



# 82 KEYS

to Digitally Capturing, Cultivating, and  
Converting High Lifetime-Value Donors



SALEM  
CULTIVATE

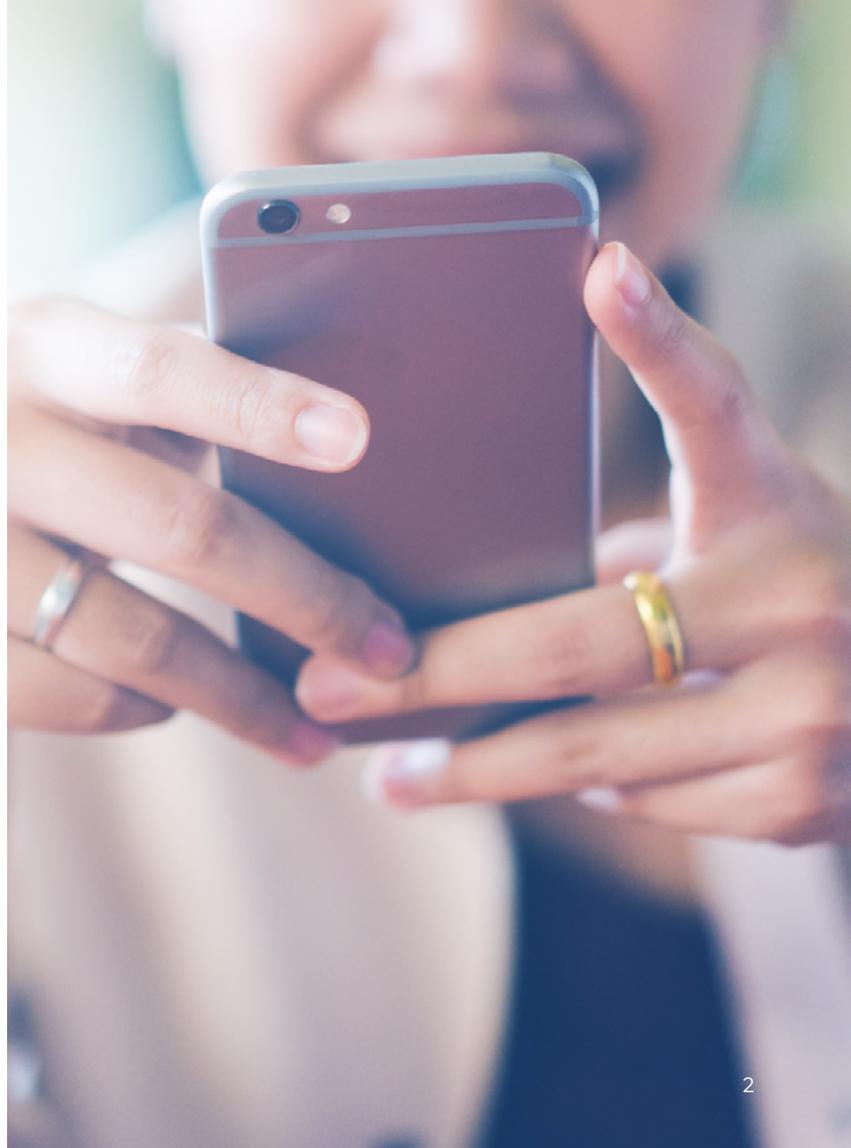
## First impressions matter.

That old adage is especially true when it comes to developing relationships with new donors—relationships that will last. But in this digital age, is it really possible to be both truly personal in your communications, while at the same time making the most of the digital tools at your disposal?

It is ... and this booklet will show you how.

In the pages that follow, you'll be guided through the digital donor acquisition process from start to finish. Along the way, you'll learn proven, evidence-based principles for reducing friction and guiding your new donors along the path toward becoming committed and enduring supporters of your organization.

We pray God uses this guiding resource to help you capture, cultivate, and convert more high lifetime-value donors—so they'll be *all in* to support the mission He's given you!





## Capture

Find Your Prospects

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## Convert

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# Capture

Find Your Prospects

"A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them."

*Steve Jobs*

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# 01

## **Make Engagement Easy**

Most nonprofits make signing up for emails, especially on mobile devices, far too difficult. Don't bury your email signup form—rather, put it on the front page where it will be one of the first things people see when they come to your website.

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# 02

## **Take It Slow and Build Trust First**

Collect only the information you need to begin sending emails—first name, last name, and email address. Anything beyond that is becoming too intrusive for someone who doesn't really know your organization. Once people get to know and trust you, then you can engage them further and obtain more information from them.

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# 03

## **Create a Compelling Email Signup Value Proposition**

"Sign up for our email list" is an outdated and ineffective way of engaging potential donors. No one wants to get more email. Instead, craft your language to meet a felt need, for example, "Get weekly encouragement on [fill in the blank]." Better yet, include a free download related to your organization: "Get this free ebook to help you share your faith."

In a 2018 study, Dunham+Company found that adding a compelling value proposition to an email signup form increased signups by 94%.

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## 04

### **Go After Your Lapsed Donors**

One of your prime targets to be your next donors are the donors who've dropped off your list. These are people who've shown they care about your mission but have fallen off for some reason. Build a reactivation series with a strong and unique call to action that reinvigorates their passion for your organization.

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## 05

### **Get a Small Win Today—and a Big Win Later**

Most people aren't going to give to your organization the first time they learn about you. So instead of going in for the gift immediately, build a relationship first. Offer them something free, let them take you up on it today, and then begin the cultivation process. You can't expect too much from someone who doesn't know you. So help them get to know you by providing them with some information that they would value knowing, and develop the relationship from there.

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## 06

### **Invest in Digital Advertising**

A 2018 study by M+R found that digital budgets across the nonprofit sector increased by 144% in one year. So if you haven't increased your digital ad budget, you may be behind the curve. And don't just focus these ads on giving—focus on advocacy as well. Asking for a donation outright is a tough sell through a digital ad. Get people involved first by asking them to sign a petition, request a resource, take a quiz, follow you on social media, or sign up for your email list.

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## 07

### **Create a Lookalike Audience in Facebook**

By uploading your email list to Facebook, you can create a "lookalike" audience where Facebook creates a group of users that appear very similar to people who have already engaged and donated to you. Once this group is created, you can target them with content and ads to create more awareness of your mission and offer them multiple ways they can learn more about what you do.

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## 08

### Take Advantage of Giving Days

From local nonprofit support days to the global Giving Tuesday movement, days focused on giving are becoming a regular part of people's calendars. Structure campaigns specifically around these days by having a specific goal you want to reach and an outcome you want to fund, then utilize email and social media to get the word out. These are great opportunities to reach new donors with your message as people are looking for places to give.

