **Educate your supporters.** While GivingTuesday might be ubiquitous in the nonprofit sector these days, many of your donors still may not know what it is. Tell them a bit about it, its importance, what your organization's role in the movement is, and have them "save the date" ahead of time.

3. **Unique messaging:** In the spirit of the day (and Thanksgiving before it), GivingTuesday is a great opportunity to make it about generosity and volunteerism in general. Lead the public discourse by following and joining the conversation on the main #GivingTuesday channels (tags, hashtags, etc., depending on the social media platform). It's also a great excuse to define new hashtags about volunteering that your organization can lead conversations in before, during, and after #GT.

4. **Have #GT-specific incentives.** GivingTuesday is a great excuse to run lots of donor matches, corporate sponsorships, and incentives for giving. Raffles, giveaways, and random prize allotments are all fair game.

5. **Keep the engagement high.** GivingTuesday should be an all-hands-on deck day for your staff. Arm everyone with pre-written emails and social media posts (using key hashtags), have your staff append a short narrative about your organization's GivingTuesday campaign to their email signatures, etc. Plan to send multiple emails over the course of the day. Day-of announcements, fundraising updates, and follow-ups/results-reporting are all key messages to send. You might even consider doing a live stream to engage donors and partners throughout the day.

6. **Recap and refocus.** On the day after GivingTuesday, send an email to everyone to celebrate the accomplishments. Positioned well, #GT will likely be one of your top-5 revenue days throughout the year. Celebrate the wins and reconnect supporters with the overall end-of-year campaign. Re-contextualize it as part of the overall campaign and goal.

In GivingTuesday 2024, participation extended well beyond financial giving: while an estimated 18.5 million people donated, more than 9.2 million individuals also volunteered, gave in-kind contributions, or engaged in advocacy. This emphasis on non-monetary involvement shows that integrating opportunities for volunteering, sharing campaigns, and in-kind giving can significantly expand reach and deepen donor relationships beyond cash gifts.

Suggested KPIs:

- Set and reach #GivingTuesday-specific fundraising and social media goals
- Be a top voice in the #GivingTuesday ecosystem around volunteering
- Realign staff and supporters with mission and purpose - the WHY behind your organization
- Analyze learnings to date
- Set up for year-end success

Non-Monetary Engagement Metrics

- **Number of volunteers mobilized** (e.g., count of people who signed up to give time during GivingTuesday).
- **In-kind contributions received** (monetary value or item count).
- **Advocacy actions taken** (e.g., petitions signed, letters sent, social shares tracked via hashtags).
- **Total % of participants engaged beyond cash gifts** (helps measure breadth of GivingTuesday impact, not just dollars).

Phase 5: Recap, Reset, Relaunch

We're about mid-way through the campaign now, and after the flurry of activity on GivingTuesday, everyone (supporters included) likely needs a bit of a break. Use the rest of this week and weekend to take a beat, relax, and review what's been working well (where to double-down) and what might be improved at this point. What trends are we seeing, and how might our engagement strategies be further optimized based on that data?

Suggested KPIs:

- Make any adjustments needed for a successful finish.
- Activate key supporters as evangelists (P2P).

Phase 6: Home Stretch

In December we're in a mad sprint to the end of the year. Hopefully though, given all the prep work you've done so far, a lot of the heavy lifting is already done. Some tips for this stage of the campaign:

1. Revisit donors you've already engaged, but who have not yet given. Most people have multiple marketing touch points before they take action, so by now, any laggards in your supporter base should be ready to go. Plus, you'll be much farther along in the campaign's fundraising progress, tapping into the Proximity Effect that we were playing off at the outset.
2. Re-engage donors who have already given. Reach out to people who gave early in the campaign–especially if they gave at the request or recommendation of a friend–*by sending them a heartfelt acknowledgement.*
3. Roll out donation matches, sponsorships, prizes, and incentives.
4. Do a livestream or send video messages from staff or the beneficiaries of your organization's services.
5. Highlight important community members, key volunteers, participating nonprofits and what your organization means to them.
6. Talk about the impact that their financial support means to your organization.
7. Tease about plans for next year and invite them to be a part of it.
8. Lock in any major gifts opportunities that may still be out there.

Suggested KPIs:

- Reach 90% of the fundraising goal.
- Reach every supporter with a donation ask that's specific to their level of engagement to date.

Phase 7: Final Countdown

This is it! From Christmas Eve through New Year's Eve, it's time to pull out all the stops. Along with GivingTuesday, these are the biggest giving days of the year. It's all been leading up to this, and if your earlier efforts are successful, you'll see donation volume increase every day in this final week of the calendar year. Look at all the recommended steps from Phase 6 and see how you can amp them up even further. Any prizes, matches, incentives, compelling messages not used earlier? Roll them out now and leave it all on the table.

