Alliance Guide to Fundraising

Part Five: Online Fundraising

Alliance for Biking & Walking

July 2014

Alliance Guide to Fundraising Series

1 Creating and Implementing an Effective Fundraising Plan

2 Anatomy of a Winning Proposal

3 Finding Local Funding Sources

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About this Series

Since 1996, the Alliance for Biking & Walking has worked to create, strengthen and unite bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organizations across North America. As agents of change on the ground, state and local advocates are transforming their communities into great places to walk and bike.

Securing and maintaining sustainable and diverse funding streams is a key component of a successful advocacy organization — and fundraising is a top interest among Alliance members. In order to share knowledge, best practices and real-world examples, the Alliance is creating this six-part Guide to Fundraising.

This guide serves as Part Five of the evolving series. As these guides are meant to be living documents, we invite your input and examples to strengthen and enhance these resources for all Alliance member organizations.

Please contact Brighid O'Keane, Deputy Director, with any insight or contributions for this or future guides in the fundraising series: **Brighid@BikeWalkAlliance.org**.

Acknowledgements

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Active Transportation Alliance
Bike Pittsburgh
BikeWalkKC
Cascade Bicycle Club
Consider Biking
Livable Streets Alliance
Living Streets Alliance
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San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Transportation Alternatives

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Brighid O'Keane, Lead Author
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Introduction

Even as we face overflowing inboxes and increasingly hectic online lives, nonprofits are dedicating more staff time to raising money online – and are seeing modest upticks in dollars raised. According to a benchmark study by M+R Strategic Services, 52 nonprofits saw a 14% increase in online giving from 2012 to 2013. Among large nonprofits, that jump was 17%.

But there is a downside: M+R's study showed that online giving for small nonprofits actually fell 3% in 2013.

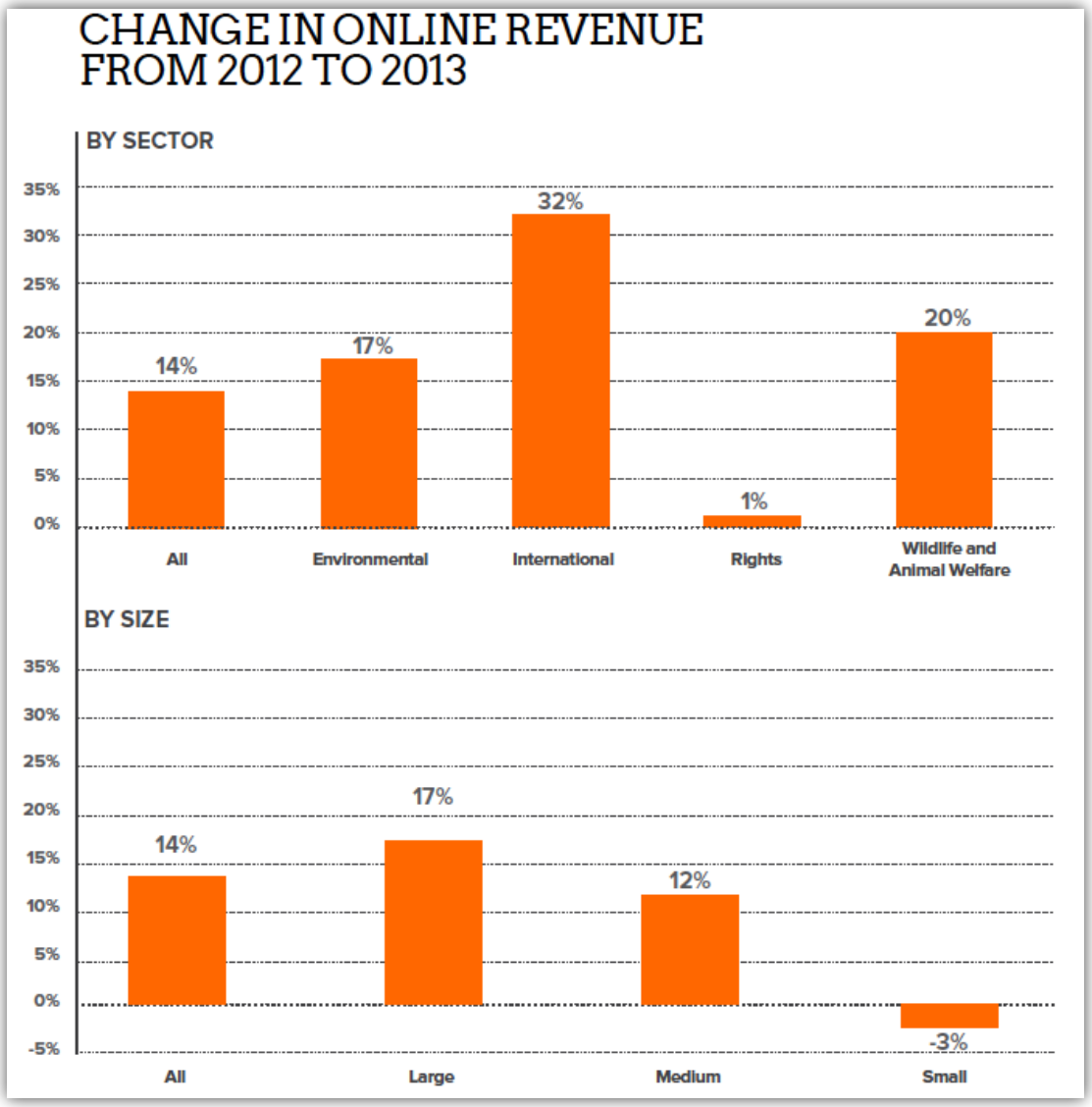


Image: M+R 2014 Benchmarks

M+R defined small organizations as groups with fewer than 100,000 email contacts.

View the full report online at **MRBenchmarks.com**.

While the M+R statistic shouldn't be cause for total despair – the study had a small sample size – it does highlight the need for smaller nonprofits to focus on maximizing efforts when it comes to online giving.

This fundraising guide attempts to help answer an important question: How can we set ourselves up for success with online fundraising?

This guide will cover the core elements of successful online fundraising: (1) website collateral; (2) emails that drive people to donate and keep them engaged between appeals; and (3) a social media presence to engage supporters. It will also discuss additional tools that that can be used to raise funds for your organization online.

Generational Giving

11% of U.S. adults attend more than 1 public meeting per year. 48% of adults have never attended a public meeting. 78% of U.S. citizens are online. 90% of U.S. households have a cell phone. In order to attract the next generation of donors, we must shift our outreach and appeals to a format that will reach young givers.

Internet users in 2014

Among adults, the % who use the internet, email, or access the internet via a mobile device

		Use internet
	All adults	87%
	Sex	
a	Men	87
b	Women	86
	Race/ethnicity*	
a	White	85
b	African-American	81
c	Hispanic	83
	Age group	
a	18-29	97[cd]
b	30-49	93[d]
c	50-64	88[d]
d	65+	57
	Education level	
a	High school grad or less	76
b	Some college	91[a]
c	College+	97[ab]
	Household income	
a	Less than $30,000/yr	77
b	$30,000-$49,999	85
c	$50,000-$74,999	93[ab]
d	$75,000+	99[ab]
	Community type	
a	Urban	88
b	Suburban	87
c	Rural	83

Source, Pew Research Center Internet Project Survey, January 9-12, 2014. N=1,006 adults.
Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., [a]) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g., age).
* The results for race/ethnicity are based off a combined sample from two weekly omnibus surveys, January 9-12 and January 23-26, 2014. The combined total n for these surveys was 2,008; n=1,421 for whites, n=197 for African-Americans, and n=236 for Hispanics.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Image: Pew Charitable Trusts

TIP: Collect age data from your members and donors to track giving trends. Test different strategies, track responses, and act accordingly!

According to research by Convio, while all generations still give directly to charities through direct mail, 53% of Gen Y and 37% of Gen X donors engage with their top charities through their website and social media. These younger donors describe themselves as more random and peer motivated in their giving, making social networks a critical component in cultivating supporters for your organization.

Generation	US population	Estimated % of the generation that give	Avg giving amount
Matures (born 1945 or earlier)	39 million	79%	$1066
Boomers (born 1946-1964)	78 million	67%	$901
Gen X (born 1965-1980)	62 million	58%	$796
Gen Y (born 1981-1991)	51 million	56%	$341

Source: Convio

How can you engage younger members and encourage them to donate to your organization?

Build an online constituency. There are many ways to attract new supporters, such as search advertising and collecting names on your web site. Always think of these new contacts as potential donors — if you engage them successfully.

TIP: Set up the infrastructure to work people up a ladder of engagement. An autoresponse email should always say "thank you, now take the next step."

Segment your marketing audiences rather than streamlining all your messages into one communication will help you directly reach younger generations of members and donors. If you collect age data, consider sending appeals asking for $10 to supporters in generation Y and younger.

Start off by asking people for as little as possible, and then work people up **the ladder of engagement**. First ask people to do small things — like adding their name to a list. Then, ask them for more high-bar asks, like donating or joining your organization. Follow up one action with another that involves a slightly higher commitment. Make sure you're constantly asking people to do things. Don't ask them too much, but be sure that they always know the next thing to do.

