

Jumpstarting Your Fundraising Efforts



The complete guide to understanding
how to secure fundraising in the
nonprofit arena.





INTRODUCTION

Most nonprofit organizations, regardless of their size, typically have one thing in common: they all have too many things to do and too little time or not enough people to do it. Whether you are an Executive Director, Program Officer, Fundraising Coordinator, or all of those (a one-person shop), balancing the daily tasks to keep focused on the mission of your organization and trying to grow your fundraising can be challenging and overwhelming.

The purpose of this eBook is not to make a list of a bunch of new fundraising activities that will take up more hours of your day. Rather, we are going to look at some simple strategies that you can do to jump start your fundraising efforts for your organization or nonprofit.

“It’s not just about the money, but about the relationship and investment.”

As you explore the fundraising needs of your organization, it is important that you focus not so much on the donations, but on how your organization can grow the number of people who are actively engaged in the work you do. This will create opportunities for people to support you over a lifetime and it can hold true for volunteers, board members, existing donors, and new donors.

We would encourage you to approach this eBook much like a car tune-up; the purpose of the 6,000 mile (or three-month) tune-up is as much about preventative care as it is when something goes wrong. A trustworthy mechanic will give you an update and status on the good (and unfortunately sometimes the bad) about your car. If you are taking good care of your vehicle and following good practices like the tune up, your car should last longer over time. The same is true with nonprofit fundraising.

This eBook will provide concrete strategies, tips, and tools for nonprofit fundraisers and organizations, including board fundraising, individual giving and online campaigns.

-The Aplos Team

CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK

No more tin-cup-begging mentality!

One of the ways you can jumpstart your fundraising efforts is by ramping up your storytelling while getting away from the begging mentality. The idea here is using personal stories to create an emotional connection with your donors. Instead of just talking about the need for funding your nonprofit, use testimonials and photos that bring stories to life. Those that can really boost your fundraising by changing your message.

Ellen Bristol of the Bristol Strategy Group [wrote in a 2014 blog post](#) about her disdain for the tin-cup mentality and her strong desire to get rid of it:



“The tin-cup mentality is the state of mind that says ‘We’re a poor lowly charity! Give us your money because we need it!’ Rather than signaling your value to the world, or inviting others to celebrate your triumphs, the tin-cup mentality emphasizes your neediness. Shouting about how poor you are does not inspire confidence among philanthropists, who are your investors. Who wants to make a bad investment? It also gives rise to a terrible fundraising habit, namely, ‘Let’s raise whatever we can and then figure out how to spend it.’”

The point here is the messaging and the using of your communication to tell signs of strength and how your donors are making a difference.

Tell Your Story

Having vision is important. Communicating that vision is more important. Walt Disney was a master storyteller. As great a visionary as he was, many would argue that his most incredible skill was his ability to tell a story effectively.



Three years before Snow White was released in theatres, Walt Disney (pictured left) took his top animators out to dinner. He brought them to a nice restaurant and gave each of them 50 cents for their meal. (At the time, even the highest-priced meals did not go over 35 cents. His value of his team did not go unnoticed.) Towards the end of dinner, he dimmed the room lights and began to describe the story of Snow White. According to Walt, it was a story that had been with him his whole life, a story that had stuck with him. It was a story he was deeply passionate about. Over the next three hours, he told the story of Snow White to his team, making sure not to leave out a single detail. Rumor has it that everyone in the room was completely captivated by his ability as a storyteller as he held the attention of everyone in the room and kept them engaged.