Suggested KPIs:

- Exceed campaign fundraising goal.
- End the year with gratitude and a shared sense of accomplishment with supporters.

Phase 8: Follow Ups

Take a breath. The heart of the campaign is over, but the work of strong constituent engagement is far from done. It's time to refocus on how the community showed up for your organization, and how we want to engage them looking forward to next year and beyond.

Promote key messaging through social media, on the website / blog, and via email (ideally a drip campaign).

Remember the Leaky Bucket Dilemma? This phase is all about solving it. It's about retaining donors from the previous year, strengthening the relationships, and converting them into higher levels of engagement.

Top objectives and content themes:

1. **Gratitude**

   You have to thank your donors. This may seem simple, but so many organizations neglect to do this well or even at all. Failing to properly thank a donor for a donation is one of the top contributors to donor churn - and it's one of the easiest ways to tarnish the organization's reputation. Strive to send a thank you to each donor within 48 hours of receiving their gift. This tells donors that you've received their generous gift and it is being put to work. A simple acknowledgement builds trust.

   Remember - you can get creative here. A simple thank you email is nice, but what kind of gesture do your donors *really* want? Other ways to thank them include individual calls and emails - videos from staff members, perhaps an email drip campaign or invitation to an in-person event. You know what kind of gestures your donors will appreciate most, and if you're not sure, then ask them!

2. **Stakeholdership**

   As previously mentioned, donors hate being treated like ATMs. They're full individuals with complete lives. They've given their time and treasure to your organization, and in exchange, they want to be seen and appreciated. What better way to make them feel that way than to ask their opinion!

   Ask how they'd like to be thanked. Ask what they appreciate most about your organization, and what they'd like to see more of or different in the new year. Offer to meet with them personally to discuss their feedback. You'd be amazed at how much a short 5-10 question survey can tell you about your supporters, and how much the exercise in-and-of-itself can strengthen the relationships.

Use this survey as a way to get to know donors better individually as well as the group as a whole. Take their feedback seriously, and circle back to update them once their recommendations have been acted upon. Even if you're not going to do everything they suggest, they'll appreciate knowing why or why not. In either case, you're showing them that they're valued.

3. **Impact**

Share some key metrics with supporters to let them know what impact your organization has accomplished with their help, and how it plans to expand and improve with their continued support in the future. This effort should go beyond simple accountability and be an invitation to supporters to share in celebrating what the entire community has accomplished together.

4. **Transparency**

Closely linked with Stakeholdership but with more focus on sharing details of the organization (e.g., opportunities and challenges, team members, etc.), this is an opportunity to let donors in on some of the behind-the-scenes work and their impact on the organization Feel free to talk about what some of the team members struggle with. Treat every donor (even the $5 and $10 kind) with the same level of transparency and accountability as those giving in the high six figures. Increasing transparency and access may be uncomfortable at first, but it'll pay massive dividends down the road as a relationship is cultivated between donors and the organization.

5. **Expansion**

It is what it sounds like - how might your organization go about increasing the involvement of each of its donors? This can be done by asking them to increase their gift size, advocate for legislation important to your cause, to conduct a peer-to-peer fundraiser, or commit to a monthly recurring gift as part of a membership program. The opportunities are endless when it comes to further engaging your donor base.

Chapter 2: Strategies for Donor Retention & Pipeline Growth

Recurring Donor Programs

The impact of recurring donations on a nonprofit's revenue cycle cannot be overstated. In 2024, overall donor retention dropped to about 42.9%, with new donor retention especially weak compared to repeat donors, who remain much more reliable in their giving (AFP, 2025). Recurring donor programs are one of the strongest tools to counteract this trend, immediately improving retention rates well above the one-time donor average. They also shift the conversation with supporters from repeated solicitations to one of gratitude, impact, and deeper engagement—since these donors are already giving monthly, organizations can focus on storytelling, community-building, and expansion. Best of all, recurring gifts provide a stable baseline of revenue that helps cover salaries, plan programs, and make strategic new hires with greater confidence. The key to success lies in clear branding, strong communication, and creating a distinct sense of belonging for recurring donors.

To do this, recurring donors have to understand what they're opting into and why it's important. The key to this is to create a specific and distinctly branded program or community that speaks only to recurring donors.

- Charity:Water calls this the Pipeline.
- Team Rubicon calls it the Support Squad
- At The Adventure Project, it's The Collective

What makes these programs so successful? Each is unique, well-branded, and the choice to opt-in is clear. Further, each has unique and exclusive SWAG, unique email newsletters, and an increased level of access and transparency with the organization. Sometimes there are unique, members-only events! They're The Fuel that keeps the organization growing, and they should be treated as such.