Facilitate giving among younger generations by **simplifying your donation tools** and making it as easy as possible to donate. Rather than suggesting four or five methods to donate (PayPal, credit card, snail mail, membership), just offer one clear stream. We recommend focusing on the credit card option.

Ask for **small-dollar donations** to help engage nontraditional donors – young people or first time donors who would be reluctant to give unless it was 3 or 5 dollars.

Websites

More and more donors are giving via online donations, but the majority are still giving offline *after visiting a nonprofit website.* Effective websites teach supporters about the work that you're doing, highlight successes, provide tools for involvement and opportunities to get involved both online and offline.

A study from M+R Strategic Services found that large nonprofits saw website visits increase by 16% in 2013. On average, 0.69% of website visitors made a gift, amounting to an average value of $0.60 per visit.

Websites increase your reach to stakeholders. Maximize the visibility of your organization online by having a simple, easy to read website that clearly states what your organization does, shows frequent updates about your work, and draws potential supporters into involvement. To maximize your website's visibility in search traffic, make sure the title of your website is closely related to your organization's name. Also, be sure to link to your website and your content pages from external sites.

Here are some tips for encouraging website giving, and examples from a scan of Alliance member organizations.

TIP: Engage supporters through advocacy campaigns. Share information and updates about those campaigns on your website. For the vast majority of your supporters, if you don't communicate about it, it didn't happen.

Have an easily accessible "Donate" option on all pages.

Make a clear ask for people to donate to your organization, rather than an implicit "Support Us," so donations aren't confused with membership or email list asks. This button should also remain visible on all parts of your organization's website.

TIP: Make sure to **update your membership and contact information with the Alliance**, so people will be directed to your page.

Cascade Bicycle Club has a Donate option on the menu bar separate from their Join option:

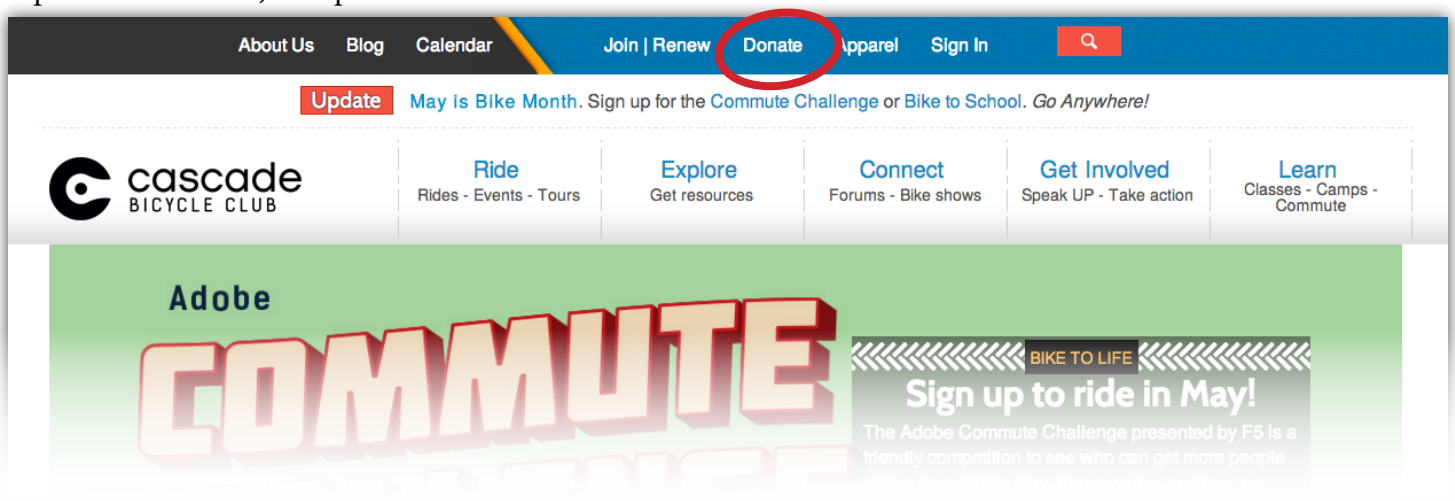


Image: Cascade Bicycle Club

The Active Transportation Alliance website includes a noticeable button on a header that remains consistent across every page of their website:

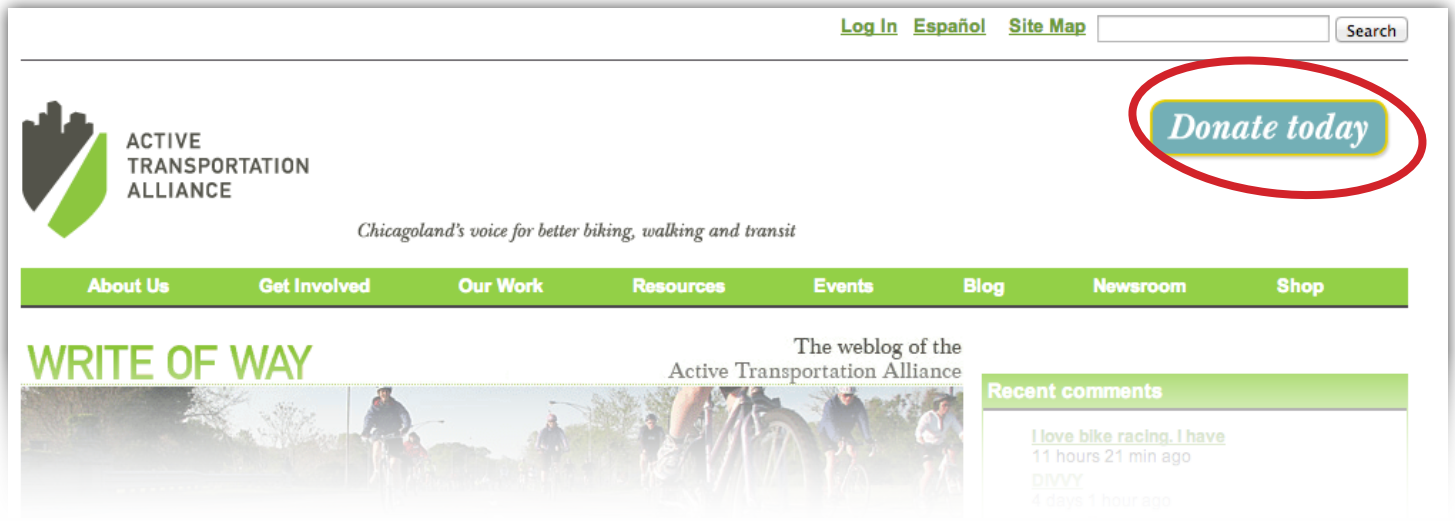


Image: Active Transportation Alliance

Strip down the donate page to its barest elements.

Collecting donations online isn't easy-peasy. The 2014 M+R Benchmarks study found that only 15% of visitors who make it to a nonprofit website's primary donation page actually made a donation. This number is called a conversion rate because it refers to the proportion of people who were converted from passive visitors into active supporters.

15% is pretty low, suggesting that it's already an uphill battle to convince people to give dollars to your organization online. To minimize the chance that a potential supporter will become distracted from donating, ensure that your donate page is as simple as possible. Successful donation pages have very little to distract people from the act of making a donation.

If possible, build donation pages that have templates that are much simpler than the basic skeleton of your website. It's also helpful to set donation pages to open in a new window, so that when visitors do close the donation page, they'll still return to your website.

For example, Transportation Alternatives' donation page has a much simpler wrapper than the main website. This helps to minimize distraction from donating.

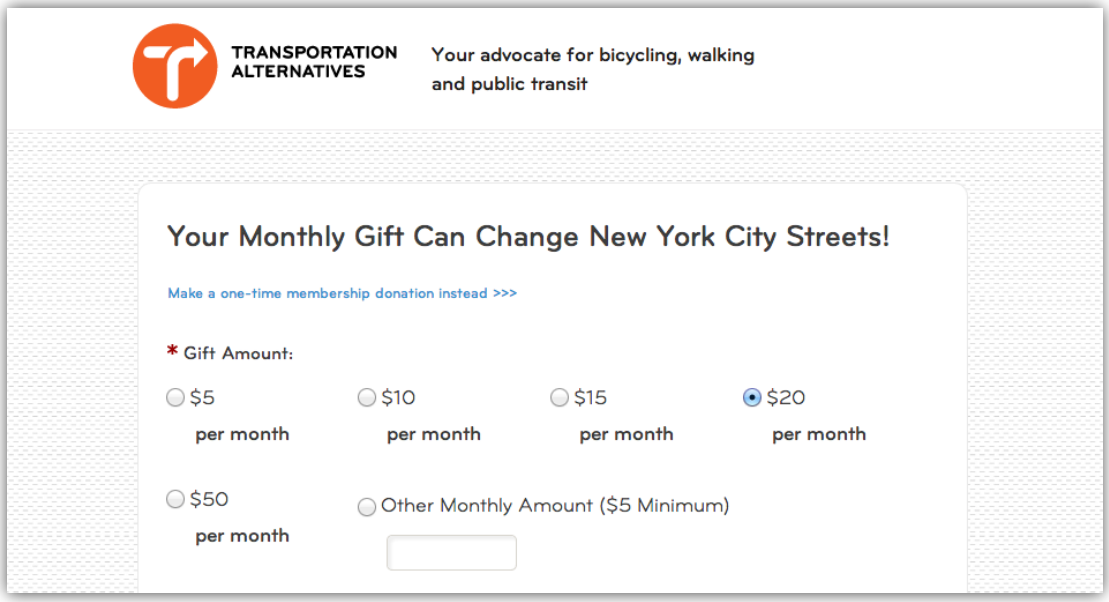


Image: Transportation Alternatives

Set a higher default amount.