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all in

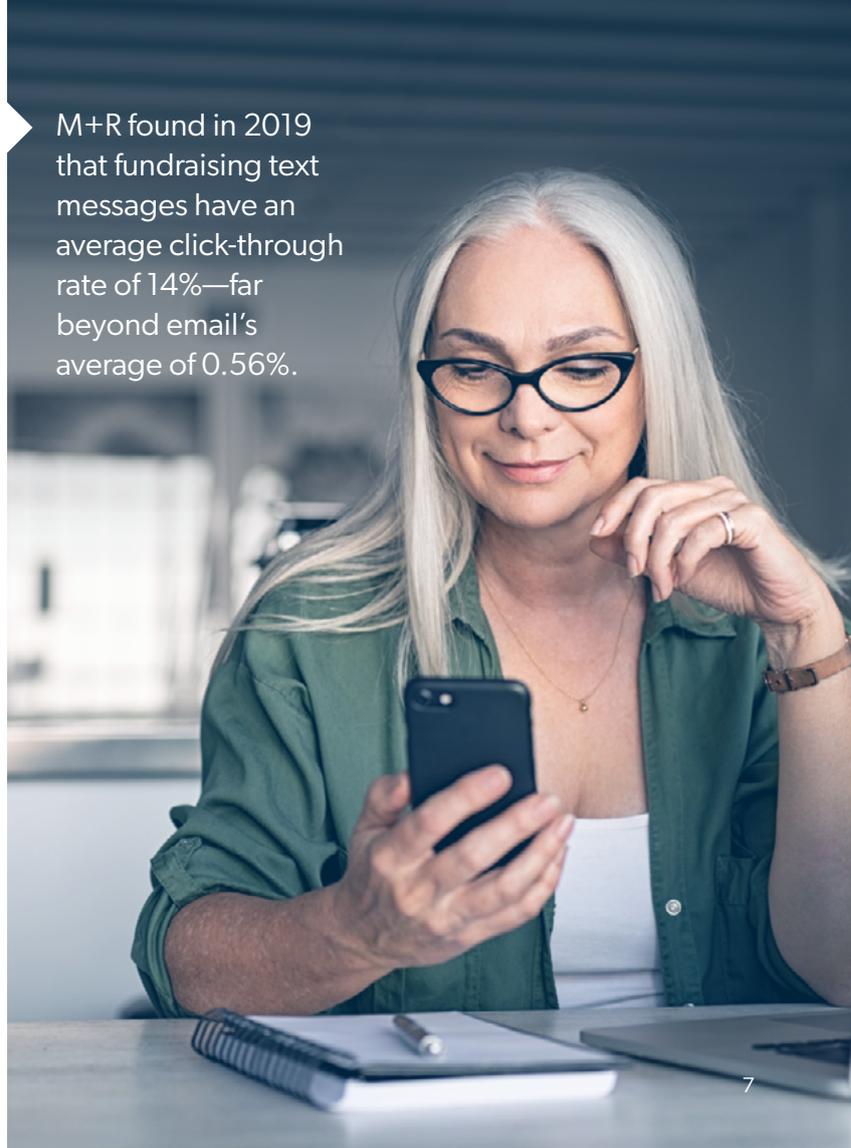
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## 09

### Investing in a Texting Platform

Texting is a much more immediate and personal means of communication than email. Have a compelling reason for people to give you their phone numbers so they can receive text messages from your organization. But be careful! The personal nature of text messaging means you could very well turn off a potential donor if they're not expecting a text from you. So be sensitive to that, and have a clear way for text subscribers to opt out if they don't want texts.

M+R found in 2019 that fundraising text messages have an average click-through rate of 14%—far beyond email's average of 0.56%.



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# 10

## **Do a Paid Digital Acquisition Strategy with a List Rental or Buy**

When you have found an appeal that works really well with your audience, you can exponentially expand your reach by renting a list with subscribers who align with your mission. So if, for example, your mission is to dig wells in Africa, you may consider approaching another organization that works in that part of the world to see if you can pay them to rent their list. Maximizing your return on investment here is key, so having a guide that understands where a receptive audience can be found is key before proceeding in this area.

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# 11

## **Invest in Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

SEO determines how high your organization's website ranks on a list of search results. If you specialize in serving the homeless population in Detroit, then you want your organization to be on the first page when people search "Help the homeless in Detroit." While it's easy to explain, it's not always easy to make happen. Work with specialists and invest some funds in making your website stand out when people are searching for what you do. Start by optimizing for your branded keywords (i.e., organization name) and then identify strategic keywords (i.e., what you do) and begin creating content around those terms. You can also search for tips on how to begin making your site more optimized to show up in the right search results.

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# 12

## Test Your Signup and Giving Forms

This might be another one that goes without saying, but have multiple people test your forms and do it yourself. Sign up and see what happens when you do. Test it out on a desktop and a mobile device. You'll be amazed at the flaws that might be exposed in your process.

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# 13

## Make Your Privacy Policy Clear

If you want people to engage with your organization, you've got to start by building trust and credibility. Having a clear privacy policy stating you won't share personal data with others will help build the confidence people need to sign up for communication from you.



## DIGGING DEEPER

# What is “Donor Lifetime Value”?

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Donor Lifespan} \\ \times \\ \text{Average Gift} \\ \times \\ \text{Donation Frequency} \\ \hline \text{Donor Lifetime Value} \end{array}$$

The Donor Lifetime Value (LTV) is a metric of how much a donor is monetarily worth to your organization from the first time they give until the time they lapse. It’s calculated as the product of donor lifespan times average gift times donation frequency.

An increase in any of these factors will result in an increase in the overall LTV of a donor.

Nonprofits that are most successful are those that have a firm grasp of their donor LTV and are using that information to be very strategic in their donor acquisition decisions.

Knowing and understanding LTVs of your donors is important because it will give you an idea of how an investment today in acquiring a new donor will pay off for your organization in the long run. So if your average donor acquisition cost is \$125, and the average LTV of the donors you acquire is \$560, then your acquisition investment today is giving you a 4x return!

**all in**

This also might change the way you evaluate success or failure of an event or acquisition appeal. If you determine success based solely on revenue generated from just the one ask and not on the LTVs of the donors you acquire through that ask, then you’re missing the bigger picture.

Donor LTV needs to be top-of-mind in any acquisition you do. It will give you a much better metric on what’s working, what isn’t, and how you can better fuel your organization for long-term growth.

Here are some free tools to help you determine the LTV of your donor base:

[www.FundraisingReportCard.com](http://www.FundraisingReportCard.com)

[www.keela.co/donor-ltv-calculator](http://www.keela.co/donor-ltv-calculator)

[www.donortrends.com](http://www.donortrends.com)

# Cultivate

Start Talking!

“When someone starts listening, you should say hello, right? When someone asks for more, give them your best. I think of the welcome series as both smart marketing and common courtesy.”

*Andy Crestodina, Chief Marketing Officer, Orbit Media*

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# 14

## **Thank New Subscribers and Donors Immediately**

A recent study showed that only about half of nonprofits are thanking new subscribers and donors within 48 hours. But a personalized confirmation or receipt is a must whether you're dealing with a new donor or someone who signed up to your email list. The confirmation can be short but should clearly communicate appreciation and let the reader know they'll be getting more from you.

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# 15

## **Onboard New Subscribers and Donors with a Welcome Series**

The first few days after a potential donor signs up to your email list are critical. Their interest in your organization will quickly wane if you don't engage them. This is a perfect time for an automated welcome series—a daily email for the first four to seven days of engagement that shares more facets of your organization and ends with an invitation to give a second gift. The key during this series is to build trust and reciprocity with the prospective donor.