Worried that your organization doesn't have the bandwidth to pull something like this off? Strong recurring donor / sustainer / membership programs are "table stakes" for modern nonprofit organizations. Those who aren't doing it will have a tougher time in the years ahead; those who are, reap enormous rewards.

Worried it's not worth investing in? Let's run some numbers. Organization X runs a standard fundraising campaign. For simplicity's sake, we'll use totally generic and round numbers. We'll also assume a standard retention rate for one-time donors of around 30%, and we'll further suppose the donors who do stay like Org X enough to increase their gifts by an average of 10%/year.

Their KPIs look like this:

- $100,000 raised
- 1,000 donors
- $120 average gift size
- 30% year-over-year retention rate
- 10% year-over-year increase in gift size

If Org X runs the standard campaigns focused on one-time giving, and does about average follow up work, this cohort of donors will contribute $176,530 over their lifetime (not terrible), but by year eight, every single one of them has moved on.

Now, let's run the same scenario for a cohort of recurring donors. Same basic math, but we're going to change two key numbers. We're going to assume a $10/mo recurring gift, or that same $120 one-time gift broken into 12 installments. $10/mo is an easy ask, right? It's easily understood and relatable to any number of other subscriptions folks are used to paying. For many, it may be easier than asking for a larger one-time gift. We'll also increase the YoY retention rate to the industry standard of roughly 70%. Again - doing nothing out of the ordinary, just making a recurring ask instead of a one-time ask.

The KPIs again:

- 1,000 donors
- $10/mo average subscription
- 70% year-over-year retention rate
- 10% average gift size increase year-over-year

Here are the results:

At the end of 10 years, this same cohort contributes $415,571 over their lifetime, and at the end of this period, there are still 40 people still giving. That's a difference of $239,041, or nearly 2.5x as much value - and you still have more donors sticking around longer, who can volunteer, advocate, fundraise, or do any number of other things to benefit Org X.

Imagine if your organization did something similar. Imagine if you got really good at recurring donor engagement, and actually grew the program year-over-year. Imagine what the benefits would be then! We encourage you to model this out, to see what it might look like for your supporters.

At this point, you might be asking yourself why even bother with a one-time gift campaign? Why not go directly to recurring? Well, there are some perfectly good reasons for that. Unless your organization is going to transition completely to a paid subscription model (which actually might work), you have to meet donors where they are. Opting into a recurring donation - even though it may be a lower up-front commitment, is fundamentally a different ask. To successfully convert someone into a monthly recurring gift, they must first have a strong affinity for the organization, feel an emotional connection with it, and understand a bit about its impact. You need donors who we think of as in the middle of the funnel. More on this later.

For now, suffice it to say that the opportunity of building a strong recurring donor program in the future is just one of the many benefits of regarding holiday fundraising campaigns as the start of something bigger, rather than a totally self-contained revenue generating event. Of course, the revenue earned is one of the most important measures of success. But it's not the only measure.

True and lasting success comes from thinking of each campaign as being contextualized within a holistic year-round fundraising strategy. The number (%) of supporters engaged, number of new supporters gained, and the retention of those donors - conversion into a 2nd one-time gift, a recurring gift, etc. - is just as important as the amount raised, if not more so.

Fundraising Math

"*In God we trust… All others must bring data.*" - WE Deming

We'll get into funnels and other aspects of a successful engagement strategy in a moment, but first, some fun with numbers which will provide some good background for the information ahead.

Fundraising is about emotion and capacity building, but at the end of the day, it's also about the data. The obvious ones relate to annual revenue and financial runway. However, taking a serious approach to data is absolutely critical to the long-term success of any organization. It exposes weaknesses, strengths, and threats. It also exposes new opportunities that would not be visible without more advanced data analysis. It's about more than just accountability - it's about internal learning and improvement as well. Focusing on data can lead us down some pretty deep rabbit holes, so let's start simple.

How much money will we raise online this year? This seemingly daunting question gets much simpler when we break it down into a simple equation: $ Raised = # of website visitors x conversion rate (% completing a donation) x $ average donation size

Simple, right? If we have any of this information from previous years, and we can look at expectations for website traffic (e.g., using Google Analytics), we can quickly hone in on a baseline estimate for this year.

Now let's examine what this unlocks for the campaign by asking some key questions and turning the exercise into a bit of a game:

First, the questions:

- How might we increase website traffic?
- How might we make the website content more compelling to donors?
- How might we make the site easier to navigate, so that people get to the donation page quicker and more efficiently?
- How might we inspire people to donate more with each transaction?
- How might we inspire them to give multiple times over the course of the campaign?
- How might we get them to set up an automatically recurring monthly gift?