Setting your donation page to automatically select an amount like $100 or $80 may encourage supporters to give more than they may have originally planned.

Consider the user experience throughout the entire online donation process.

Choose website tools that will enable you to control as much as possible about the online donation process. For a supporter, donating should be easy and they should feel gratified afterwards.

Consider implementing the following:

- **Get rid of unnecessary fields on donation forms.** Donation pages should be simple and short – more fields can dissuade donors.
- **Redirect donors to a thank-you page.** After most people donate, they look for recognition that their transaction was successful and appreciated. Set your donation page to direct donors to a page that gives a heartfelt thank you – as well as an appreciation for their contribution. Also on this page, encourage donors to take a follow-up action.

- **Give donors a next step.** A donation should be the beginning – not the end – of your organization's relationship with a supporter. After they give, suggest a next step: take an action, volunteer, share something on Facebook, register for an event.
- **Set up automatic thank-you emails that double as receipts.** As soon as their donation is processed, a donor should have an email waiting in their inbox. An effective thank-you email is heartfelt, grateful, from a real person, and suggests a next step.
- **Track, track, track.** Set up your website analytics to collect information about where donors are coming from, how long supporters stay on various pages, and what pages they visit. Track metrics like conversion rate and bounce rate.

Let's look at Transportation Alternatives' full donation process as an example. T.A.'s donation page opens in a new window, is on a simple template, and doesn't ask more than is necessary to collect the donation.

Users first arrive at a recurring monthly donation page and have the option to view a one-time donation page instead. I chose to make a $40 one-time donation on this page (but note that the higher $80 option is pre-selected):

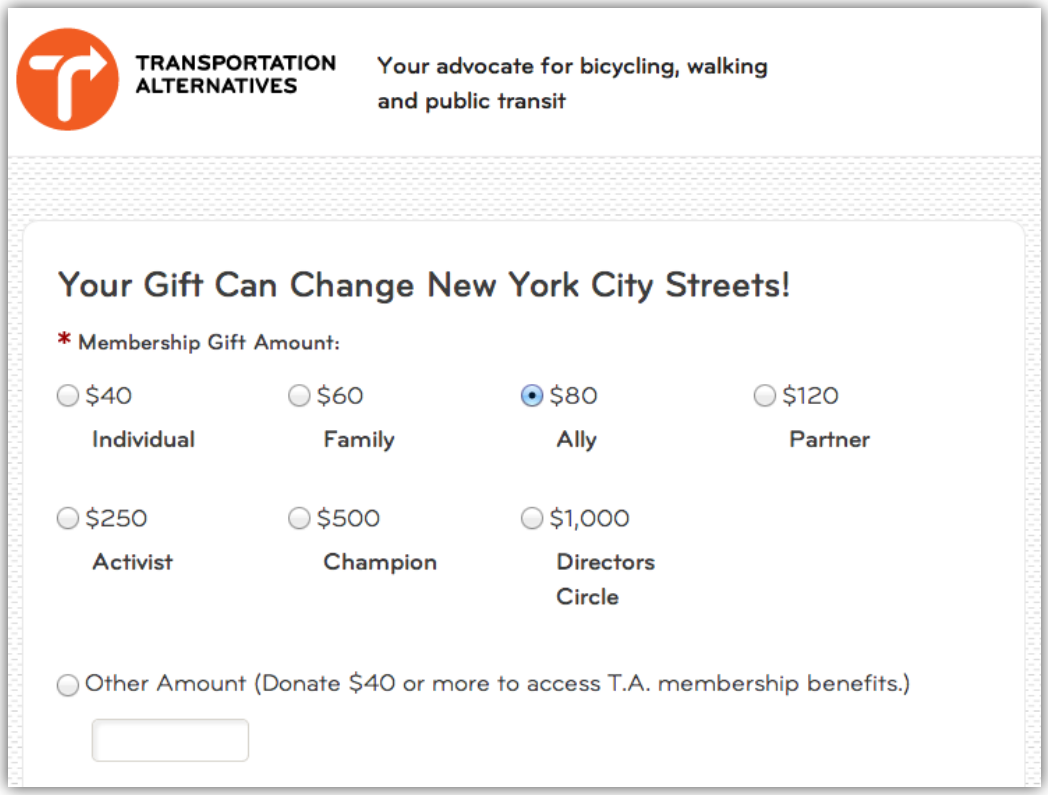
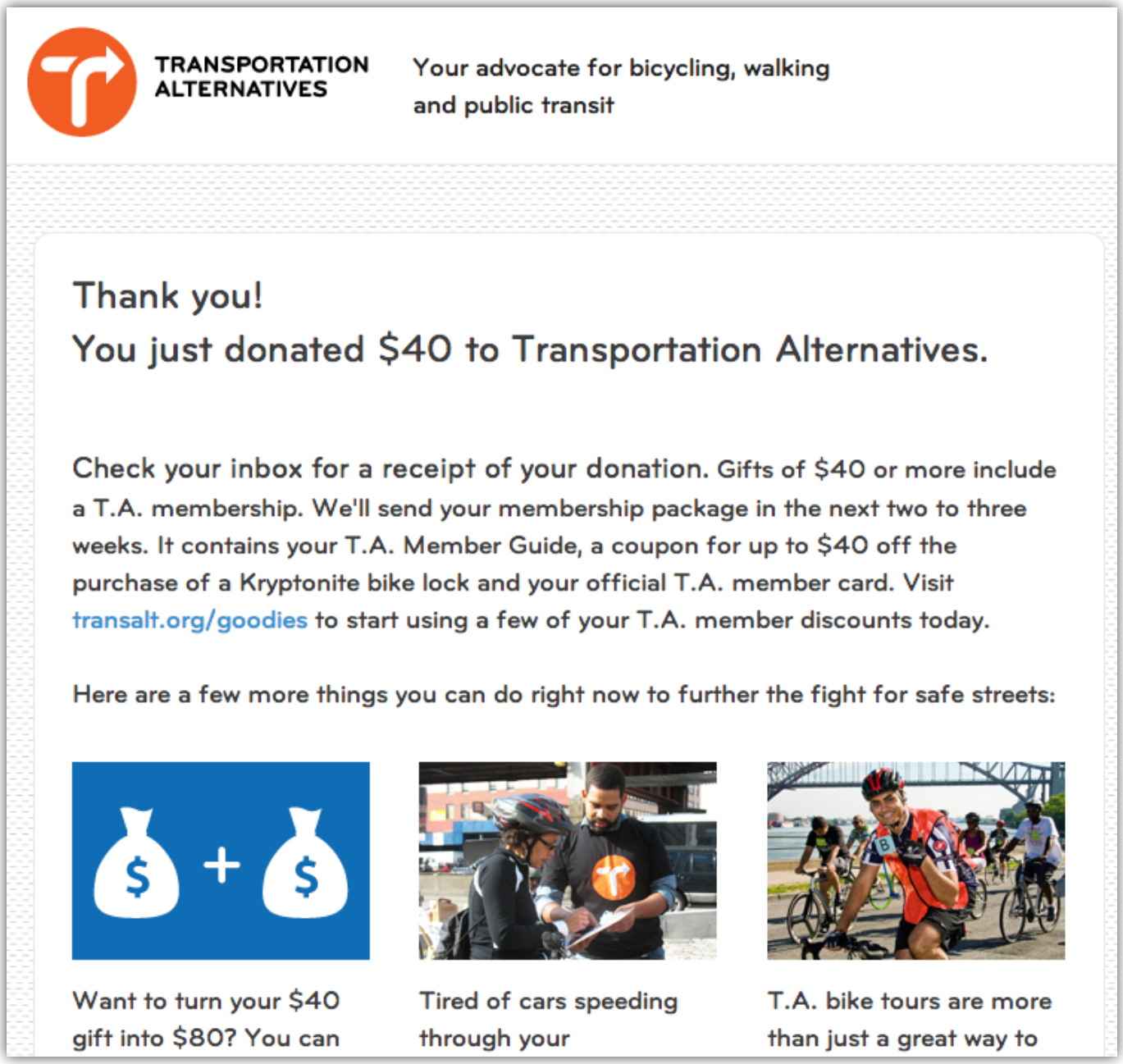


Image: Transportation Alternatives

After donating, a supporter is redirected to a thank-you page, where they are encouraged to take another action. TA encourages donors to seek an employer match, get involved in an activist committee, or register for an event:



TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Your advocate for bicycling, walking and public transit

Thank you!
You just donated $40 to Transportation Alternatives.