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# 16

## **Strike While the Iron Is Hot**

When organizations have a welcome series, the typical cadence is six emails over 45 days. This is too slow. A more effective approach is to send emails sooner because that's when they're expected and more likely opened. Try finishing your onboarding series within two weeks, and then move people into your usual communication cycle.

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# 17

## **Keep Emails Simple**

An uncomplicated email template is key. Donors want to quickly know why they got the email and what action they should take. Try a simple approach by putting an organization logo at the bottom, using a hyperlink instead of the standard call-to-action button, and avoiding any obvious design that requires HTML formatting. This simple arrangement typically outperforms beautifully designed emails.

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# 18

## Try Sending When Others Don't

Competition for the email inbox is intense, so experiment with sending when others don't. Only 16% of nonprofit emails go out on the weekend. There is also less volume early in the morning (4 a.m. – 6 a.m.) or late afternoon (1 p.m. – 4 p.m.).

- ▶ Solicitation emails sent during off-peak hours—weekends, mornings, and evenings—resulted in an average of 50% higher per gift given.



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# 19

## Maximize Opens with a Compelling Email Envelope

Your email envelope is what people see before they open your email. This includes your “to” line, “from” line, subject line, and preheader or preview text. These elements are the main drivers of whether or not a person opens your email—so it’s critical they’re compelling and work together well. Conduct several A/B tests to know what combination works best. A good email envelope has ...

- The receiver’s name—not email address—visible in the “to” line
- The ministry head’s name—typically not the organization’s—in the “from” line
- A subject line that teases the content and makes the reader want to open the email
- Preheader or preview text visible under the subject line in preview mode that acts as a continuation of the subject line teaser

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# 20

## Spend More Time Crafting Your Subject Line

The work you put into your email communications is completely wasted if people don’t even take the first step to open it. With the industry benchmark for open rates at 17%, then 83% of your audience isn’t even reading what you wrote. The easiest remedy for this is to simply write better subject lines. First, write a subject line that focuses on the value to the reader. Next, rewrite it in a way that doesn’t completely give away the topic. Then look for ways you can add recency cues into it (e.g., “Today,” “Tomorrow,” “Good Morning,” “This Week,” “Tonight,” etc.). Finally, make sure it has a “made for you” cue in it. Examples would be using words like, “You,” “Your,” “You’ll,” “Yours,” or the receiver’s first name.

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# 21

## **Send Emails to People Who Want Them**

There's a cost to sending emails to people who don't open them. It will affect your sending reputation, which can cause future emails to end up in your recipient's SPAM folders. A best practice is to segment your email list so that only addresses that have engaged with an email in the past 90 days get your communications. If you aren't regularly removing inactive emails from your list, it is likely that far fewer emails are ending up in the inbox than you think.

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# 22

## **Monitor Your Email Domain Health**

If you're not frequently purging your list of inactive emails, you can find yourself domain "blacklisted" by inbox service providers. Make it a habit of doing a search on your domain health to manage your domain reputation. If you do find yourself on a blacklist, do the necessary work to clean up your reputation. There are a number of free tools that can help with this; search "check my domain reputation" to get started.

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# 23

## **Make the Purpose of Your Email Clear**

All too often, emails coming from organizations contain far too many calls to action. They're part thank-you, part get involved, part financial ask, and part explainer. Make each piece of communication you send out have a single-minded purpose—and make it clear to the reader.

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# 24

## **Be Sure Your Emails Are Mobile Optimized**

Many people, if not most, are reading your email on their phones. So before you send your email, check it out on mobile to ensure that the text is readable without "pinching" to zoom in and that your graphics work well. Most email services do this for you, but it's always best to make sure.

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## 25

### **Insert Clear Buttons with a Call to Action**

Let's face it, most people don't read the emails they get. In fact, you probably don't either. For most people, "reading" an email means a quick scroll through. This is where buttons are your friend. Buttons stand out from the copy and are a quick summary of exactly what you want the reader to do. They communicate a felt need based on the person's interest in your organization.

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## 26

### **Banish the Phrase, "Click Here"**

The phrase "click here" is robotic, redundant, and unnecessary. Just about everyone who uses the internet knows what to do when they see a button that will take them somewhere. Also, with so many viewing your email on a screen they can tap, clicking isn't an option. Bottom line, "click here" doesn't reinforce your value proposition, and your call-to-action copy is better served without this phrase.

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## 27

### **Your "Ask" Needs to Make the Donor's Gift the Logical Answer**

Donation pages should present the donor as the logical missing piece in the equation. Donors should get the impression their gift will complete the circle of impact. Pairing their gift with a tangible unit of impact (\$30 provides 3 pairs of shoes, for example) increases this effectiveness.

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## 28

### **Let Others Praise Your Work**

Reading your email should leave the potential donor with the impression that you know what you're doing. One quick way to easily build that credibility is to include a quote or short testimony of impact. You also can use a statistic from a reputable source. Having this third-party validation shows the prospective donor that what you're doing is working.

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# 29

## Tug Their Heartstrings

Emotion is going to be one of the biggest drivers of people's behavior—including giving. Good emails tell stories that tap into readers' emotions. A strong testimony of life change can also do this. As you're writing, think to yourself, "What would motivate me emotionally here?"



## DIGGING DEEPER

# Creating & Deploying a Successful Welcome Series

People who sign up to receive emails from your organization are primed to become donors. This is the honeymoon phase of the relationship, and people are more likely to open and click on your emails in this phase than any other time. You need to take advantage of it! Open rates for welcome series are frequently in the 30–50% range and click rates are 3–5%, compared to 17% and .5% at any other time. Here’s an example of a 7-day “welcome series” you can automate to send to your new signups to onboard them toward making their first gift. This isn’t how every welcome series has to go, but it’s a good template as you start creating yours.



**Day:** 1  
**Subject:** Kick-off email

Address the reader by first name and thank them for connecting. Then provide them with the item they signed up to receive or give them something they will value that will benefit them. Tell them how you appreciate their heart for your mission. Give them an easy next step to find out more about a particular topic or suggest ways to get involved. Bottom line is to provide a ton of value in this email as it is likely to have the highest open rate, and you want to set the expectation that every time they open an email for your organization, they benefit from it.



**Day:** 2  
**Subject:** What does solving this problem look like?

Talk about impact, impact, impact—and share how “friends like you” are helping make that impact possible, perhaps with a story. This isn’t an email about the organization. Think of it as an email about the impact other donors are making through your organization. Provide another resource that will add to readers' lives and highlight the chance to be part of the solution through their gift.



**Day:** 3

**Subject:** Send a survey

Give the reader a chance to tell you what's important to them. This step is also a great chance to collect additional demographic data on the person such as age, gender, and what topics interest them so you can customize their communications in the future. This step is consistently one of the best-performing emails in the series.



**Day:** 4

**Subject:** Customize their content

Based on the information they shared in the survey, provide them with a compelling impact story or resource about their stated interests. Make sure the story really tugs the heartstrings. Remember, you're not selling your organization. Your product is impact—impact that can happen thanks to people like the reader. Close this email with an opportunity to give or provide a free offer they will find valuable (e.g., free resource, PDF, video, additional insight into the problem they want to solve).