Answering any of these questions and making the appropriate adjustments will result in an immediate increase in overall donation volume. Think of each variable as a "lever" you can use to lift the overall total. All levels need attention at various times, but it can be very useful to focus on one or another as a discrete exercise or "sprint."

You might also ask things in the form of "how might we" rather than "how do we" or "how should we." It's important to be creative, open minded, and generative here. This will lead to innovation and rapid improvement. Don't be afraid to make some hypotheses and test them!

Look back at all the prep work we did during Phase 1 - the matches, the incentives, the key messaging pillars, etc. How might we utilize those resources to improve donation volume coming through the website?

Here's a similar equation for major gifts - very similar, but with some important nuances that bear examination. $ Raised = # of major donors x average gift x win rate

Since philanthropists are not generally giving through the website without encouragement, their process looks a bit different, and we must ask different questions:

- How do we identify a major donor, and what distinguishes them as someone who is worthy of a hands-on (human-to-human) engagement process, rather than leaving them to give through the website on their own? There's no empirical right or wrong answer here. The determination should be made based on the expected size and likelihood of their gift, balanced with the internal bandwidth available to engage with them.
- What, specifically, is a given donor's motivation for supporting your organization? What parts of the messaging and overall case for support do they respond to most? What might they want in return? Are they seeking public recognition? Networking? Increased transparency and access to the executive team? Maybe they want anonymity. Knowing the answers to questions like these is crucial to nurturing them towards a successful close.
- Are they open to your organization using their gift as a "match" to inspire more fundraising activity online?
- How might we move donors more quickly and efficiently through their evaluation process?
- What compelling events or experiences might we provide or create?
- What opportunities can we offer that would create increased motivation for larger or more frequent gifts?

Hunters vs. Farmers

While online and offline fundraising might appear quite similar, they require different skill sets and a very different mentality. Farmers till their soil, plant seeds, and provide fertilizer, sun, and water. Then they wait and make incremental adjustments as needed, using all the data and resources available to them. It's totally fine for some crops to fail, as long as you're maximizing the overall yield efficiently. They're the online fundraisers. Great websites, email communications, online ads, and user experience will yield an outstanding harvest. It's fine if not everyone responds, the focus is on the aggregate. Maybe you take your most outstanding crops to the county fair (refer them to the development director), but otherwise, you're just looking to sell produce by the bale.

Hunters are all about proactively landing the big game. They're patient. They survey the landscape, pack their supplies of food, bait, and ammunition, stalk their prey, and hope to bring home the trophies that not only look great on display, but can also feed their families for weeks. As fundraisers, they research their donors on an individual level. They get to know them, learn their likes and dislikes, earn their trust. In the end, they secure the win and cash the big checks (once or in installments) that will sustain their organization throughout the year. They use trends, data, and best practices. They use the same general messaging, but they do far more preparation on an individual basis and every donor matters.

Advanced math

The two equations above will carry your organization far. However, there are more advanced data to know and strategies to employ in order to understand your donor base well. The equations below can be extremely useful when looking at one-time donors, but they're especially powerful when used in the context of recurring monthly donors, such as the programs like those described above.

DAC - Donor Acquisition Cost:
How much does it cost to acquire a new donor? Sometimes this cost will be greater than the value of their initial gift, and as long as you have a plan to engage them further and secure bigger gifts in the future, that's OK!

DAC = Sum of All Fundraising & Marketing Expenses / # of New Donors Added

Donor Churn Rate:
On a monthly or annual basis, how many donors leave the organization, never to be heard from again? If your churn rate is 70% / year, as is the industry benchmark for one-time donors, then how can you possibly expect to grow revenues reliably over time? Reducing this number as much as possible (often by turning them into automatic recurring donors) is absolutely crucial.

Lapsed Donor Surveys:
Sometimes donors will leave. Hopefully not 70% of them per year, but some churn is inevitable. Don't be afraid of it - engage with it fully. There's no better pool of people to contact, survey, and learn from, than your lapsed donors. Understanding their motivations for leaving and adapting to them is the quickest way to: a) keep other donors from leaving for similar reasons, and b) bring lapsed donors back. Maybe you can clear up misunderstandings, offer explanations, or incentives for coming back and giving your organization another chance.

Donor Lifetime:
On average, how long are donors sticking with your organization? As with Donor Churn Rate, this can be viewed on a monthly or (more likely) annual basis.

Donor Lifetime = 1/Donor Churn Rate

Donor Lifetime Value (DLTV):
Simply put, how much are each donor worth to your organization and how can that value be increased? Since this is such an important metric to the overall fundraising and financial health of the organization, it's helpful to understand this metric, broken down specifically by donor segment.

