



NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP SERIES · 2026

# Smarter Fundraising for Nonprofits

Strategies That Drive Sustainable Giving

How nonprofits can strengthen donor relationships, improve fundraising consistency, and build long-term financial sustainability



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## INTRODUCTION

# The New Reality of Nonprofit Fundraising



The environment in which nonprofits raise funds has changed. Donor expectations have risen, competition for attention has grown, and the old playbook of annual campaigns and year-end appeals is showing its limits.

Today's donors compare organizations, look for evidence of impact, and expect the same quality of digital experience they receive elsewhere. Short-term campaign thinking creates instability – revenue spikes then collapses, making it difficult to plan or deliver consistently.

## Sustainable Fundraising Is Built On Five Core Pillars



Trust



Consistency



Donor Engagement



Operational Efficiency



Long-Term Strategy

# What Drives Long-Term Giving Today



Modern donors arrive with higher expectations. They want transparency about how funds are used, personalized communication, and clear visibility into the outcomes their giving supports.

**5x**

More expensive to acquire a new donor than to retain one

**40-45%**

Of repeat donors go on to become long-term supporters.

**80%**

Average annual retention rate for monthly donors



## Retention Matters More Than Acquisition

Most organizations invest heavily in acquiring new donors. Yet retention delivers far greater return. A donor giving for three or more consecutive years is worth multiples of a one-time contributor – in cumulative value and referral potential.

"Donors today don't just want to give – they want to belong to something they believe in and see their contributions make a difference."



# Moving Beyond Campaign-Centric Fundraising



Reactive fundraising – planning appeals around Giving Tuesday or year-end tax deadlines – can produce short-term results. But it leaves organizations vulnerable when a single campaign underperforms.

## A Diversified Revenue Model

- **Recurring giving** – Regular, small commitments that accumulate into significant annual revenue
- **Annual campaigns** – Timed and intentional, with clear goals and meaningful follow-up
- **Grant funding** – Relationship-driven and aligned with program strategy
- **Corporate partnerships** – Mission-aligned sponsorships and matching programs
- **Community fundraising** – Peer-to-peer and event-based giving from your community



### KEY PRINCIPLE

Sustainable fundraising is not about raising more once – it is about building systems that make giving easy, meaningful, and continuous.



FundThrive by MentisSoft gives schools a centralized view of every campaign's outcomes – making it easy to pull together impact reports, track donation totals by program, and share meaningful results with your donor community.

# The Human Side of Fundraising

There is a meaningful difference between communicating with donors and building relationships with them. High-retention organizations treat stewardship not as a post-donation formality, but as an ongoing commitment.

## Why Storytelling Works

A statistic about meals served reaches the mind. A story about the family who received those meals reaches the heart. The most effective impact communication shares three qualities:

- **Real outcomes** – Specific, verifiable results rather than vague claims
- **Transparency** – Providing honest visibility into outcomes, including what worked, what didn't, and how donor contributions created measurable impact.
- **Ongoing updates** – Impact shared over time, not just at the point of donation



### KEY PRINCIPLE

People may support causes, but they stay connected to stories and the evidence of real impact."



FundThrive by MentisSoft gives schools a centralized view of every campaign's outcomes – making it easy to pull together impact reports, track donation totals by program, and share meaningful results with your donor community.

# Meeting Donors Where They Are

Donors increasingly discover, evaluate, and support nonprofits through digital channels. A difficult donation process or a giving form that doesn't work on mobile creates friction and friction costs donations.



## Multi-Channel Engagement

- **Email** – Highest-ROI channel for personalized updates and renewal asks
- **Social media** – Builds community, extends reach, and surfaces new donors
- **Events** – Create belonging and deepen commitment
- **Online campaigns** – Clear goals and progress visibility create urgency and momentum

## WHERE TO START

Before investing in new tools, audit what you already track. Many organizations collect more data than they use. The highest-value improvements often come from using existing information more consistently.



# Creating Predictable Fundraising Growth

A monthly donor giving \$25 per month contributes \$300 annually. Over several years of continued giving, their total value often exceeds that of a major one-time donor. More importantly, monthly donors are far more predictable.



## What Makes Monthly Giving Programs Work

- A clear, friction-free sign-up process with multiple giving levels
- A dedicated welcome sequence that reinforces the donor's decision
- Regular, brief impact updates that tie giving to outcomes
- An annual acknowledgment of their cumulative contribution

## Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Treating monthly donors the same as one-time givers in communications
- Over-communicating with frequent appeals after they've already committed
- Poor payment failure handling – losing donors to avoidable card declines



"A well-run recurring giving program is a community of your most committed supporters – and it deserves to be treated that way."

# Strong Systems Support Sustainable Giving

Many nonprofits operate with a patchwork of tools and manual workflows put in place under budget constraints and never revisited. Over time, this creates hidden costs: staff time on data entry rather than donor relationships, errors that damage trust, and reporting that takes days instead of hours.

## The Role of Technology

Technology works best when it supports a clear strategy rather than substituting for one. The most useful questions when evaluating tools:

- Does this eliminate a manual process?
- Does this improve the donor experience?
- Does this help us make better decisions?

## OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY UNLOCKS

Faster donor acknowledgment · Better segmentation · Timely lapsed-donor outreach · Accurate board reporting · More staff time for relationship-building



# Building Resilient Organizations




## Emerging Trends in Fundraising

- Personalized engagement – Donors expect communication tailored to their history and interests
- Digital-first journeys – From discovery to giving to stewardship, more of the relationship happens online
- Community-driven giving – Peer-to-peer programs, donor communities, and ambassador models are growing
- Data-informed decisions – Organizations using data to guide strategy consistently outperform those that don't

## What Sustainable Organizations Do Differently

- They treat donor relationships as their most important long-term asset
- They invest in systems and processes before those become urgent
- They measure retention, lifetime value, and mission alignment – not just totals
- They communicate consistently, not only during fundraising periods



"Organizations that build trust, transparency, and long-term donor engagement are better positioned for sustainable growth – regardless of economic conditions."

# Sustainable Fundraising Is Built Over Time

The shift toward sustainable fundraising isn't a single decision – it's a series of practices and investments that compound over time. Organizations making this shift today are building resilience that will define their capacity for impact for years to come.

## Key Takeaways

- Sustainable fundraising is relationship-driven, not campaign-driven
- Donor trust is a long-term asset built through consistency and transparency
- Retention delivers greater return than acquisition for most organizations
- Recurring giving creates the revenue predictability that enables planning
- Operational strength enables better fundraising – not the other way around
- Technology should serve strategy, not substitute for it



## A CLOSING NOTE

Forward-thinking nonprofits are increasingly adopting smarter operational and fundraising practices to strengthen donor engagement and long-term sustainability. The organizations that prioritize both relationship quality and operational excellence are best positioned for the decade ahead.

### Source:

- 5× more expensive to acquire a new donor than to retain one: <https://www.keela.co/blog/donor-retention>
- 40–45% of repeat donors go on to become long-term supporters. <https://afpglobal.org/FundraisingEffectivenessProject>
- 80% average annual retention rate for monthly donors <https://lfgandme.com/monthly-giving-playbook/>
- A donor giving for three or more consecutive years is worth multiples of a one-time contributor <https://giddingsconsulting.com/blog/donor-retention-strategies-guide/>
- Monthly donors are far more predictable: <https://lfgandme.com/monthly-giving-playbook/>

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