Check your inbox for a receipt of your donation. Gifts of $40 or more include a T.A. membership. We'll send your membership package in the next two to three weeks. It contains your T.A. Member Guide, a coupon for up to $40 off the purchase of a Kryptonite bike lock and your official T.A. member card. Visit transalt.org/goodies to start using a few of your T.A. member discounts today.

Here are a few more things you can do right now to further the fight for safe streets:

Want to turn your $40 gift into $80? You can

Tired of cars speeding through your

T.A. bike tours are more than just a great way to

Image: Transportation Alternatives

TA donors also receive an automatic email with information about their donation, a heartfelt thank-you note from their executive director, and encouragement to take another action.

T.A. Just Got a Little Stronger -- Thanks to You! Inbox x

Paul Steely White, Transportation Alternatives membership@transalt.org via mta-c3poolno 3:25 PM (5 minutes ago)
to mlhall

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

May 9, 2014

Dear Mary Lauran,

You make all of our work possible. Thank you!

When you make a donation, sign a petition, ride in a T.A. bike tour, attend a T.A. event or an activist committee meeting, you're supporting local activists who fight tirelessly to improve New York City streets. You have a direct impact on issues that matter to New Yorkers across the city.

Look out for a thank you letter from T.A. in the next two to three weeks. If you donated $40 or more, the letter will also include your official T.A member guide, membership card and a coupon for up to $40 off on the purchase of a Kryptonite bike lock. You can use your T.A. membership card to access deals and discounts at hundreds of New York City retailers. T.A. members save big on bike repairs, clothing, accessories, food, rock climbing and much more! Find out more at **transalt.org/goodies**.

Every day we're winning the fight to make New York City's streets safer, healthier and more sustainable -- and it's all because of you. Every action you take makes T.A. stronger.

MATCH YOUR GIFT | JOIN THE ACTIVISTS | RIDE A TOUR

Image: Transportation Alternatives

Consider bundling donations with membership

There doesn't have to be a firm line between one-off donations and memberships. If somebody donates the cost of membership or greater, consider automatically granting membership privileges.

Encourage recurring donations

Monthly donations are great ways for committed supporters to ensure regular monthly support for your organization. M+R found that monthly giving accounted for 16% of nonprofits' online revenue in 2013. Consider finding an easy way for donors to give monthly – and then encourage supporters to do so!

The Livable Streets Alliance gives the option to give one-time or recurring donations and clearly explains the terms for monthly donations.

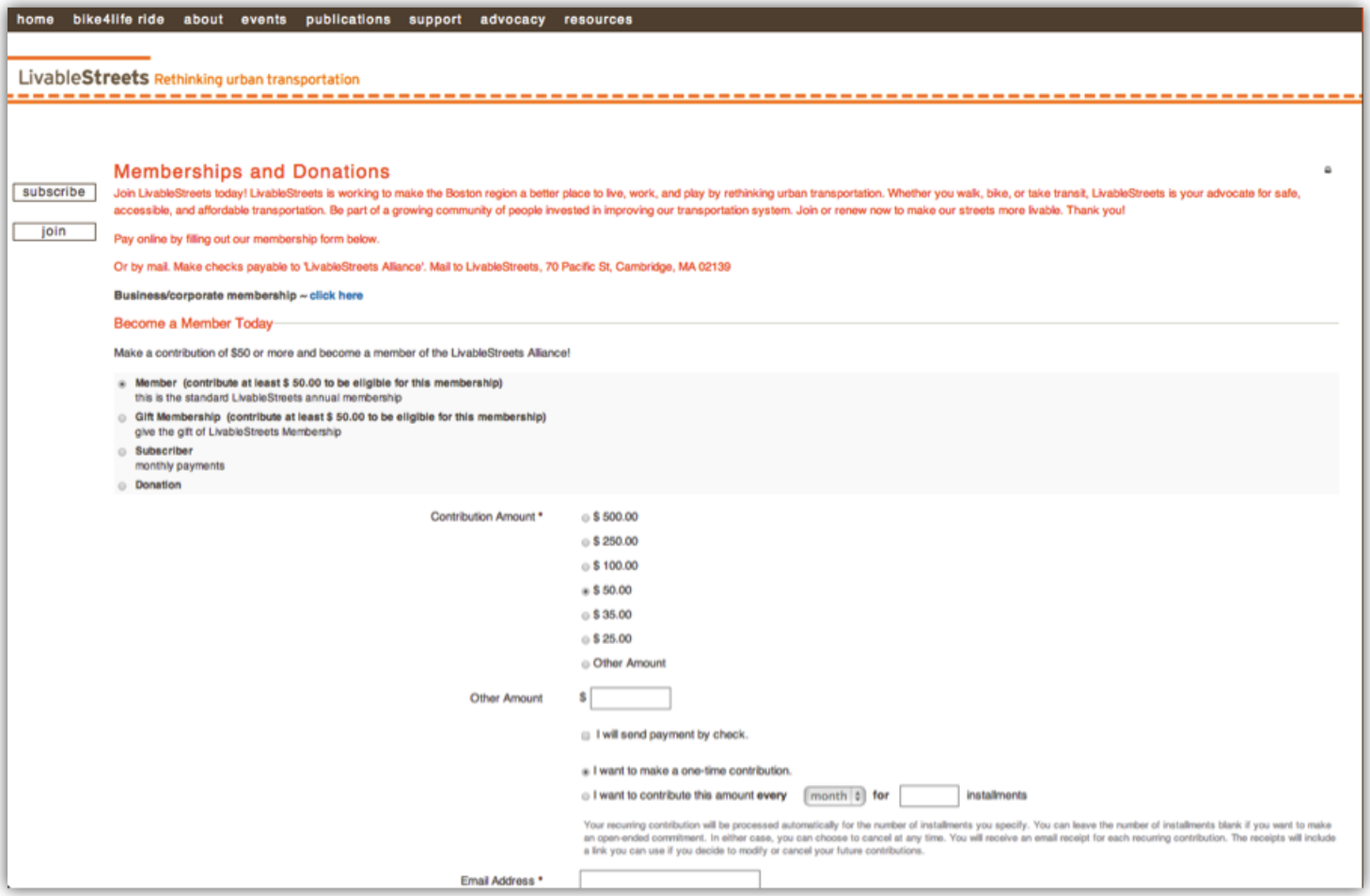


Image: LivableStreets Alliance

Consider a splash page during major campaigns

A pop-up window on your homepage around major campaigns can help boost donations.

Consider Biking implemented this on their page:

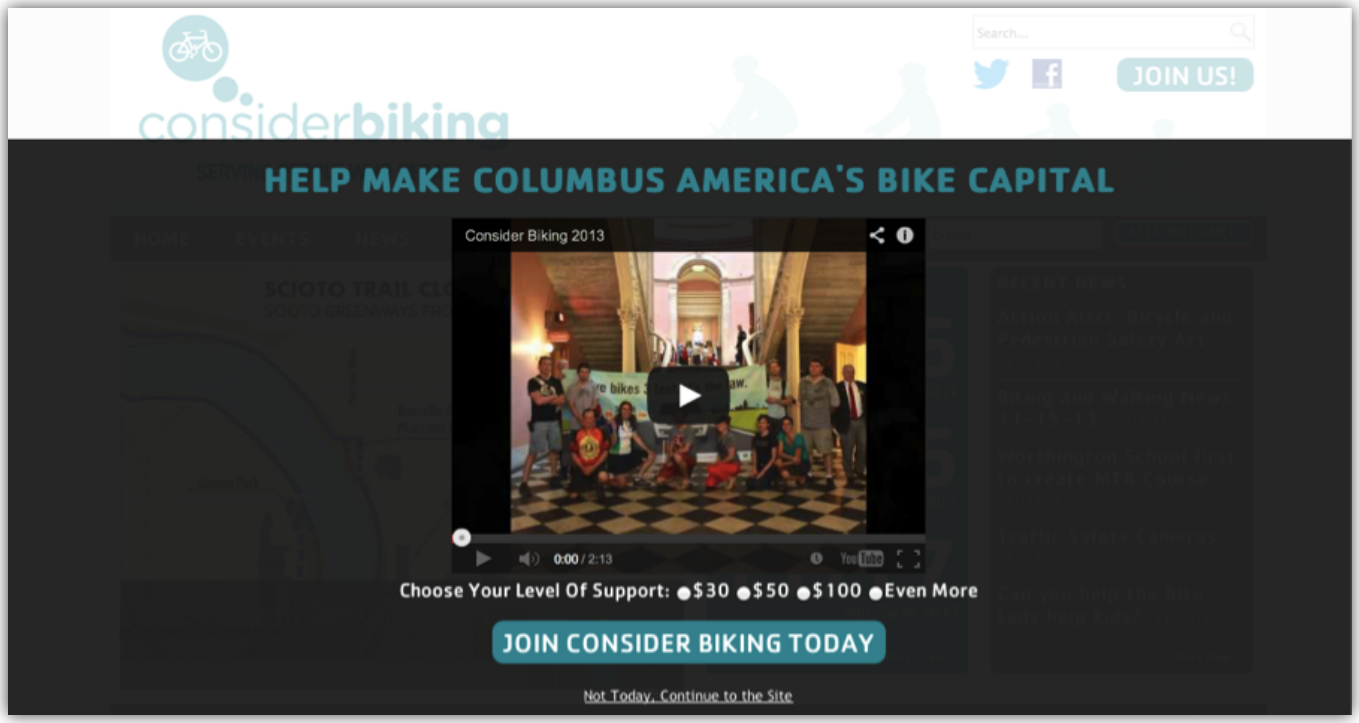


Image: Consider Biking

Build your site for mobile

According to a January 2014 Pew poll, 58% of U.S. adults have smartphones. As more people use mobile devices rather than desktop computers to check their email, it's increasingly important to send messages that are optimized for email and desktop viewing and giving.