**Day:** 5

**Subject:** Provide an incentive to give

This is a great time to hit readers with an ask using an incentive (e.g., Matching Grant, free gift with donation, quantifiable impact). Be sure to communicate urgency, letting them know the offer won't last. Consider setting up a Matching Grant fund just for new donors so they can multiply their impact.



**Day:** 6

**Subject:** Show them other ways to get involved

Provide readers additional on-ramps to getting involved and going deeper with your organization. Tell them about your app, let them know about upcoming events, share about volunteer opportunities, ask them to create a fundraising campaign, and so on. There are many ways people can give to your organization without making a gift.



**Day:** 7

**Subject:** Envision a better future

This is where you can turn up the pitch a bit. Talk about the impact you want to see in donor-centric terms, not organization-centric terms. And be specific because that will instill confidence that you know what you're talking about, for example, "Your gift today will provide the gospel to 10 people."



**Day:** 10

**Subject:** Roll into regular communication cycle

Whether your prospect has come through with a donation or not, roll them into your regular communications. If they haven't given, there will be other opportunities. If they do donate, trigger a similar first-time donor automation. Make sure that your process includes giving them a call to say thank you and sending them a handwritten note thanking them for their generosity and reminding them of the impact they are having.

### **Need help? Just ask.**

If you want some help creating your welcome series or would like input on what you already have in place, send an email to [Brad.Davies@salemwebnetwork.com](mailto:Brad.Davies@salemwebnetwork.com) and we would be happy to set up a call with you.

# Convert

## Part 1: Turn Interest into Donations

“Donors don’t give to institutions. They invest in ideas and people in whom they believe.”

*G.T. Smith*

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# 30

## Don't Just Ask, Cultivate

Cultivation is the art of engaging a prospective donor with the organization without asking for a gift. Studies show that an increase in cultivation will deepen a donor's commitment to the organization and will result in a higher donor LTV.

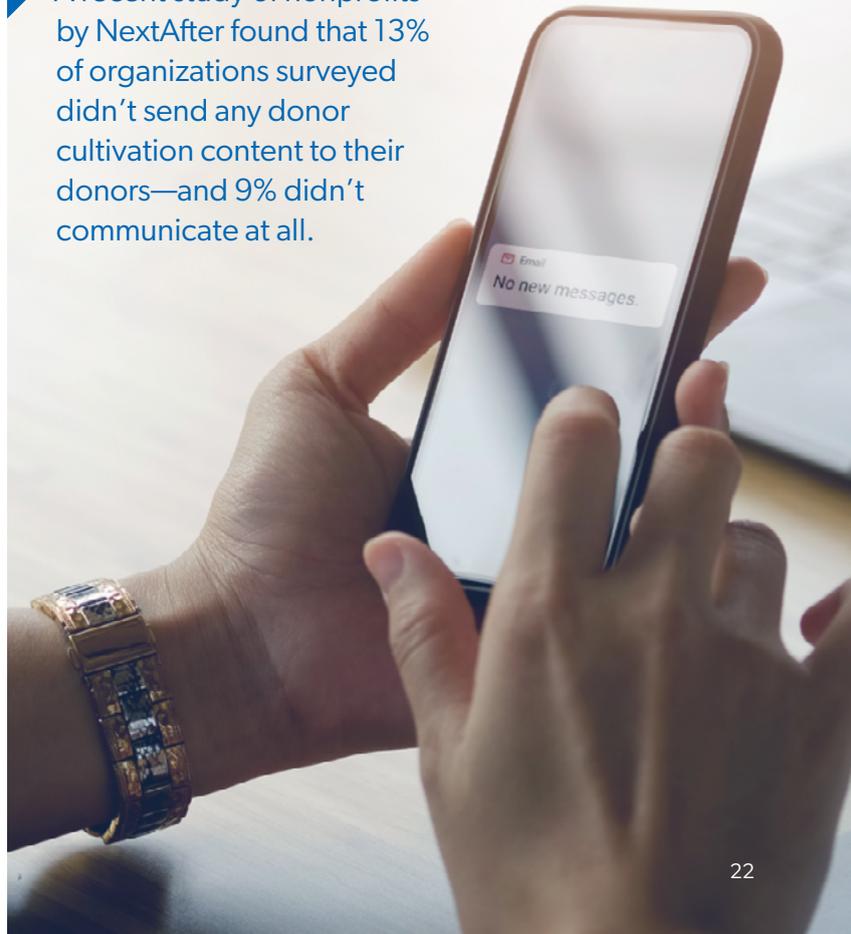
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# 31

## Don't Just Cultivate, Ask

The first emails a subscriber gets from an organization have the highest open rate and the highest click-through rate. So your early emails are a good opportunity to put an ask in front of subscribers while you have their attention.

▶ A recent study of nonprofits by NextAfter found that 13% of organizations surveyed didn't send any donor cultivation content to their donors—and 9% didn't communicate at all.



**Conversion Rate** is the rate of response to an offer divided by the number of people to whom the offer was extended—as a percentage.

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## 32

### **Offer a Tangible Incentive**

Study after study shows that even in our digital world, a tangible incentive to give is a strong motivator for a donation. Free ebooks and premium access to web content work. If you can offer an actual book, CD, or anything that can be held, the conversion rate of the offer goes up by 25–50%.

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## 33

### **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**

Nearly half of nonprofits today email their donors or prospective donors once a month or less. That's an eternity in the digital world. Ideally, you should be sending emails at least weekly—if not more often. You might feel like you're over-communicating. But remember, your donors aren't thinking about you as much as you're thinking about you. They have to be reminded.

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## 34

### **Be Personable**

Studies show that 87% of nonprofits are still not using the receiver's first name in the subject line even though it's been proven to increase open rates. In addition, in one study of 273 nonprofit organizations, only 9% of groups sent emails from an individual and not an organization. But personalizing an email results on average in 28% higher open rate. Make sure you are collecting names in addition to email addresses on your signup form; it will be worth the added friction.

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## 35

### **Ask for Feedback**

Being personable also means two way communication, strategically send emails asking for questions and feedback from your list. This helps people to feel valued and lets you know their areas of concern. A bonus is when people reply to your sending email address. It will improve your email domain reputation as it shows inbox service providers that the sending email account is regularly monitored.

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## 36

### **Use Donor Testimonies That Talk About a Positive Giving Experience**

Everyone at some level likes being part of a crowd. And one thing that really motivates people to give is when they see that others are also giving. Include a testimony from a current donor about how good they feel supporting your organization; it will likely help convert others. Think of it like a customer review of your organization—building credibility and encouraging engagement.

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## 37

### **Tell Stories That Connect**

The right amount of details is essential when it comes to drawing people into the stories you tell. It's one thing to say a gift will help "Rose" in Kenya feed her family. It's another to make the donor care about Rose. Talk about her daily life. What is her family like? Let the donor meet Rose first, and then caring about Rose enough to help her feed her family will be an easier step.

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## 38

### **If Your Email Is from a Person, Make It Look like It**

It's one thing for your email to be from a person—it's another to make it *feel* like it's from a person. Emails from a person that are too graphic and copy heavy can undermine the personalization of the email. Including a signature or headshot along with your name in the sign-off is a dead giveaway that it is not really a personal email.