Understanding exactly how much money each donor is worth to the organization is crucial. It tells you how much money you can spend on acquiring, retaining, and increasing their gift size. It tells you how many new donors you need to reach in order to meet the evolving goals (and budgets) of the organization. Perhaps best of all, understanding this, along with the motivations of various segments of your donors, can reveal ideas for new fundraising and engagement campaigns to run and new avenues to explore. Understanding the motivations of your higher-value donors can tell you where new cohorts of untapped donors may exist for you to reach out to.

DLTV = Value of Annual Giving ($)/Donor Churn Rate

LTV to DAC Ratio and Time to Recover DAC:
These should be self-explanatory at this point, but they deserve their own focus. What can you do to get someone more quickly to a 2nd gift? If DAC is too low, it could be a sign you're not being innovative enough, and not investing enough in retention.

Credit where credit is due: Equations like these are becoming more commonplace among modern nonprofit organizations. However, these specific ones were adapted from the great For Entrepreneurs blog by David Skok. The bulk of his work revolves around startups and subscription (SaaS) companies, but his work is extremely relevant to social good organizations looking to sustain themselves well and grow their revenue and supporter base efficiently.

Global Marketing

It can be very tempting to focus on optimizing email send times, frequency, unsubscribe rate, etc., and there are some great resources available that provide general best practices. Here are a few: M+R Fundraising is a great resource in general, and their 2025 Benchmarking Report provides some great insights. Givebutter puts out some good content, as does CauseVox, and Classy has nearly 500 articles on various aspects of email marketing for nonprofits.

Before looking towards those (more-detailed) topics, it's important to gain as deep and detailed understanding of your supporter base as possible. The more you learn about your donors, the more accurate and specific you can be. However, even starting with a short brainstorming exercise during the preparation phase of the campaign can be illuminating and pay huge dividends down the line.

Three specific areas of study that deserve special attention, each one building on the last, are:

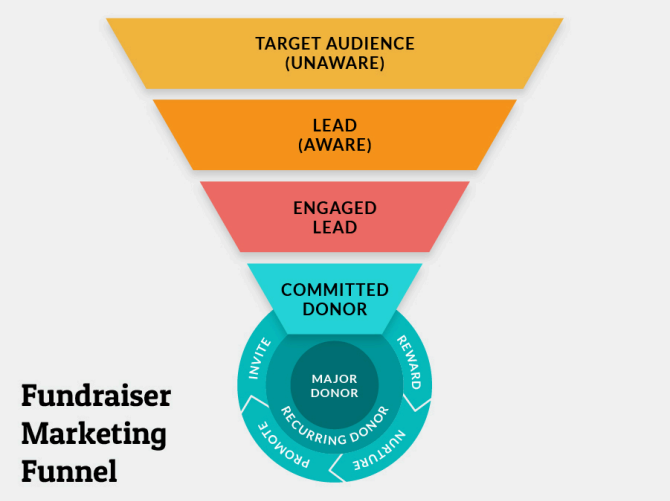
1. Personas & Archetypal Avatars: Who are your supporters and what categories do they fit into? How can we group them based on their interest level, reasons for engaging with your organization, and the size of their contributions? How do we reach them effectively, in ways that are meaningful to them?

2. Donor Journey: What's the ideal experience we want supporters to have when they engage with your organization? This includes how they first discover the organization, and the marketing touch points they experience, as well as the actions (donating, fundraising, volunteering, etc.) that they take. This isn't meant to document every possible path. Rather, the path that your organization wants the majority of them to take in a perfect world.

3. Funnels and Flywheels: With a firm understanding of who the supporters are and the experiences we want them to have with your organization, it's time to start thinking about funnels. From an engagement perspective, funnels are everything. For example:

For any action you want a supporter to take, there's a funnel that describes it. At the top of the funnel, is awareness. At the bottom of the funnel, the conversion point. In between, are all the baby steps one takes to get from awareness to completing the desired action.

Actual funnels vary by organization and part of the Customer Journey they're concerned with, but typical nonprofit fundraising funnels oftentimes look like this:



In reality, donors and volunteers will come and go. Their life circumstances, interests, capacity for support, etc. may change over time. So, an actual funnel for your organization may include a flywheel or vortex at the bottom. Once they've completed an initial action, we'll want to find compelling actions to continue engaging them in various ways throughout the year, and their broader lifecycle as a supporter.

The key to working with funnels is attempting to understand why some donors move efficiently from awareness to conversion, and why others get lost and fall off along the way. Some attrition between funnel stages is inevitable, but (remember the section on fundraising math?) the more we can open the top of the funnel (reach a wider audience), and the higher percentage of them move quickly from stage to stage, the more money your organization will end up raising and the more impact it'll create.

There are great resources that go deeper into these concepts. The links provided above are a great start. There are tons of great blogs, classes, and other resources, along with actual product demos that show you how to action the ideas being presented.