You should assume that people will visit your website from their phones. Browsing on a small screen will be difficult with content-heavy, full-scale sites. According to Convio's **"A Guide to the Mobile Web,"** you should consider creating a mobile site if 5% of total website traffic comes from mobile operating systems, or if you're already redesigning your site. See their Guide for more tips of developing a mobile strategy and setting up a mobile site.

Remember to always test your email messages on a smartphone, to make sure they are easily navigated by mobile devices.

TIP: To get a sense of how a responsive design differs on a desktop and on a mobile device or tablet, visit **CAF America's website**. If you're on a desktop computer, shrink your browser window and notice how the layout changes accordingly.

Application Service Providers

An Application Service Provider (ASP) will rent you a credit card processing tool for a monthly fee and a per-gift fee. At the very least, you'll want a service that can process one-time gifts, permit recurring monthly or quarterly donations, handle thank you gifts, send an email receipt to the donor, and allow you to download donor data to integrate into your in-house database.

Some options used by Alliance members include: **NetworkForGood**; **Convio**; **Razoo**; **Click & Pledge**; **CiviCRM** (open source); and **BrainTree**. **PayPal** has gotten a lot better thanks to their experience with e-commerce.

Always be fundraising. Have a large donate button on every piece of communication you put out, keep a Square in your pockets so that you're always available to take money on-site, and collect your supporters email addresses at all of your organization's events.

Email

Email is an essential part of your organization's marketing. It's a relatively cheap method of communication with potentially high returns for engagement and fundraising.

For the nonprofits in M+R's study, about 33% of online fundraising revenue came from email. On average, nonprofits saw $17 in revenue for every 1,000 fundraising emails delivered in inboxes.

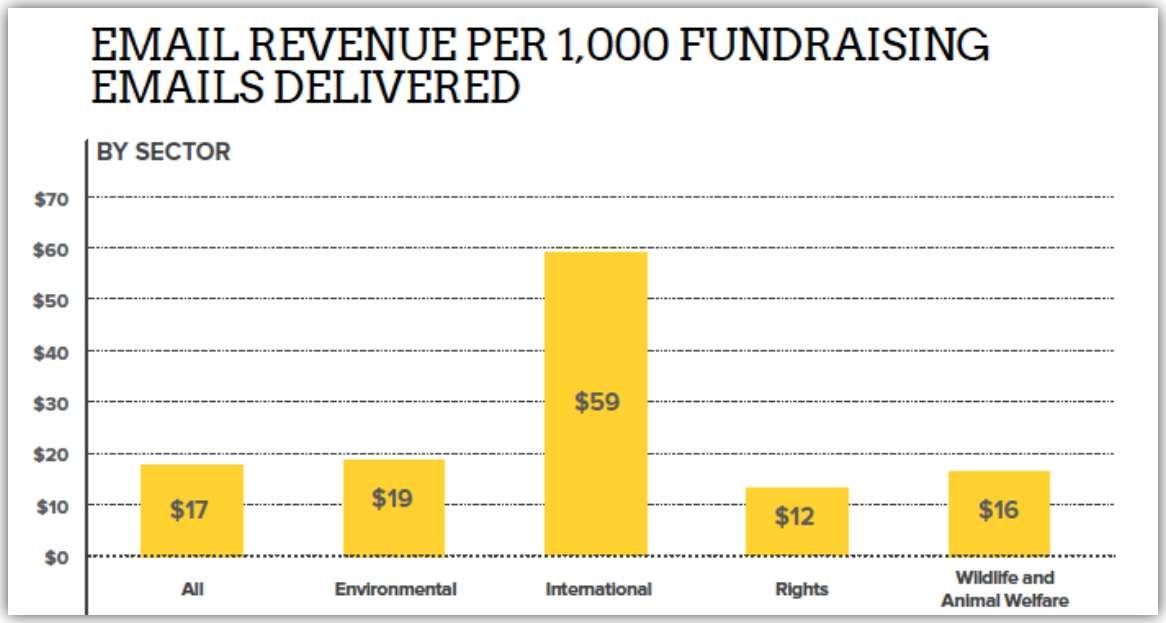


Image: M+R 2014 Benchmarks

That's not to say that email fundraising is easy. Larger online-savvy nonprofits often dedicate whole teams to email alone, and many pay big bucks for consultants to manage their email programs on top of that.

For many state and local biking and walking advocacy organizations, success in email fundraising is about doing the best we can, given limited staffing, time, and resources.

Know your churn

Email churn is an indicator of attrition – it tells you what percentage of people you lost due to unsubscribes, bounces, or inactive email addresses.

As the manager of an email program, it's important to take steps to reduce churn on your list.

Here are a few things you can do to keep your emails getting to the right place:

- **Remove emails that have bounced from your send list.** Some organizations with large email programs temporarily remove bounced emails, then try re-sending to them after some time. For smaller organizations, though, it's likely best to just remove them.

- **Check the email inbox that receives automatic replies to your mass emails.** When you receive an auto-response that indicates a nonexistent or new email address, make the appropriate update in your email system.

- **Always include an "unsubscribe" link.** Legally, this link must continue to work for 30 days after you send your email.

- **Write great emails!** Sending emails that are interesting and consistent with your brand will keep people clicking.

Keep in mind, too, that organizations in M+R's study that sent more emails boasted lower churn rates. This could be for several reasons – more emails sent could mean fewer emails opened and therefore fewer opportunities to unsubscribe, or it could mean that people tend to stay engaged when a nonprofit messages them more often. Either way remain calm: there's no need to worry about scaring people off just because you send higher volumes of email.

Learn more about spam filters in **Mailchimp's guide to how to avoid spam filters**.