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# 39

## Reinforce Your Message with Display Ads

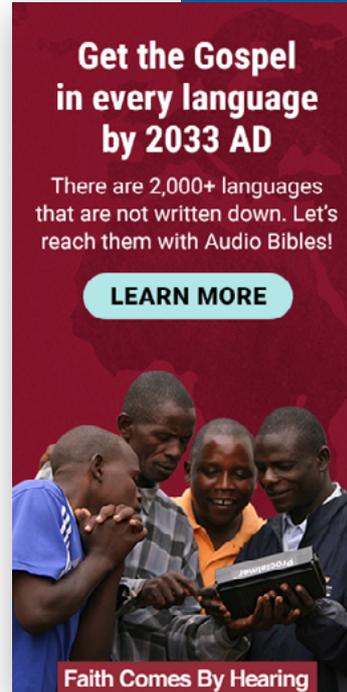
Consider targeting your new names or supporters with branded ads on Facebook or other platforms while they are in the process of receiving the welcome series emails. This generates trust in your organization and shortens the length of time it takes someone to give, thus increasing the conversion rate (by as much as 760% in one test!). These ads should be informative, without a hard sell, and provide information about the work you are doing and why they should give to the cause. Donors who see supplementary ads tend to give a higher average gift than those who don't.

### Need help? Just ask.

If you want some help knowing how to do this, send an email to [Brad.Davies@salemwebnetwork.com](mailto:Brad.Davies@salemwebnetwork.com) and we would be happy to set up a call with you.

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all in



After signing up for a free offer, new users are retargeted with display ads while going through the welcome series to reinforce the value proposition of the organization and emphasizing the impact their gift can have.

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## 40

### **Segment Your Audience and Create Multiple Ads Around the Same Offer**

Studies show that people are much more responsive to multiple ads around an offer than they are to seeing the same ad over and over again in a “one-size-fits-all” campaign. Vary your ads and make them specific. Target men with a certain ad, and women with another. Then vary your copy based on age or some other demographic. Let those ads run awhile, then try something different and compare.

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## 41

### **Show How Donations Make a Difference**

Thanking people repeatedly (three times) for changing beneficiaries’ lives has a lasting impact. In one study it led to a 5.8% increase in the number of future donations. Once a person has made a gift, be sure to communicate the effect the gift had on the recipients.

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## 42

### **Send Out a Survey**

According to Donor Voice, something as simple as offering a link to a survey in your emails can improve donor retention by 15%. That’s because a survey communicates you care about the donor—and gives you a better understanding of what the donor cares about.

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## 43

### **Make the Giving Link Prominent on Your Website**

One of the main reasons why people will come to your website is to give a gift. So make the path to giving as smooth as possible. The giving link should be prominent and highlighted at the top of your home page—and should lead directly to the donation page. Users should be able to locate it in five seconds or less, and ideally it’s the only click a donor has to make before submitting a donation.

## DIGGING DEEPER

# Crafting Calls to Action That Get Clicks

Your call-to-action copy is the moment of truth for your donors. Reading it should give them a quick summary of what their gift will do. Calls to action need to be relational—exciting donors and avoiding any robotic or transactional language. Not only that, but they should also communicate a sense of urgency to get the reader to take action now. And for button copy, a good rule of thumb is that it should be a shortened, first-person version of your email's call to action.

all in

### Use this:

#### Email body copy:

- ✓ Help bring hope to ...
- ✓ Transform lives like [Name]'s today
- ✓ Give and request your ...
- ✓ Have your gift doubled now

#### Button copy:

- ✓ I'll help bring hope now
- ✓ I'll help transform more lives
- ✓ Give and request my ...
- ✓ Yes! Double my gift now

### Not this:

- ✗ Click here to give
- ✗ Make a donation
- ✗ Submit
- ✗ Support [name of organization]
- ✗ Give

City \*

State \*

Zip Code \*

**I'll Provide a BibleStick to a Service Member!**

AMOUNT: \$50

*"This has been the most useful thing I've ever had. Every day I listen — and it has brought me closer to God," says a Navy pilot.*

Faith Comes By Hearing

<http://faithcomesbyhearing.com>

info@faithcomesbyhearing.com

505.881.3321

2421 Aztec Rd NE

Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87107

US



### Pro Tip

Have value proposition copy underneath the final call-to-action button that reinforces the impact a donor's gift will have and reminds people of the value they'll receive by making a gift to the organization.

# Convert

## Part 2: Create Landing Pages That Motivate Giving

“When you reduce friction,  
making something easy,  
people do more of it.”

*Jeff Bezos*



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## 45

### Give People a Great Reason to Give

“Support us” may sound heartwarming to the person who is asking, but it’s a huge turnoff for a potential donor. Your landing page should have a strong value proposition that connects with the felt need of the reader to help. Copy should avoid being organization or program driven, but instead emphasize the spiritual/social impact the reader’s gift will have.

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all in

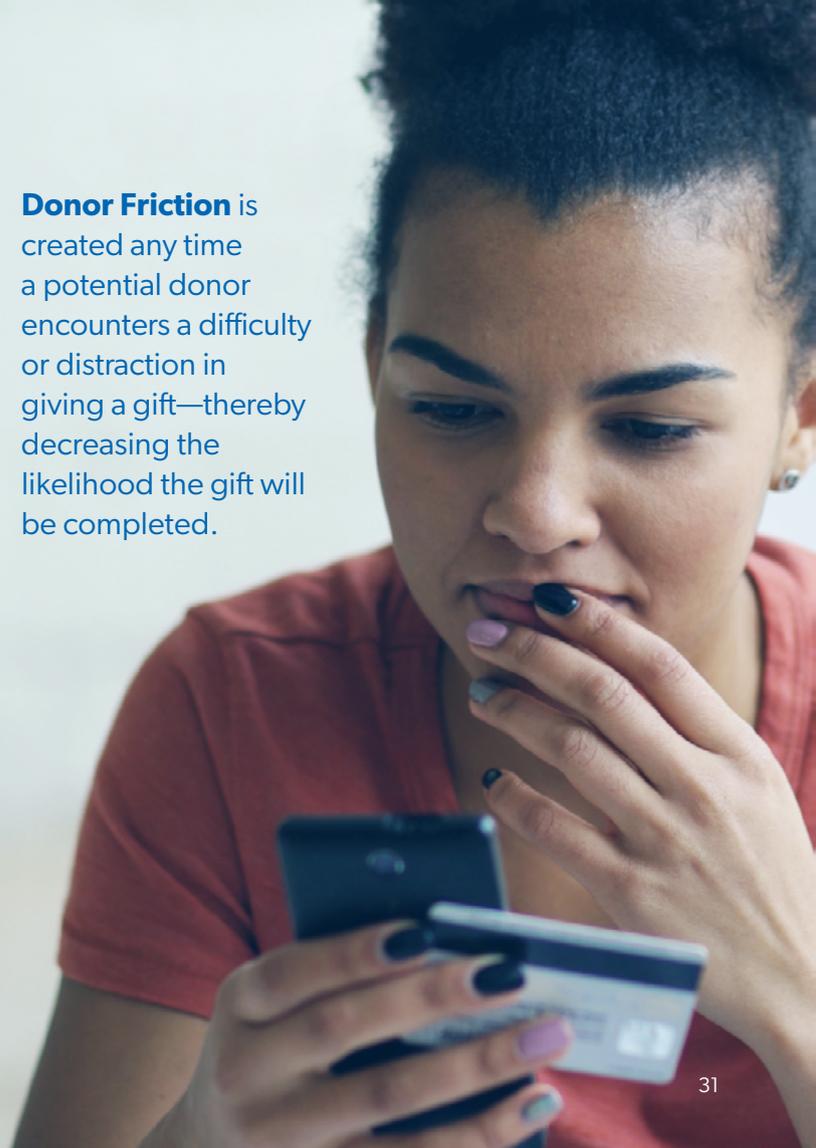
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## 46

### Use Web-Friendly Graphics for Faster Loading Time

Studies show that if a giving page takes too long to load, a percentage of donors will give up on giving. Ideally, a giving page should take less than five seconds to load. So don’t make your page sluggish with high-resolution graphics. Use web-friendly resolutions that will enable your page to load quickly. Also, you can test your page load speed at [tools.pingdom.com](https://tools.pingdom.com) for free.