Tell a Powerful Story

The best way to retain and expand a marketing audience is to provide compelling content that's relevant and interesting to them, regardless of whether or not they take further action.

In his great TED Talk, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," Simon Sinek outlines the best way to craft compelling marketing messages, starting with WHY. It's well-worth a watch.

How great leaders inspire action

62,699,328 views | Simon Sinek | TEDxPuget Sound • September 2009

Some additional considerations include:

- How might we lead with emotion and validate with facts?
- How can we put our community first, and highlight the heroes within it?
- How does a specific marketing message fit within the overall narrative of the campaign?
- How well does this message add value to the audience?
- How does it strengthen or weaken our relationship with the supporter?
- Is the correspondence simple and direct? Can it be simplified further, or broken into two separate messages?
- How well does it fit the brand voice?
- How clear is the call to action?

Chapter 3: Marketing, Communications, and Reminders

Website

Websites provide the foundation for all other marketing and communications. They should be thorough, engaging, and above all, easy to navigate. The quickest way to get people through the funnels, like those outlined above, is to minimize the number of steps between awareness and conversion, and to make those steps as easy as possible to complete.

In order to optimize your organization's website for holiday fundraising:

- Look for ways to simplify the homepage and make it more emotionally compelling.

- Present information about the campaign in clear, and obvious ways, such as:
    - Adding an "Action Bar" to the top of the screen. Present some clear, concise, and emotionally compelling information about the campaign, and get people quickly to the landing page and/or donation form.
    - Using a pop-up that takes over the whole screen on page load, with the same type of user experience recommended for the Action Bar.
    - Temporarily suspend any current headers and activate one that's specifically focused on the campaign and fundraising goal.

- Don't feel the need to try all this at once. Conduct a few tests during the early weeks of launch and stick with the one that yields the best results.

- Clean donation forms - the quality and usability of online donation forms make an enormous difference in overall funds raised. For peer-to-peer fundraising, Classy is still the undisputed leader. However, for straight website donations, FundraiseUp is the clear winner. They feature clean user-experience, white-labeled branding, lots of developer-friendly tools and customization options. Their donation amount buttons can be customized per user, leveraging AI tools to predict the donor's capacity for giving, and serve the most appropriate suggested amounts.

- Invest in a great blog. Blogs are incredibly powerful, in that they're great for SEO, but also provide an incredible source of content for email and social media. Write marketing messages for the blog first, and then utilize the articles across all your other channels.

- Proactive Chat is a great way to engage website visitors and help point them in the right direction. If you're able to connect with supporters at the exact time they're interested in learning more about your organization, it's an incredibly efficient way to strengthen your relationship with them and point them in the right direction. Learn more.

Email

Keep it clear, simple, and to the point. Single-subject emails work best, but if you have lots of information to cover, you can include up to three. Make sure each topic has an engaging title, concise description, and clear call to action at the end.

In general, people don't read email, they skim. So, you have to capture their attention quickly and make things very easy to understand. Don't send frivolous messages. Ensure every email sent to supporters provides some kind of direct value, whether or not they choose to take further action.

Anatomy of a great email:

1. Catchy subject line
2. 1-2 Engaging images, videos, and/or GIFs
3. Relevant title
4. Concise copy
5. Clear call to action
6. Unsubscribe information.

There's always a ton of curiosity around the best times to send. There is also a lot of guidance and general best practice information out there. But at the end of the day, there's no substitute for experimenting and making improvements based on your own constituent base and results.

A few general principles:

- Send emails when people are likely to read them, such as early morning, lunchtime, or before dinner.
- Get on top of the inbox. Sending on Sunday afternoons can be beneficial, as you can often be the top email in someone's inbox when they open their computers on Monday morning.
- Figure out what days and times offer the best audience engagement for your organization, and then aim for consistency. If people come to expect correspondence from you at a certain day and time, they're more likely to read it.
- Don't worry too much about unsubscribes. *People who don't want to hear from you probably weren't all that likely to donate anyway.* Send exactly as many emails as you need to drive the engagement you want - no more and no less. Err on the side of more.

Concepts to include:

- Why is your org doing what it's doing?
- Impact of your work – first / best / only.
- Unique team / staff – this is a great time to highlight and celebrate your team.
- How your organization is differentiated from others - what are you doing, and what are you NOT doing?
- Note: Brand sets your org apart from others doing similar things. For example, animal welfare is a large topic. Are you interested in adoption, mercy for animals, conservation, etc.? A different type of person is drawn to each approach to mission delivery.
- In summary…. If for nothing else, ask yourself what are the top three "things" you want your audience to hear this end-of-year season. …. Count it a win if the majority of your donors know the same three facts that you can then build on in the new year. This is a chance to raise awareness.

Email Templates

The first example has formatting queues; they are removed thereafter.