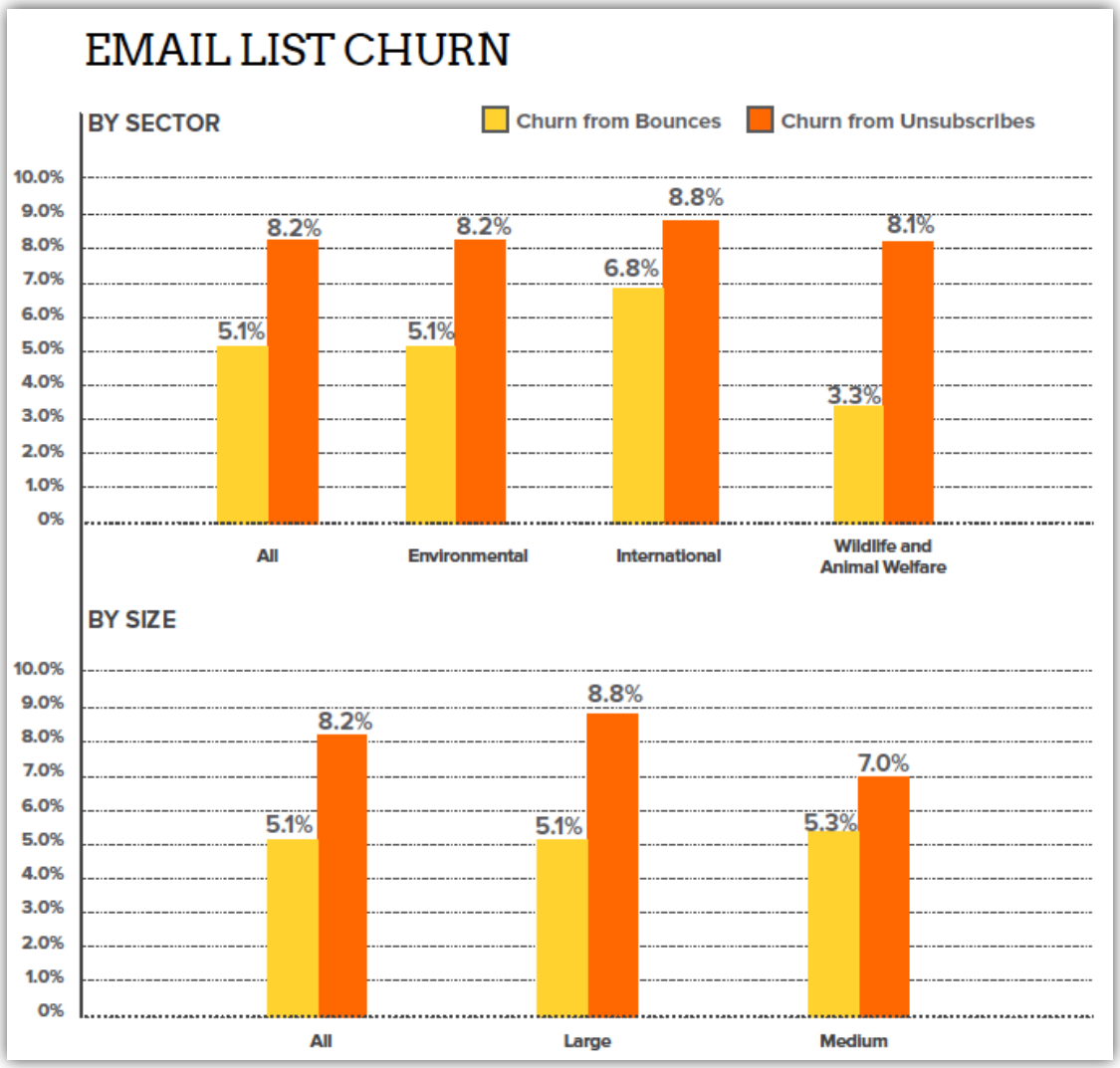


Image: M+R 2014 Benchmarks

Note: the M+R Benchmarks did not report list churn for small nonprofits because the sample size was too small.

Grow your list

Of course, your organization can't send an email to a supporter until they've signed up to receive your messages. Your capacity to raise money via email will be directly dependent upon your ability to bring potential donors into your email program. So a goal to increase online giving via email should accompany goals to grow your email list.

Here are a few things to consider when defining a list growth strategy.

- **Give people reasons to sign up.** Run petitions for advocacy campaigns, and make sure that those supporters also receive your organization's general emails. You can also run petitions for simpler campaigns that are primarily focused on list growth.

- **Activate key moments.** When big moments roll around – like a major victory or threat, a news story, or a big event – use the opportunity to signify their interest by signing up for a list or petition.

- **Make it easy to sign up.** Email sign-up pages should be visually simple, direct, and have few blank fields.

Integrate fundraising into everything you do. Even on non-donation appeals, make sure there's a donation link at the bottom of the email. Schedule content regularly that's related to fundraising.

How to write great emails

Great email fundraising can't happen without great email content, design, and execution.

Here are some tips from Blue State Digital on how to make your emails stand out:

1. Spend time thinking about your **subject lines**. Think about the donor experience: many organizations are tempted to write gimmicky subject lines, but may not entice the reader to donate. If your list is large enough, A/B test your subject lines for effectiveness.

2. Use testimonials, quotes and first-person stories to **move hearts and minds**.

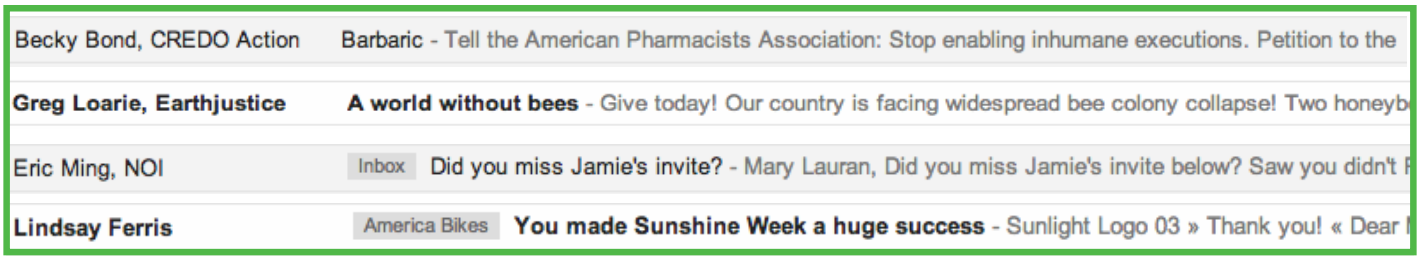
3. Make your asks **meaningful and urgent**, and make your stories relevant and relatable to your asks.

It's easy to insert preview text that shows up in an inbox preview but remains invisible in an opened message. On most email providers, you can insert size 0 text in an HTML header. For example:

Preview text goes here

4. Make sure to check **the small but important elements** of your email before sending it. Graphic alt-text, special characters, formatting issues and missing links can distract your reader and make it harder or them to take action. Consider including preview text so that viewers are enticed by the first few lines of an email in their inbox.

5. In order to track the success of your emails and your program, make sure to **source all links** so actions and dollars can be attributed back to individual sends.



A collection of subject and preview lines from an Alliance staff member's inbox. Which would you open?

Images: Mary Lauran Hall

To appeal to a younger generation of donors, think about the **design and packaging**. There should always be a clear call to action in your emails. Show the reader how to take the next step to support your organization and their values. Make it stand out in its own paragraph, bold in, link it to your donation page on the website, use a colorful icon or "Donate Now" button.

If your list is large enough to run A/B tests (at least 1,000 contacts), consider testing elements like subject line, sender, wording, and length.

Here are some additional tips for writing good nonprofit emails.

1. **Address your reader directly as "you."** To the extent that you can, make the reader the hero. Personalize your email so that it directly addresses the recipient. What can your supporter do to make a difference on an issue that they care about?

2. **Always include a theory of change and a call to action.** What do you want your supporter to do? How will their action affect the broader change they want to see? How will they be making a difference? There should always be a next step and a clear reason for doing so.

Learn more about Theory of Change from the New Organizing Institute in their **Online Fundraising training**.

3. **Keep it short … or not.** Most emails no more than 700-800 words, and some are much shorter. That said, some lists respond well to longer emails with more detailed explanations. A good reason to test your list! See page 24 for an example of a long email that performed well.

4. **Keep it skimmable.** Consider what a reader will see if they skim your email in just a few seconds. Bold the most important parts. Make your main points come through even if your supporter only reads the parts that stand out.

5. **Keep it simple.** Focus on one topic only, especially in an appeal. At most, keep your email focused to no more than three topics.

6. **Design your emails for easy preview.** Think about what the message will look like in a person's inbox, before they even click to open. Consider taking advantage of "the curiosity gap" – supplying just enough interesting information to entice people to click.

7. **Write in a friendly tone,** rather than using academic or formal prose.

8. **Make your emails visually appealing**. Include photographs and images that illustrate your point. Make visually appealing buttons for the actions you want people to take. An email shouldn't be only images, though – spam filters have a hard time reading images, so your messages may be more likely to remain undelivered if your emails have no text.

9. **Use a one-column template.** Many people now open emails on their phones, making multi-column layouts increasingly obscure.

10. **Begin and end with your single ask.** The one thing you want your supporter to do should be the main focus of your email. Begin and end with your ask.

How much to send?

If your organization currently only sends newsletters and email appeals, consider broadening your email program. M+R found that the average nonprofit sent **4.1 messages per month per subscriber** – many more than the single monthly email newsletter that many bike/walk advocacy organizations send.

Interestingly, M+R found a negative correlation between email volume and the overall email unsubscribe rate. In other words, nonprofits in M+R's study that sent more emails tended to see lower abandonment. Many people will remain subscribed to a nonprofit's list and will activate at key times even if they don't open all emails.