**Donor Friction** is created any time a potential donor encounters a difficulty or distraction in giving a gift—thereby decreasing the likelihood the gift will be completed.



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# 47

## Craft a Compelling Headline

Research tells us that if people read one thing on your page before giving, it will be your headline. So your headline should communicate your value proposition in a quick, compelling way. Think of it as answering the question, “What’s the most important thing your gift today will accomplish?”

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# 48

## Use Bullet Points to Emphasize Value Proposition

After the headline, it’s been shown that eyes naturally move to bullet points within the copy of the page. Use these to unpack the value proposition—explain the “how.” If the headline tells the reader that their gift today will impact lives, bullet points are a great opportunity to give three to four tangible ways that’s going to happen.

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# 49

## Use Paragraphs to Make Copy Scannable

Eye scan tests reveal that most people are going to scan the copy on your landing page instead of reading it word for word. Therefore, it’s imperative that you break up the copy into easily scannable and digestible paragraphs.

**A Value Proposition** is the main motivator of a gift. It answers the question, “*What is my gift going to accomplish?*”

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## 50

### Add a “Second Headline”

Just before the giving form begins, create a second headline that reinforces the value proposition, reiterates what the gift will do, and helps the donor understand the necessary next step. So if your headline is, “Your gift today helps feed hungry children,” then your second headline could be, “Complete the form below to help feed a hungry child today.”

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## 51

### Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

Each word of copy on your landing page should directly relate to the gift the donor is (hopefully) about to give. Don’t utilize valuable landing page space writing a narrative or talking about other ways to get involved. Get to the point—the gift! It’s why they are there.

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## 52

### Consider Offering an Incentive

Incentives can both help motivate the donor to give—as well as motivate them to give an even bigger or monthly gift. These may include ...

- Actual gifts like a book in exchange for a certain gift amount
- Matching gifts that double (or more) the donor’s contribution
- Quantifiable impact, assigning a specific dollar amount to impact
- Giving level memberships—for example, “\$500 gets you a Silver membership”
- No overhead gift, so that 100% of the gift goes toward the program
- Premium access to website content, and so on

**Cognitive Load** is the stress felt by donors when they are forced to make a decision. This stress can often lead to abandonment of a donation.

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## 53

### **Reduce “Cognitive Load” on the Donor**

Giving decisions are tough to make for a donor. What should I give to? How much? How often? And studies show the greater this “cognitive load” is on a donor, the more likely they will opt out of giving completely. The fewer decisions donors have to make on your landing page, the more likely they are to complete the gift. If you must include a decision, prioritize or preselect a decision for the donor such as the frequency and amount.

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## 54

### **Don’t Wait to Show Donors They Missed a Field**

It’s absolutely frustrating to complete an entire form online, click “Donate,” and then be told you missed a field. What’s even more infuriating is if you have to start all over again because of it. Set up your forms to notify donors the moment they skip a required field.

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## 55

### **Minimize or Remove Links That Take You Away from the Page**

You want people who make it to your landing page to stay there. Avoid hyperlinked text or images that take them away from the page. This also includes removing a navigation bar at the top that may appear on your website or a footer full of extra links. A good rule of thumb of the only ways for a donor to leave the page are the following: to click “back,” to close the window, or to make a donation.

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## 56

### **Make Giving on Your Landing Page a One-Step Process**

A good landing page shouldn't take multiple clicks to complete. If a potential donor has to navigate through multiple pages or, worse, is forced to create an account to give, this creates friction, which will decrease response.

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## 57

### **Utilize Gift Arrays Wisely**

A gift array gives potential donors the option of selecting from a suggested gift array or entering their own amount. A suggested gift array is helpful for new donors who may feel unsure of what a good amount to give may be—especially if you've preselected a mid-range gift for them. But on the other side of the coin, studies show gift arrays can actually be a hindrance for people who've given before. If you're trying to convert new donors, gift array buttons may be helpful.

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## 58

### **Ask Only for What You Need**

Too many organizations require nonessential information for someone to complete a gift—how the donor heard about the organization or a gift designation. If a potential donor sees too many fields, that's a friction point that will result in a decrease in response.

A recent study by NextAfter showed that simply adding one nonessential field to a giving page—cell phone number—decreased response by 50%.

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# 59

## Offer Recurring Giving on the Same Page

Potential donors often have to visit separate pages to give a one-time or recurring gift. Eliminate this friction by simply offering to make the donor's gift monthly on the same page. One technique that's been shown to be even more effective at securing a monthly commitment is to add a "Make your gift monthly" pop-up to the process. This communication—whether in the flow of a one-time gift or through a pop-up—should communicate a value proposition as well.

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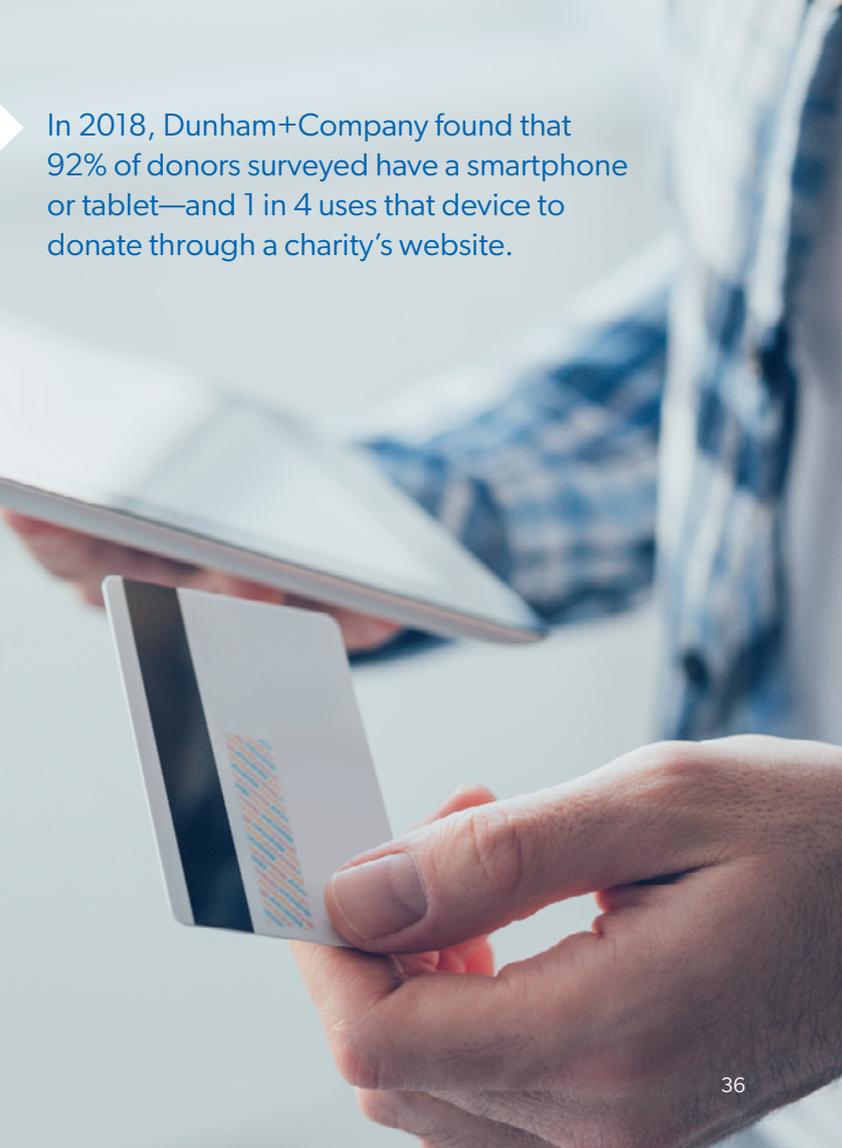
all in