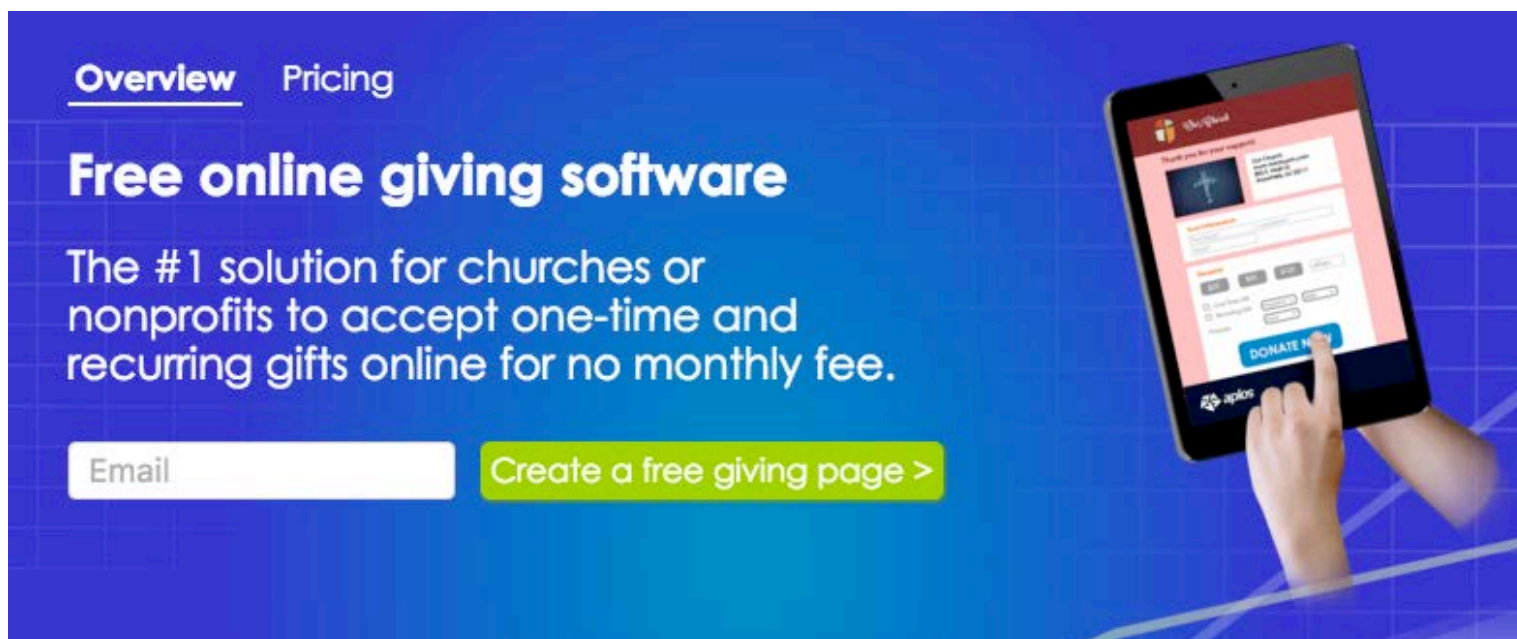
CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK CONT.

At the end of his 180-minute telling of Snow White, he asked them to create his first feature-length animated movie. Snow White was released three years later, winning an Oscar (and 7 miniature Oscars) and grossing over 8 million dollars in a time where it cost only 14 cents to go to the movies. Snow White ended up being 87 minutes long, though in that initial dinner meeting Walt Disney took three hours to describe the story that had been with him all those years. That was no accident. Disney wanted to be sure he cast the vision (told the story) as clearly and effectively as possible so that his team would not miss anything.

Again, having vision is important. Communicating your vision is more important. The greatest leaders are not those who have the best ideas.

The greatest leaders are the ones who tell a story that people want to hear over and over again. A story that brings them to a place they had not been before, and inspires them to go even further.

As mentioned at the first part of this point, by using personal stories to create an emotional connection and the work being done, your donors become a part of the story. This is true in your website, social media pages, direct mail appeals, and correspondence to your donors and friends of the organization.



The banner features a blue background with a white grid pattern. On the left, the text 'Free online giving software' is prominently displayed in white. Below it, a sub-headline reads 'The #1 solution for churches or nonprofits to accept one-time and recurring gifts online for no monthly fee.' At the bottom left, there is a white input field labeled 'Email' and a green button that says 'Create a free giving page >'. On the right side, a hand is shown holding a tablet that displays the Aplos giving page interface, which includes a 'DONATE NOW' button. At the top left of the banner, the words 'Overview' and 'Pricing' are visible, with 'Overview' underlined.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Meaningful conversations

Regardless of how much money you are trying to raise or what your plan is to do so, one of the most important aspects of fund development is the strength of building relationships. Nonprofit workers can sometimes get so busy planning and organizing that you and your staff may forget to take time to build and deepen relationships with the people who matter the most — your donors and prospects. What we are talking about here is not going out and asking for money, but having real, authentic conversations by getting to know the people who support your organization.

We can't remember where we heard the saying . . .

“Money goes where the relationship flows”

. . . but it is a great reminder that at the core of good fundraising is the very basic practice of going outside the office and have meaningful conversations with people.

Some of the largest donations we know of started with regular conversations over lunch, coffee, or dinner. This includes quick phone calls to celebrate a birthday or anniversary, or other creative ways to connect with your donors and prospects. These are sincere relational conversations, not just some way to get money.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING CONT.

Who should you reach out to?