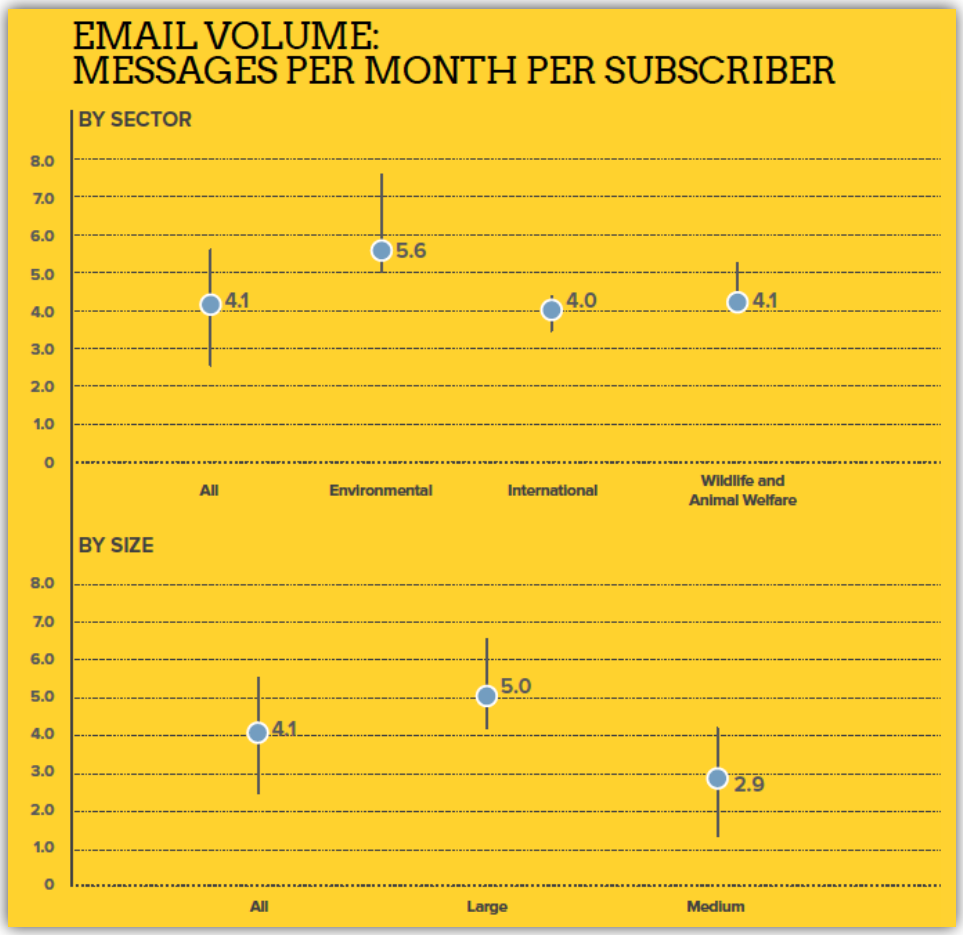


Image: M+R 2014 Benchmarks

It can be helpful to think about sending messages from different types of voices, with various different "asks," and with updates on issues that are important to your supporter base.

For more information on successful email marketing, see **Network for Good's "Nonprofit Email Marketing Guide."**

See Appendix I and II for email and newsletter templates.

See the next page from a successful year-end fundraising email from the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

Image: BikeWalkKC

An example donate button from BikeWalkKC.

Dear biking friends,

Rather than sending you the traditional year-end plea for funds—which is usually a recap of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association's 2013 work accompanied by a picture of cute kids on bikes—I'm writing to you today with a list of ideas.

WABA has been recognized by major news outlets and organizations for conducting some of the most innovative work in the nation to increase bicycling. With your support, we will continue our efforts to transform this region into one that is truly built for bicycling.

Your membership dues fund our general advocacy, which includes actions like attending public meetings, working with public officials and decision-makers, testifying at hearings and commenting on plans, and mobilizing grassroots support for biking. But, if we hope to continue to accelerate the D.C. region's biking movement and the accompanying improvements for people who bike in this region, we must be able to go beyond traditional advocacy and continue to develop, fund, and implement innovative programs that expand and improve bicycling.

Here, we are presenting you with a list of projects that WABA has designed and wants to undertake in 2014—but lacks funding to complete. The following four projects were cut during this year's annual work-planning and budget deliberations. Because we are efficient in our work and are blessed with the support of so many volunteers, these projects can be done for $30,000. But the only way we can do this work is if you help us pay for it.

Make a year-end donation to WABA to make bicycling in the D.C. region better.

This fundraising email from the **Washington Area Bicyclist Association** performed particularly well.
See the full email online here.

Social Media

Social media has become an essential element of nonprofit marketing and a powerful tool for spreading the word about causes.

Social medial allows you to raise awareness about your organization, engage with a community of stakeholders, drive traffic to your website and donation pages and enable grassroots movement. From using Facebook to drive event registration to demonstrating support to elected officials on Twitter, biking and walking advocates are increasingly taking advantage of social networking to boost visibility for more walkable, bikeable neighborhoods.

M+R's Benchmark study found that a little less than half of online revenue came from email. The rest came from online sources, which could include social media spread, website visits, and fundraising campaign pages.

Learn more about social media for biking and walking advocacy on these webinars from the Alliance for Biking & Walking and the League of American Bicyclists:

- Social Media as an Advocacy Tool
- Facebook 101
- Twitter 101
- Twitter for Media Relations
- Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, & Vine 101

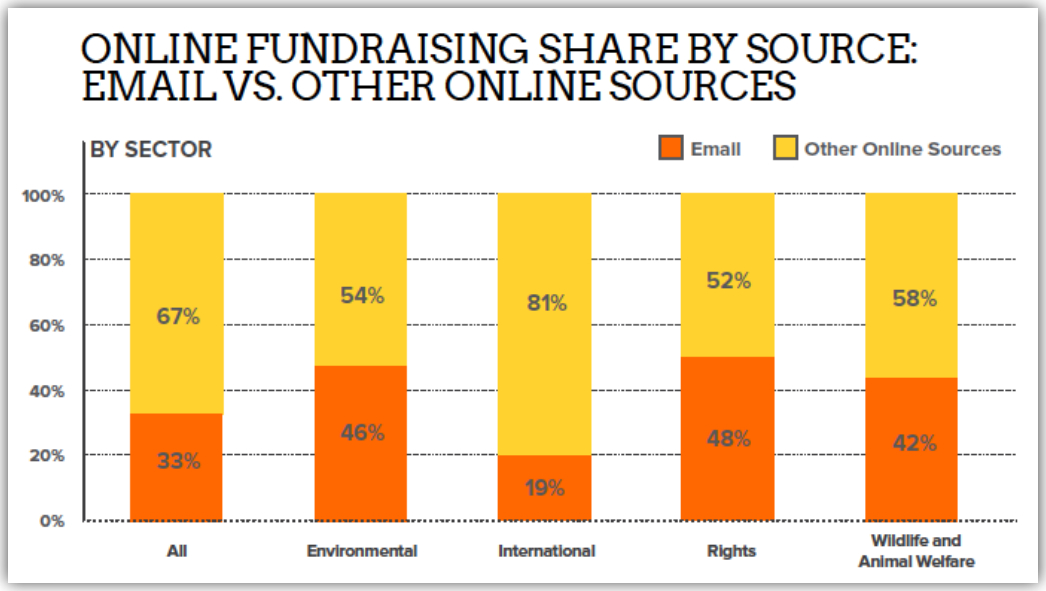


Image: M+R 2014 Benchmarks

How can you raise funds through social media?

- Create **blog posts** to share engaging information about your organization and your issue area. Don't be afraid to work fundraising asks into your content.

- **Maintain a Twitter presence with content about your causes.** Don't be afraid to send out fundraising messages on Twitter, too.

- Use your **Facebook page** to share links to content relevant to your organization's work. Take advantage of the **curiosity gap**.

- Integrate a **campaign donation form on your Facebook page** or create a **custom Facebook application** that integrates with your donation system and allows for evergreen donation opportunities.

- Develop content in advance for supporters to **share and post** on their own social networks. This can help drive donations around seasonal campaigns and help get the word out to your supporters' networks.

Online audiences have shorter attention spans, but circulate your message: keep it simple and positive. For more information on developing a social media strategy, read **"Going Social: Tapping into Social Media for Nonprofit Success" by Convio**.

You can build links for supporters to click to easily share a link on Facebook or to tweet a certain message.

Free online tools like **ShareCodeGenerator.com** make it easy to build links that supporters can click to share content.

Crowdfunding

Crowdsourcing is people creating real products, services and urban spaces together. In 2011, the citizens of Tuscaloosa, AL used MindMixer to share their best ideas on what their city could become after the destruction caused by tornados. The end result was the **Tuscaloosa Forward Strategic Community Plan**. Adopted as a policy document by the City, this plan includes many biking and walking elements as key components in the city's redevelopment.

Crowdfunding uses the same methods of crowdsourcing, but to enable people to fund projects and services they want. It works on the premise that many small gifts can add up to meet larger needs. Kickstarter.org and IndieGoGo.org are successful examples of crowdfunding for creative projects, but there has been a recent rise of using these same tools to raise money for civic projects. Living Streets Alliance **used Kickstarter** to raise funds needed for Cyclovia Tucson. Bike Pittsburgh **used IndieGoGo** to raise money for their Drive with Care advertising campaign.

To raise money for a small infrastructure project, advocates may want to consider using **Neighbor.ly**. This platform connects projects to alternative funding sources and the local match for federal projects. It was born out of countless meetings with cities and boards who supported great infrastructure ideas up until the point when they had to pay for them. The tool allows citizens to put money towards projects they really believe in and get involved in supporting great civic projects.

Crowdfunding tools should be used to show public support for certain projects, but should NOT replace local agencies' responsibility to pay for biking and walking projects. Team up with a partner like Neighbor.ly and avoid using your organization's limited resources to raise private funds to pay for projects that cities are accountable for, instead of using those valuable dollars for your organization's own growth, capacity, and ability to leverage more public dollars.

BikeWalkKC has worked very closely with Neighbor.ly as a platform to raise civic funding donations. The city grew public support and raised funds for the first 12 stations of the city's bike sharing program using Neighbor.ly.