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# 60

## Optimize Your Giving Page for Mobile

Many donor files today have more people giving online by mobile than they have giving by computer. But when a giving page isn't optimized for mobile giving, the odds a mobile giver will complete the gift decrease dramatically. So be sure your giving platform is easy on a mobile device.

A person wearing a white lab coat is holding a tablet computer in their left hand and a credit card in their right hand. The background is a blurred office or clinical setting.

In 2018, Dunham+Company found that 92% of donors surveyed have a smartphone or tablet—and 1 in 4 uses that device to donate through a charity's website.

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## 61

### **Build Confidence with Security Markers**

Help donors feel secure in giving online by taking steps such as utilizing an “https” URL and a simple padlock or “secure” seal. Even a piece of text that says “all transactions are secure” helps. While these may seem like small steps, donors who are told they’re in a secure atmosphere are 10% more likely to give!

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## 62

### **Utilize Third-Party Endorsements and Validators**

Put the donor over the top with confidence right at the moment before they give by using a seal of approval, a quote from someone reputable, or anything else that reinforces their trust in you. Ideally, this can be placed close to the “Donate” button on the form. Also, include a link to your most recent 990 where it’s easily accessible, but make sure it opens a new window and doesn’t take the donor away from your giving form.

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## 63

### **Reinforce Your Message at the Decision Point**

If possible, add a short blurb near the “Donate” button reinforcing what the gift they’re about to give will do. A simple “Your gift today will ...” helps at the moment of final decision.

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## 64

### **Make the Giving Form Appear as Short as Possible**

Reducing the amount of information you collect is a good start. But take it a step further by not requiring a lot of scrolling to complete the form. For example, instead of putting the first name and last name fields on two separate lines—one on top of the other—reduce the form length by putting them on the same line.

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## 65

### **Send Donors to Different Donation Pages Based on Motivation**

Donation pages should match the call to action to which the donor responded. It creates friction if a donor clicks to help provide shoes for children but is sent to a page with general donation copy. Therefore, different donation pages should be created to direct donors along the same motivational journey toward giving their gift.

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## 66

### **Don't Take Donors to a Verification Page**

Verification pages appear right after you click "submit" on a donation and ask you to confirm all the information you have just given. One study showed that removing this additional step between the donation form and confirmation page resulted in a 176% increase in completed donations.

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## 67

### **Create a Well-Written and Informative Confirmation Page**

Your post-donation confirmation page should thank the donor by name and refer to both the dollar amount and the value proposition established on the landing page. If the donation was to feed a hungry family, the confirmation page needs to refer specifically to that subject matter. Also, you can ...

- Tell them you'll keep them updated on the impact of their gift
- Ask if their employer has a gift match program
- Give them another chance to "upgrade" their gift to a monthly contribution or to give a gift in support of another ministry program
- Offer them the chance to share with others about their donation on social media
- Share your contact phone number and email should the donor have any questions

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# 68

## Do Your Own Research

Spend time examining mobile and web experiences you consider to be seamless or easy—even enjoyable. Whether it's ordering something from Amazon, requesting a ride from Uber, or selecting a movie on Netflix, get some inspiration on ease of use from websites and mobile apps that have a high amount of traffic. They're doing something right!



# How long should a landing page be?

The copy you place on your landing page could make or break a person's decision to give. But how much is too much? How little is too little? Well, again, it largely depends on your audience.

Studies we've conducted at Salem Cultivate have shown that the combination of a long email (150-200 words) and short landing page (50-100 words) resulted in the best conversion rate for an appeal to a house email list. The theory behind this is that donors who click on an email link to give don't need to keep being sold. They've decided—and just want to deal with a giving form that doesn't look overwhelming.

On the other side of the coin (which you knew there would be), there have been studies that show longer landing pages have a better conversion rate. This may be in situations where new names or first-time donors still need (and want) more information before they give.

So what guidelines should you follow?

This is where knowing your audience is really important. Take some time to test different landing pages with your donor file. Test long email with short landing page, then test the opposite. Test different kinds of landing pages with lengths (a longer page with a compelling story might do well).

Get to know your donors' preferences in all-digital communication—and be willing to change where need be. That's the key to achieving long-term success.

# Re-Cultivate

Send Effective Follow-Up  
Communications

“Don’t forget, a person’s  
greatest emotional need is  
to feel appreciated.”

*H. Jackson Brown*

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69

### **Thank Donors for Their Individual Impact**

We established that donors respond well when their individual donation is tied to a specified impact. This is true when it comes to thank-yous as well. When a donor is told that their gift helped this or that person, the impact of the thank-you goes further. It's great to hear that a gift helped impact 10,000 people. But it's even more powerful to hear that a specific gift impacted one person.

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70

### **Invest in the “Thank-You” with a Mailed Letter**

Automated thank-you notes are important, but they are only a first step in the acknowledgment process. After a gift is made, mail a personal thank-you letter to the donor's physical address. Again, this is in addition to the automated thank-you note sent after an online gift is made. This letter should include text both thanking the donor and making them feel good about their gift, as well as a receipt detailing the donor's gift. It is a little thing, but it goes a long way.

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71

### **Thank Your Donors with a Personal Call**

Studies show this is one of the most important single actions you take toward a donor to increase their lifetime value toward your organization. This doesn't have to be a long call or overly scripted, but just a personal touchpoint to let the donor know you noticed.

In her book *Donor-Centered Fundraising*, Penelope Burk observed a thank-you call to a donor after a first gift resulted in a 39% increase in lifetime revenue from that donor on average.

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# 72

## **Send “Just Because” Thank-You Communications**

An occasional “just because” note or postcard goes a long way with donors. This is because while they may come to expect acknowledgment for their gifts, a note that’s not tied to a gift shows you care on a more personal level.