Pre-GivingTuesday - use this template the days leading up to GivingTuesday.

Subject line: GivingTuesday is right around the corner!

Dear [Donor Name],

We're celebrating GivingTuesday with a goal to raise $[revenue goal] and are getting a head start by accepting donations early. This funding will support our team in [example of mission programming], [example of mission programming, and [example of mission programming].

We need your help to reach our goal. Will you consider making a $[suggested donation amount] donation today? Click here to make your donation today!

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Title]
[Organization]

GivingTuesday - send this email early on GivingTuesday.

Subject line: It's GivingTuesday – will you donate to [organization]?

We're celebrating GivingTuesday with a goal to raise $[revenue goal] in 24 hours! This funding will support our team in [example of mission programming], [example of mission programming, and [example of mission programming].

We need your help to reach our goal. Will you consider making a $[suggested donation amount] donation? Click here to contribute today!

P.S. Help us reach our goal twice as fast with a corporate matching gift if your employer offers a matching program!

End-of-year - Use this template after Christmas.

Subject Line: We're [percentage]% of the way towards reaching our fundraising goal with only [number of days] to go.

Will you help us enter in the new year with the funding to make a difference on [program beneficiaries]?

Please consider giving via our online donation form here [link to online donation form]. You can also check out our website to discover other ways to support the cause, including matching gifts, volunteer opportunities, in-kind donations, and more: [link to website page]. Click here to support our work now!

Thank you - use this template for every donation.

Subject Line: Thanks to you, we raised $[total fundraising revenue]!

Together we did it! We exceeded our fundraising goal and raised $[total fundraising revenue] with generous donations supporting [summary of organization mission]. We couldn't have done it without your generosity.

The team at [organization name] truly thanks you for your donation of $[donation amount]. Because of you, we're able to [example of mission programming] more than ever before.

We'll be sharing additional ways to get involved as we continue our end-of-year fundraising initiatives. Click here to make your donation today!

Pro Tip: There are many resources available online. For example, Neon One has prepared an excellent synopsis of email and social templates for GivingTuesday. Learn more

Newsletters

Newsletters should be compelling, comprehensive, and arrive on the same time and day of the week, like clockwork. Consistency is key. Much of the newsletter can be calling attention to specific blog articles, but one section should be dedicated to whatever is most urgent and pressing. *For the final months of the year, it's best to reserve this for campaign-specific information and calls to action (CTAs).*

N.B., we recommend you email a monthly newsletter that includes good news about the impact of your work, upcoming activities, and ways to get engaged, and a CTA (such as sign up to volunteer, give to a fundraising effort, or refer a friend – not everything all at once, rotate).

Automated Marketing

It can be a huge advantage to have a marketing automation system integrated with your CRM. Create dynamic smart lists based on supporter interest areas or levels of engagement. Instead of one email detailing a certain subject, create automated drip campaigns to tell a compelling story over time, and lead supporters towards a specific goal (funnel conversion or stop on the supporter journey).

Be careful not to inundate donors with too many drip campaigns. This is easy to do, but can be prevented by stack-ranking the workflows, prioritizing the highest-value messages, etc. Set rules around the automation that prevent supporters from receiving the same email more than once, or from being inundated with too many emails.

One of the highest-value automated drip campaigns any nonprofit organization can create is a new donor onboarding series. The goal of these series is to take a one-time donor giving for the first time, and nurture them through to a second, higher-value action such as giving another gift or signing up for a volunteering opportunity.

Learn More.

In 2025, AI-powered donor insights, predictive analytics, and dynamic personalization tools (e.g., FundraiseUp, Salesforce NPSP, GHL) are considered standard. These enable nonprofits to tailor ask amounts, messaging, and timing to donor behavior for higher conversion rates.

Social Media

Social media best practices are similar to many of the key concepts already mentioned. Be fun, be interesting, be relevant. Understand the unique nuances of each social media platform: Facebook is for friends, whereas Instagram is for followers and is much more image oriented. LinkedIn has a professional tone, and TikTok is short, sweet, and favors video.

It can be tempting to take on all social media outlets, but best practice is to focus on only the ones you actually have audiences on, and the bandwidth to engage properly. There's nothing worse than discovering a new channel from your favorite brand, only to have it be void of activity, with unresponsive moderators.

All social media content quality should be high, but it's much lower stakes than any of the more formal channels, and thus, ripe for experimentation. You can create and schedule posts easily on Canva, although there are many other tools now available. Post early and often. It's almost impossible to post too much since the algorithms for the various social media platforms are so dynamic. Schedule posts ahead of time, as much as possible, and free up resources to respond quickly to audience comments, and post new, relevant content as the opportunities arise.

Focus on one or two social media platforms rather than all. You can create and schedule posts easily on Canva, although there are many other tools now available. Learn more.