- **New Donors** — Look for new gifts or unique gifts that have come in recently. Reach out to those donors and find out more about who they are, why they gave, and what their connection is to your organization. This is also a great way to figure out how to involve them further in your organization.
- **Longtime Donors** — Believe it or not, sometimes the longtime donors are easy to forget about because we get so used to them and rely on their regular gifts and support. However, making sure you're connecting with those longtime donors is a great way to help them feel valued, and you'll definitely feel energized by having meaningful conversations with people who care deeply about you and the work your doing.
- **Board Members** — We will talk about donor engagement in the last section of this eBook, but Board Members are a great resource and can offer lots of insight to you and your organization. Board Members care and want to hear stories and updates that go beyond looking at financials and the Executive Director's report. Don't forget about them or ever take them for granted.
- **Key Volunteers** — Volunteerism is a form of giving. Do not underestimate the value of people giving their time. Adding up the total hours of the volunteers and their hours might be the equivalent of 10-15 fulltime employees, which is thousands of dollars in savings for the organization. Be sure and get to know your volunteers and give them a chance to tell their stories, which are added value to the work your doing.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING CONT.

If you would like some additional tips and help on building relationships with donors and prospects, there's a great book called *Let's Have Lunch Together* by Marshall Howard. The premise of this book is how to reach out and build powerful relationships. It is easy to read and very practical for getting started and improving in this area.



Don't complicate the relationship building. Having conversations with people should not require a whole new strategic plan or hours of lost time in the office. We heard a great way to look at this from Jeff Brooks, a fantastic fund-raising blogger/writer/thinker in the NPO world. When asked about the secret to good fundraising, Brooks said something like:

Go. Find people. Have conversations. Listen. Share your heart and passion. Agree on a plan that results in a measurable impact. Celebrate the victories. Support each other in the midst of failure. Then do it again . . . and again . . . and again.

We hope you too can go have meaningful conversations and see the power in building solid relationships with your supporters.

REVIEWING YOUR DATATBASE

Do you know the commercial that asks “What’s in your wallet?” Well, a good nonprofit organization needs to ask, “**What’s in your donor database?**” If you are using a donor database at any level (and if not, you should be), this can be a gold mine of information and possibilities. Your database is like a closet or storage shed. Instead of storing clothes, stuff, or equipment, it is a place where you store information about your donors, volunteers, and potential supporters. So, as a way to jumpstart your fundraising efforts, let’s take a minute and look at what’s in your database.

Most donor database systems, even at the very basic level, cost money and need someone to take the time to input the information into the system. So you need to ask the question, “Why spend time and money on something and not do the upkeep?” This becomes a far too common problem with many nonprofits as they get busy and neglect to do proper upkeep of their database. We’re going to propose that you take some time and do some **donor database spring cleaning** (no matter what season it is).

Name	Date	Note/Check	Account	Purpose/Fund	Amount
Beth Briney	01/30/2016			General	\$50.00
					<u>\$50.00</u>
Larry Briney	01/30/2016			General	\$50.00
	02/24/2016			General	\$50.00
					<u>\$100.00</u>
David Keller	01/29/2016			General	\$50.00
	02/24/2016	Cash		General	\$46.00
	03/01/2016	thanks!		General	\$30.00
	03/04/2016		Justin's Income	General Fund	\$50.00
					<u>\$176.00</u>
Total					<u>\$326.00</u>

Looking for lost donors

When cleaning or reviewing your donor database, you can start with some real basics like merging, deleting, and updating the addresses. Look for lost donors. For a very low fee you can do a National Change of Address (NCOA) search of your database and see if people have moved. You can also search for updated emails or other forms of contact information that have been lost. Many times donors move and/or change information and you’re the last to know, which can result in lost support.

Checking for inactivity

Be sure to also check your database for records that have been inactive for a while. Just doing a little detective work and finding out who are the donors who gave last year but not this year. You might consider doing a special appeal or reach out to those who gave last year but not this year.

REVIEWING YOUR DATABASE CONT.

Spend a little time with your results.

Admit it, most of us are always looking for the next best thing or new fundraiser. Everyone wants to have something like the “**Ice Bucket Challenge**” that goes viral and raises zillions of dollars. But that is just not realistic for most of us, so it is important to stop and reflect on what you do well and what has worked in the past.

Your data or results are a great place to look for ideas on messaging.

What have your donors responded to in the past?

What areas of your mission have your donors been most interested in?

What has not worked as well?

All of these are excellent questions to ask so that you can adapt, improve upon, and grow your messaging and your approach.

Form your data analysis, then go and reach out to your donors with a message of the results and how their support is working. This is something that often gets overlooked, in that we forget to simply talk about the results. You need to be sharing how your donors' dollars are making an impact.



CONCLUSION

We hope that you've found this to be helpful. If you are a small shop and feel overwhelmed by the fundraising aspects of your job, we would encourage you to start somewhere - take one or two items on this list or tweak something you're doing.

Nonprofit work can be daunting at times, but we've found that it is one of the most rewarding experiences to be a part of!