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# 73

## **Focus on Retention**

Tests across the spectrum of nonprofits show that if you acquire a new donor online, your best shot at turning them into a long-term supporter is to get them to give again—and soon. So communicate with the expectation that the donor cares about your organization and wants to give again. A special welcome series to new donors would be a great tool to introduce them to new facets of your organization. Get the second gift, and you’ll be much more likely to retain that donor for the long haul.

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# 74

## **Give New Donors a Next Step**

Giving is just one way a donor engages your organization. But giving a first gift is an emotional high point for any donor. So utilize the opportunity to engage further. Tell them about volunteer opportunities, or invite them to sign up to pray for your organization. Get them even more engaged at this critical time!

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# 75

## **Survey Your Donors**

Building a two-way communication is key when it comes to cultivating long-term donor relationships. Engage them in a two-way dialogue about your organization. You’ll gain insight into what motivated their gift—and they’ll walk away with a stronger emotional connection to your organization having given their feedback.

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# 76

## **Provide Opportunities for One-Time Donors to Become Monthly Partners**

We live in what the tech company Zuora calls a “Subscription Economy”—where people are more accustomed than ever to paying a monthly fee. And there’s almost no more effective way to increase the lifetime value of a lower or mid-level one-time donor than by converting them to a “subscriber,” or a monthly partner. Build a strong value proposition for monthly giving related to ongoing impact. While you wouldn’t want to inundate them with these asks, it’s entirely appropriate both to give a first-time donor the chance to give monthly soon after a first gift and also to have a monthly partner appeal to your lower and mid-level donors once or twice a year.

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# 77

## **Don’t Be Tone Deaf**

Digital communication needs to speak to what’s going on in the world. In the first weeks of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States in 2020, it was easy to tell who did and who didn’t adjust their email copy to speak to what was top-of-mind—the disease outbreak. As people were hunkering down in their homes, emails written three to four weeks prior were going out asking them to patronize their businesses. This kind of tone deafness is a huge turnoff to donors—as it overtly communicates you don’t share their concerns. So be sure to look over your emails and ensure that they’re up-to-date in the days before they’re sent.

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# 78

## **Communicate with Donors Situationally**

While it may be difficult to do with your entire donor file, setting up personalized communication to go out when a donor has a birthday, anniversary, or reaches a giving milestone will result in better overall engagement.

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# 79

## **Engage with Social Influencers**

Monitor your donors' social media feeds, and when you have someone with high engagement with your content and is an influencer (i.e., has more than 100 Twitter followers), follow up with them personally and let them know how they can become an advocate for your cause.

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# 80

## **Report Back on Impact with Newsletters**

Sending regular mailed and electronic newsletters highlights your organization's impact with headlined articles and stories. These pieces also build trust because they communicate the wider impact of the organization apart from simply what donors know about you. Studies show this kind of trust is key when it comes to building long-term supporters.

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# 81

## **Send Reactivation Emails to Unengaged Subscribers**

Donors and email subscribers often stop reading emails sent to them. One proven way to reengage them is by sending a 30-day reactivation email. If a subscriber hasn't opened an email in the last 30 days, reach out and ask them how you can improve your communications. Also, give them the opportunity to opt out—you don't want to be sending emails to people who don't want them.

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# 82

## Study and Test Your Audience

While there are some hard-and-fast rules for communicating with your donors, every donor file responds a little differently to different communication. There is a myriad of reasons why, but what's important is to get to know your donors. So be sure to conduct tests of your email list: Which subject lines work best? How responsive are your donors with a strong ask? Do longer emails increase or decrease response? Most mass email clients today have A/B split testing, so utilize that tool to get to know how your donors respond best.



## DIGGING DEEPER

# Who are you writing about?

It's easy to consciously or subconsciously assume that if a donor just understood what we do better, they'd care more (and give more). So our default is to just talk about ourselves—which is a huge turnoff whether you're on a date or soliciting a gift!

But here's a secret: You CAN still talk about your impact without using organization-centric copy. Here are some examples of what that might look like:

all in

### Organization-centric Communication

Instead of saying ...

- ✘ We shared the gospel with 10,000 people!
- ✘ [Name of organization] fed 200 homeless people this Christmas.
- ✘ We're bringing hope to China this month!

### Pro Tip

One effective way to make a difference in this area is to take two different color highlighters, using one to highlight the "we" language in your copy and the other to highlight the "you" language. Then, turn as many as you can of the "we" pieces into "you" references.

Make the donor the hero of your copy—and the donor will continue to want to be heroic.

### Donor-centric Communication

Say ...

- ✔ Your support helped 10,000 people hear the gospel!
- ✔ With your help, 200 homeless people experienced the joy of Christmas with a warm meal.
- ✔ Friends like you are helping bring hope to China this month!

# You Have What It Takes for Your Donors to Be “All In”



People are relational beings at their very core. They like it when people reach out to them. They enjoy reading that they can make a significant impact. And they feel good when they learn they've helped a person in need.

But they'll never know any of that unless someone tells them. Unless someone communicates.

So how do you cast a net that will effectively capture new leads? How do you begin cultivating those leads toward giving? How do you get those leads to make the decision to convert to donors? How do you create longevity among your donor base?

Simply put, how do you acquire high lifetime-value donors who are all in? You communicate.

Our hope and prayer is that the principles you've learned in this booklet equip you to take your fundraising communication to the next level—and that, by doing so, the vision God has given your organization would be fueled and moved forward by those whom He's called to stand with you.

We'd love to help you deepen your relationships with your donors and, by the same token, deepen their commitment toward your cause. So please reach out to us today and learn how, together, we can help you fund your vision by capturing, cultivating, and converting donors who are all in!

Contact the Salem representative who sent you this guide or send an email to [Brad.Davies@salemwebnetwork.com](mailto:Brad.Davies@salemwebnetwork.com) to learn more about how we can put these principles to work for you.

*the Salem Cultivate team*

## Special thanks to ...



ActiveCampaign for their guide, *Welcome Email Series: A 6 Email Welcome Sequence You Can Steal*.

Dunham+Company for their *Online Fundraising Scorecard 2.0: A National Study Analyzing Online Fundraising Habits & Donor Experience of Nonprofits*.

The Institute for Sustainable Philanthropy for their guide *Learning to Say Thank You: The Role of Donor Acknowledgments*.

Keela for their Lifetime Donor Value Calculator available at [keela.co/donor-ltv-calculator](https://keela.co/donor-ltv-calculator)

M+R for their *2019 Benchmarks Study*.

NextAfter for their webinars, *7 Key Insights from How 199 Nonprofits Communicate with Donors and Subscribers in the First 45 Days* and *5 Fundraising Strategies from the Best New Fundraising Research*, as well as for their copious amounts of research studies.

NextAfter and Kindful for their report, *The State of Nonprofit Email Cultivation*.

Roger Dooley for his keynote, *Friction – The Untapped Force That Can Be Your Most Powerful Advantage*.

Virtuous CRM for their resources *The Complete Guide to Digital Fundraising: Using Technology to Connect with Modern Donors* and *Inspire More Giving and Responsive Fundraising: The Donor-Centric Framework Helping Today's Leading Nonprofits Grow Giving*.