Creating eye-catching graphics and compelling content is crucial for engaging your online audience and driving donations during your year-end fundraising campaign. Here's a set of engaging graphics and content ideas for social media:

1. Social Media Cover Image:

- Design a festive and attention-grabbing cover image featuring your nonprofit's logo, the campaign hashtag, and a call to action.
- Content: "Join us in making a difference this holiday season! 🌟 #GiveBackNow"

2. Quote Graphic:

- Create a visually appealing graphic with an inspiring quote related to your cause.
- Content: "Every donation, no matter the size, brings us one step closer to our mission. Together, we can change lives! 💙 #DonateForChange"

3. Progress Tracker:

- Design a progress bar graphic that visually represents your fundraising goal and updates as you receive donations.
- Content: "Help us fill the progress bar and reach our year-end goal of [Your Target Amount]! Your contribution matters."

4. Impact Stories:

- Share impactful stories from beneficiaries or volunteers.
- Content: "Meet Sarah, whose life was transformed by our organization. Your support can change more lives like hers! #StoriesOfImpact"

5. Testimonials:

- Create graphics with quotes from satisfied donors or supporters.
- Content: "Our donors speak for us! Your generosity can make a real difference in the lives of those we serve. #Testimonials"

6. Countdown Graphics:

- Design graphics counting down the days or weeks left in the campaign.
- Content: "Only [X days/weeks] left to be a part of something incredible! Let's make it count! #CountdownToChange"

7. Giving Tuesday Promotion:

- Create a special graphic for Giving Tuesday.
- Content: "Double your impact on Giving Tuesday! All donations today will be matched by our generous supporters. #GivingTuesday"

8. Thank You Graphics:

- Share thank you graphics featuring your team and supporters.
- Content: "A heartfelt thanks to all our donors who are making a difference. Your support means the world to us! 🙏 #Gratitude"

9. Urgency Graphics:

- Create visuals emphasizing the urgency of your campaign's deadline.
- Content: "Time is running out! Don't miss your chance to be part of something amazing. Act now! ⏰ #ActForChange"

10. Infographics:

- Develop infographics highlighting your nonprofit's impact and the importance of year-end giving.
- Content: "Year-end giving fuels our programs, empowers our mission, and changes lives. See the difference your donation can make! #YearEndGiving"

Remember to use your branding colors and fonts consistently across these graphics to maintain a cohesive look. Share these graphics across your social media platforms, and don't forget to include a clear call to action, such as a link to your donation page or a specific campaign hashtag, to encourage engagement and donations.

Online Ads

Online ads are a great way to connect with new audiences. It's worth investing in both search and social media ads, as each has unique ways of reaching audiences, and unique types of content they prefer. For social media ads, start by promoting your highest-value and best-performing social media posts to expand their reach. Create audiences based on what you know about your donor base and the Archetypal Avatars you defined earlier.

Most advertising of this type is designed to widen the "top of the funnel," and reach new audiences you don't already have access to. That said, it can also be great for mid-funnel, and for retargeting.

By creating target lists based on past donors, you can convert them to a second one-time or (better yet) recurring gift donors. By creating lists based on website activity, you can serve ads to people who have previously visited your website, but who did not complete a donation. The latter is called *retargeting* and can be used to tremendous effect.

A note on the Google Ad Grant. The $10K (or $40K) allocated to nonprofit organizations each month is an incredibly valuable resource. However, it is worth allocating a budget to paid ads as well. Google ad placement works off of an auction-based system, with the best ad placement reserved for the highest cost-per click. With the Ad Grant, there's a limit on the amount of money an organization can bid, meaning that it won't typically get favorable placement. You can improve your odds of winning prime placement by narrowing down your audience and keywords as much as possible, and by creating a separate Google Ads account that allows for paid ad buys. Learn more

Concluding Thoughts

The preceding playbook was written using industry best practices and hands-on experience in nonprofit fundraising. We've endeavored to provide big-picture guidance, strategic recommendations, and advice for getting the most out of the best tactics that can be used to meet your fundraising goals.

It's our hope that with the information provided, and its own internal resources, your organization is set up for a very successful holiday season that lays the foundation for continued growth and success in the new year.

It has been our pleasure to create this playbook for you, and we're happy to provide additional advice and support in the future, as needed. Don't forget to check out the Simple Guide to Giving Tuesday and the Checklist of Activities organized by phase to summarize this document.

Lindsay Simonds, Principal and Managing Director, LSC
Philanthropy Consultants | Strategic Advisers | Capital Campaign Directors Website:
Lindsay Simonds Consulting
Podcast: Creating Community for Good Inform. Inspire. Evolve.
Lindsay@lindsaysimondsconsulting.com