Top tips for crowdfunding:

From **"Crowdfunding: The New Wave of Online Grassroots Fundraising," by Emily Nepon**:

1. Plan your messaging and timeline.
2. Choose a platform that will be easy to update.
3. Be strategic and realistic as you set goals and deadlines.
4. Videos help.
5. Tell a personal story.
6. Offer perks and incentives, such as matching gifts or free t-shirts.
7. Personal outreach is key. Appeal to your personal contacts and post to social networks.
8. Send personal thank you notes.

During a crowdfunding process, be your project's champion. The most successful projects have great advocates who are savvy enough to push to their networks and spread the message. A park board that is lax about fundraising might think that because a proj-

Fundraising Videos

Videos can be a very useful tool in inspiring donors to support your organization. Successful videos can be shared through social networks that expose your organization to a wider audience of stakeholders and supporters.

Videos should supplement your advocacy efforts and should be used strategically for specific causes. If you have the budget for a video, consider using it to leverage an annual fundraising appeal, member drive, a welcome message to new supporters or for high-profile campaigns. Use video to showcase the work that you do through a variety of voices – your Executive Director, staff, board, members, volunteers, etc.

Keep your video short (about 3 minutes or less) and share it widely. Post it on YouTube or Vimeo, embed it on your website, feature it in email messages, promote (and share) it via social media. People don't share fundraising websites; they share stories and the emotions that are created from them. Music and powerful images can help you appeal to the emotions of the viewer. And, remember to end with a call-to-action with an imbedded link or a simple URL to donate.

The **YouTube Nonprofit Program** can help your organization create a low-cost video.

Examples of videos used by Alliance member organizations:

- **"7th Street Bike Lane Campaign"** (Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition)
- **"Better Bikeways"** (Bike Pittsburgh)
- **"Connecting the City: Stephanie's Story"** (San Francisco Bicycle Coalition)
- **"Open Streets on State Street"** (Active Transportation Alliance)
- **"The Bronx Helpers Call for Safer Streets"** (Transportation Alternatives)

For more tips on video storytelling, read **"The Starter Guide to Nonprofit Video Storytelling,"** by CauseVox.

Tracking and Evaluating Results

Your supporters and donors are multichannel people. They don't just tune in on desktops smartphones; they also volunteer, advocate, participate, and champion your cause to others. Ensure that you have robust capabilities in place for creating and managing relationships via your website, email and social media channels.

Depending on your organization's goals and capacity, you may choose to track different things. Here are several metrics that may be helpful to track, and some ways to track them.

Email metrics

Track with: your email system (i.e. MailChimp, Constant Contact, etc)

- **List size:** The number of deliverable email addresses on email list.
- **List growth:** The change in your list's size over time.
- **Open rate:** The percentage of email recipients who opened an email.
- **Click rate:** The percentage of email recipients who clicked through on an email.
- **Unique clicks:** The number of people who clicked on any link in an email message.
- **Response rate:** the percentage of email recipients who took the main action requested by an email message.
- **List churn:** M+R defines this as "the number of subscribers who became unreachable in a 12-month period divided by the sum of the number of deliverable email addresses at the end of that period plus the number of subscribers who became unreachable during that period."

Website and donation metrics

Track with: your donation platform (i.e. PayPal, Razoo, Network For Good, Causes, etc); an analytics platform (i.e. Google Analytics); and spreadsheets (i.e. Excel; Google Docs)

- **Visitors per month:** The number of monthly unique visitors to your website.
- **Website donation conversion rate:** The number of donors to your website as a portion of website visitors.
- **Page conversion rate:** The percentage of page visitors who make a donation.
- **Average donation** and **median donation**

Social media metrics

Track with: Facebook, Twitter, and spreadsheets (i.e. Excel; Google Docs)

- **Facebook likes:** The number of people who have "liked" your organization's page on Facebook.
- **Facebook page growth:** The change in number of Facebook likes over time.
- **Twitter followers:** The number of people who follow your organization on Twitter.
- **Twitter follower growth:** The change in number of Twitter followers over time.

(Free) Metrics Tools

- **EdgeRank Checker** is a tool that helps you determine how effective your Facebook page is in reaching your followers
- **Facebook Insights** gives you access to active users, likes, comments and link traffic
- **Google Analytics** is the top metrics tool to let you know about your site traffic and marketing effectiveness
- **Klout** offers a daily summary of your organization's social media influence
- **SEMRush** shows you the keywords your blog or website ranks for vs. similar organizations
- **Twitalyzer** gives you information about your impact and influence
- **Woopra** is a web analytics tool that provides real-time data about how your users behave
- **YouTube Insight** is a self-service analytics and reporting tool that allows you to view detailed statistics about the audience for the videos that you upload to the site

Conclusion

Effective fundraising to support advocacy efforts is vitally important for a well-run advocacy organization. From running smart email campaigns to leveraging social media to employing new crowdfunding tools, Alliance organizations can and do use many methods and approaches to boost online fundraising.

Many elements of successful online fundraising are the same as any other method. Be clear in your message, practice making the ask (and make it often), and be consistent in your communications. Like all methods of fundraising, online fundraising is about relationships. Know your audience and focus your energy to what will motivate them and make it easy for them to donate.

It's important to remember that successful fundraising comes from a variety of approaches and methods. Online fundraising is a supplement to — not a replacement for — traditional fundraising practices.

Appendix I: Online Fundraising Worksheet (New Organizing Institute)

1. Build Your Email List
__ Collect email address through petitions, pledges, donations, tell a friend, social networking sites, and offline activities.
__ Partner with organizations that have a similar mission and do an email swap.

2. Know Your List
__ Where did people on your list come from? Why did they join?
__ Did people signup based because of a particular petition, cause, or general interest?
__ Segment your list: interests, donors v. non-donors, new donors v. reoccurring donors.

3. Tell Your Story
__ Use voices and personalities from your organization.
__ Be creative – and use both email and the web.
__ Ask supporters for their input and FOLLOW UP.
__ Share what's happening in the field.

4. Make Your Ask
__ It's not just about donating, it's about empowering & providing a way to take action.
__ Set goals and deadlines. Plan around key milestones.
__ Use personal stories as much as possible.
__ Be transparent. Tell your supporters what you want to do, what it's going to cost, and what change will result from their donation.
__ Start with a small ask (e.g., $10 or $25).

5. Maximize Your Website
__ Make it as easy as possible to donate and signup for email updates.
__ Content on your site should match your email campaign.

6. Track & Engage
__ Monitor your initiatives and track the progress (e.g., email open rate and click through rate, average donation, increase in donation amount, forward to a friend).
__ Keep the conversation going – provide updates/action items.
__ When doing A/B testing, test one thing at a time (e.g., subject line, sender, the ask).

7. Additional Fundraising Methods
__ Different options include: splash page (home page takeover); name the fundraising campaign; match two donors and introduce them; recurring donations; text to donate.

Appendix II: Basic Email Template (Blue State Digital)

From: A real person in your organization
Subject: Make it short and clever

%%FirstName(Friends)%% --

Your attention grabber: clever, funny, or scary. Just keep it short.

This paragraph is a summary of why you are sending this email -- an upcoming event, a need of some sort, just a reason for people to keep reading.

Here, you explain what you want people to do, what action you want them to take. You can take a paragraph or two. Don't be afraid to be blunt; people want you to get to the point.

Repeat your basic action here in even simpler language and hyperlink this text!

For the rest of the email, you can add supporting information. That includes things like:

> Blockquotes, which could be a few words from a supporter, explaining why people need to take the action you're recommending.

Or maybe a bulleted list of important facts and figures that support your action:

- Like this
- And this
- And even this

Just make sure to continue to broaden your explanation as to why taking an action will make such a difference.

Then, finally, repeat your basic action request, and always add a "naked" URL:

The URL (or link) to your action page

Sign off,

Name

Sender's Full Name
Organization

Image: Blue State Digital

References and Resources

- Alliance for Biking & Walking: **"Spearheading Your Online Fundraising Initiative"** (Mutual Aid Call)
- Alliance for Biking & Walking and League of American Bicyclists: **"Facebook 101"** (Webinar)
- Alliance for Biking & Walking and League of American Bicyclists: **"Social Media as a Bicycling Advocacy Tool"** (Webinar)
- Alliance for Biking & Walking and League of American Bicyclists: **"Twitter 101"** (Webinar)
- Blue State Digital: **"Top 5 Tips for Better Emails"**
- CauseVox: **"The Starter Guide to Nonprofit Video Storytelling"**
- Convio: **"A Guide to the Mobile Web"**
- Convio: **"Going Social: Tapping into Social Media for Nonprofit Success"**
- Convio: **"The Next Generation of American Giving"**
- Koné-Miller, Nzinga: **"Using Video in Your Online Campaigns"**
- M+R Strategic Services: **"2014 M+R Benchmarks Study"**
- MindMixer: **"Tuscaloosa Forward"**
- Network for Good: **"Nonprofit Email Marketing Guide"**
- Nepon, Ezra: **"Crowdfunding: The New Wave of Online Grassroots Fundraising"**
- New Organizing Institute: **"Online Fundraising: The Basics"**

Contact

Questions? Ideas?

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